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## Temple Stay as Transformative Travel: An Experience of the Buddhist Temple Stay Program in Korea

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## Introduction

Buddhism arrived in Korea over 1,700 years ago from China and has grown to become a unique form and practice of the cosmology and can be conceptualized as consisting of three central practices of meditating, studying sutras, and chanting. Over the past 16 years the people of South Korea have chosen to share this rich history by opening operational Buddhist temples to be discovered by Korean people seeking to revive historical roots and alternative tourists from around the world pursuing personal growth. Identified as the “Temple Stay Program”, this cultural, economic, religious, and touristic brainchild of the South Korean government (and the largest Buddhist denomination called the Chogye Order), has grown enormously. Through the aid of ticket entries, government subsidies, and funding from the United Nations (Wang, 2011), the Chogye Order reports that currently, 130 monasteries (The Korea Bizware, 2018, para 4) have transformed “from being sacred sites of a specific religion into inclusive hybrid displays of national heritage” (Kaplan, 2010, p. 128) and twenty-six of those Buddhist communities offer translating services.

The governmental impetus for creating this niche tourism was to boost economic growth (OECD, 2009, p. 115) by promoting a “positive image for the Korean tourism” (p. 118) and the Buddhist denominations sought to inspire Koreans to become reacquainted with cultural heritage and internationals to learn about Buddhism. Temple stays were and continue to be promoted as a way to find one’s “true self”, spend time in nature, meet monks, become immersed in nature, rejuvenate, learn Buddhist practices, and gain new knowledge and skills (OECD, 2009, p. 116). Specifically, a variety of programs---lasting one day to a week--expose travelers to ceremonial services of chanting, Zen meditation, tea ceremonies, and communal Buddhist meals. Many temples offer one-to-one time to talk with a monk as well as classes in traditional cooking, cloth dying, playing traditional instruments, and meditative art such as lotus lantern-making or prayer bead making. Some monasteries even offer spiritual counseling. This burgeoning tourism niche attracted 70,910 internationals in 2017; a 27% increase from 2016 (The Korea Bizware, 2018, para 2).

First branded as a “theme-based tourist attraction” (OECD, 2009, p. 115) in 2002 to help visitors (in country and internationals) to better understand Buddhism and ignite pride in Korean cultural heritage and history, this tourism product has attracted labels such as: alternative tourism (Kim & Yoon, 2008, p. 130), “edutainment-type culture tourism” (You & Chun, 2011, p. 140), “ecology oriented...and rural tourism” (Jin, 2010, p. 353), “inclusive heritage centers” (Kaplan, 2010, p. 140), nature-based ecotourism (Lee, Lawton, & Weaver, 2012), religious tourism (Chun, Roh, Spralls, & Kim, 2017). Defined as “a new and

prominent Korean tourist attraction in which visitors are invited to many of the major Buddhist monasteries throughout the country to stay for a couple of days and experience the traditional monastic lifestyle” (Kaplan, 2010, p.127), it is still too early in its development to discern how this niche will emerge among known tourism typologies.

The purpose of this descriptive paper is to explore the emerging tourism niche most often referred to as a *temple stay* (which includes the governmental program labeled “Temple Stay Program”) as constitutive of transformative travel based on the intentions and/or perceptions of the traveler and to make suggestions for future research. Using 10 activities of transformative travel (Ross, 2010) as a guide to analyze her experiences, Jungyun Christine Hur, a Korean American scholar of Hospitality Management will walk the reader through her personal account of being a participant of a Korean temple stay. The aim of this paper is to reveal rich descriptions of one persons’ personal and innermost experiences juxtaposed as related to activities of transformative travel to determine the potential for temple stays to qualify and be classified as transformative travel.

## Transformative Travel

Transformative travel is defined here (from the guest perspective) as “travel with a purpose to create conditions conducive for personal transformation” (Ross, 2017, p. 3). Transformative travel activities (Table 1), which derived from an analysis of literature and the author’s lived experiences of leading transformative travel to Costa Rica and Peru, provide a framework through which to analyze travel as being conducive for personal transformation.

Table 1. Transformative Travel Activities

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1. Dwelling at sacred sites.
  2. Engaging in ritual and ceremony.
  3. Initiating regular group sharing sessions.
  4. Being in nature and connecting to natural sites through the body, mind, heart and spirit.
  5. Spending money with a sustainable ethic.
  6. Learning esoteric and common history.
  7. Engaging in multiple means of self-exploration such as: reflection, yoga, expressive art, group activities or exercises, journaling, nature hikes, or guided meditations, to name a few.
  8. Talking to, listening to, and learning from willing indigenous secular and/or spiritual teachers, community leaders and members, and children.
  9. Engaging in physically challenging activities and/or adventures
  10. Giving and providing services to families, children, and communities.
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*Note.* Modified from (Ross, 2010). Copyright Susan Ross, 2018.

## Narrative Account of a Korean Temple Stay

As a tourism and hospitality scholar, I participated in a three-day temple stay in Korean monastery called Temple *Hwaeomsa*, which participates in the governmental Temple Stay Program. For ease of communication, I will refer to my visit as a temple stay. Temple *Hwaeomsa* offers two types of program types: *relaxation* and *experience*. The *relaxation program* provides participants the freedom to select activities of monastic life of their choosing. This program offers visitors rest and peace in their mind at a holy place of Buddha's enlightenment amidst the beauty and stillness of natural surroundings. The *experience program* offers organized activities as a group, which helps visitors to become immersed in the Temple activities in the company, collaboration, and companionship of others.

My motivations to participate in this adventure stemmed from my genuine curiosity to step into the Buddhist monks' secluded life and temple culture, which in general, has not been open to the public for centuries. Admittedly, I also desperately needed time away from my hectic lifestyle and the "concrete jungle" of Seoul to restore myself with the fullness of nature. More importantly, I needed time to organize my thoughts and to prepare for my anticipated life transition event: soon I was to move to the United States. I accepted a job and needed to prepare myself to live life in a new place and to leave my family and South Korea--the place where I was born and lived for more than 30 years. I was grateful to go on the retreat with my long-time friend, Jiyoung. At first, I thought it would be better to be by myself during my temple stay, but my curiosity and novelty-seeking was accompanied with a little fear, and so I asked her to be my companion on this trip. In the following sections, I will share my experiences of a temple stay, using 10 identified activities affiliated with transformative travel (Ross, 2010).

Dwelling at sacred sites.

A three-hour high-speed train from Seoul took us to Gurye-gun Jeollanam-do, a southern part of South Korea. Utilizing a local bus, we traveled one and a half hours to mountain Jirisan National Park where the Temple *Hwaeomsa* is located. A bus from Gurye-gu station dropped us off nearby *Hwaeomsa* where we were going to spend the next three days. From here, with slow steps, we walked for about a half an hour to *Hwaeomsa*. Once we stepped off of the bus, we knew we were walking on holy land.

The road ahead of us was carpeted with winter fallen leaves. A murmuring stream flowed from mount Jirisan. Although it was late January, winter in the

southern part of Korea was bearable. It was not necessary for us to walk together. Respecting our individual tempos and desire to be reverent, I walked alone; inhaling deep breaths of fresh air, appreciating the natural beauty of my surroundings provided throughout Jirisan, and wondering how my feeling and thoughts would differ from now as compared with when I would walk these same steps after my temple stay. A car stopped besides us asking if we needed a ride to *Hwaeomsa*. We politely refused the offer as we wanted to stay focused, maintain simplicity and our connection to nature in our hearts as we continued on our walking journey.

Before arriving to the temple grounds, we noticed a few simple and humble, wooden decorated commercial restaurants, with menus posted out front. They served temple food which seemed to tell me that I was about to enter into another world. With a little tension and excitement, I felt hungry and realized that it was already past my lunch time. A restaurant manager who wore a *Seungbok*, a monk's uniform, welcomed us with a warm smile. I paid particular attention to our last "grand meal". I wanted to fully enjoy the late lunch as I presumed that the real temple food would not be as tasty, with fewer condiments and of course, exclude meat.

A big and tall wooden main gate, called *Iljumun*, gradually came closer. It is said that passing through the temples first gate takes the person to the world of enlightenment. As I passed the first gate, the second gate waited for me. It is said that passing through the second gate gets rid of the person's foolish thoughts. Finally, I entered into a tranquil world leaving a hectic secular world behind.

A woman at the temple stay reception area welcomed us with smile. We were instructed about basic manners to maintain at the temple, escorted to our room, and given clothing called *Seungbok*, that we were asked to wear. *Seungbok* is a grey pair of baggy pants and a short, wide-sleeved working jacket, both stitched out of a coarse heavy fabric. When I changed my clothes and put on the *Seungbok*, I felt as if I had instantly entered into a monastic life and had to think and behave differently.

Learning esoteric and common history.

After changing clothes, we toured *Hwaeomsa*, which is nestled in Jirisan National Park upon the slopes of mount Jirisan, the second-tallest mountain the 'back spine' of the South Korean peninsula. Of the seven major Buddhist temples on Jirisan, *Hwaeomsa* is the largest and best-known. The sanctuary was built in the 5th century by a monk named Yon Gi who named the temple after the *Avatamsaka Sutra* or *Hwaeomgyung*, one of the pillar teachings of East Asian Buddhism. The doctrine that describes the manifestation of the beauty of Buddha's virtues and uses the metaphor of flower. *Hwaeomsa* directly translated to English means "Flower Adornment Temple." It is a temple of the Jogye Order,

a traditional sect of Korean Buddhism that contains several national treasures, mostly stone artworks from about 600-900 CE. While appreciating this 1,700-year-old temple and magnificent backdrops of mount Jirisan, I imagined how *Haweomsa* had gone through hardships throughout its history and I wished to deeply connect with the historic and natural beauty through my mind and body while dwelling at this sacred temple. A darkness in the mountain came quickly. A drumbeat by a monk signaled sunset and the start of peaceful time for rejuvenation. I laid my body down on a warm *Ondol* floor, a Korean traditional floor heating system, and tried to sleep.

Being in nature and connecting to natural sites through our body/mind/heart.

Attending the break of dawn ceremony at four o'clock in the morning was the introduction to my second day. I woke up in a rush at 3:40am--I did not want to be late to my first activity. Rising this early would never have been possible for me during my daily life in Seoul. I changed into the *Seungbok* and headed to *Gakhwangjeon* Pavilion, a main building at *Hwaeomsa*. Serenity and peace governed the surroundings. In the darkness, my eyes landed upon the serenity of monks. Participants in the temple stay like us, gathered in silence in front of the Pavilion in ones and twos. A monk holding drumsticks waited for us in front of an enormous cylindrical shaped wooden drum. A guess of the size would be that the diameter of the drum was at least six feet and its height was about eight feet. Drumbeats resonated through the pre-dawn darkness and I could feel each strike of the drum reverberate in my gut. This powerful sound was a prayer for all living things to be free of their pain, symbolizing waking up all living creatures. I felt that all my sensory organs were awakened as the drumbeat resonated through and all around me. I felt I was being connected with nature and all living creatures embodied me. The drumbeat lasted for about seven minutes but it remained in my mind even after my temple stay. I attended this ceremony each morning of my stay.

Engaging in ritual and ceremony.

Following the break of dawn ceremony, the visitors and monks gathered and headed into the main Pavilion for *Yebul*, which refers to a Buddhist ceremonial service to praise Buddha that involves chanting. While on the wooden floor, we listened to about a ten monks chant many prayers because it was the last day of January, close to the beginning of the Lunar New Year. As a non-Buddhist attending *Yebul*, I thought of my visit as a chance to gain insight into the Buddhist culture and traditions, and not as a religious retreat. There were a series of movements associated with the prayers that began with *Hapjang*, by holding two

hands together in front of one's chest and ended by kneeling on the cushion in front of each person and bowing low with respect. I felt the power of the prayers and maintained much respect for Buddha and the practices. The sound of a small round handheld wooden percussion instrument and chanting at *Yebul* opens the mornings at *Hwaeomsa*.

Learning a sustainable ethic.

After a short break in my room, I headed to a dining hall for breakfast. Buddhism regards having a meal as another opportunity to practice Buddhist teachings. This formal monastic meal is called *Balwoo Gongyang*. *Balwoo* means a modestly portioned wooden ball and *Gongyang* means temple meal. I watched the monks closely and learned how to put just enough for my needs in my bowl and leave no leftovers. No voices or sounds of eating were heard, we maintained the mindfulness of mindfulness. Everything inside the bowl was raised by the earth, sunlight, and rain. Thus, it was only right to thank nature for the food. After the meal, water was poured into the empty bowl. I wiped the bowl with the last piece of food and drank the last drops of water. There was nothing to throw away because there was nothing left. Further, no life was hurt because nothing was thrown away. *Balwoo Gongyang* reflects well the core Buddhism ethics of sustainability and respect for all living creatures.

Engaging in multiple means of self-exploration.

The temple stay provides many activities for self-exploration. *Yebul* and *Balwoo Gongyang*, which were explained in previous paragraphs and *Dahdoh*, a tea ceremony which I will share in the next paragraph, are all means of self-exploration. Here, I would like to talk about my experience in meditation.

At *Hwaeomsa*, there is a hill where people can see the entire view of *Hwaeomsa*. One afternoon, I sat down between a pagoda and a stone lantern on the hill to participate in a Zen Meditation called *Chamseon*, which is one of the ways to reach enlightenment. From somewhere, a dog with yellowish hair came close to me and sat down. I sat still and tried to empty my mind to enjoy the serenity. Even the wind seemed clam so I closed my mouth and ears and opened up my heart. In silence, I began to encounter my true self. At first, many thoughts came across my mind and in time they gradually were eliminated from my mind and I calmed down. I meditated independently for almost an hour. When I opened my eyes, a teardrop flowed down my cheek; my mother came to my mind. I had no clue why I suddenly had a thought of my mother until later, when the monk taught about the pagoda where I sat. The three-story four-lion stone pagoda is National Treasure no. 35. At the center of the four statues of lions, there is a statue of a woman with her palms clasped together. Inside the stone lantern is a

statue of a male monk kneeling. The male monk is the Buddhist priest *Yeongi*, the founder of the temple. The woman in the pagoda is his mother. The monk expressed himself as serving tea to his mother to pray for her happiness in heaven. Reflecting on the experience, I realized later that the monk *Yeongi's* prayer touched my heart and he helped me to think of my mother who would miss me after my big move.

Talking to, listening to, and learning from a monk.

Jirisan National Park where *Hwaeomsa* is located is famous for its natural beauty and there are several small temples in the forest surrounding the main temple where in general, only one or two monks live. In the evening, my friend and I walked in the forest to one of the small temples for a tea ceremony, called *Dahdoh*. *Dahdoh* is not only for the genuine appreciation of tea but also it provides a chance to talk with and gain advice from monks. Our journey to the ceremony led us through bamboo trees that whispered with the wind and we passed small streams that meandered around and down hills. After 40 minutes of hiking, we arrived at a small temple. An elder monk welcomed us and guided us to a tea room where we sat on the wooden floor. The monk skillfully poured hot water into a small teacup to warm the cups and then discarded the hot water to nature. He then filled each cup with hot tea, however the first cup was bitter and therefore, he discarded the first cup of tea and poured a second, which we slowly enjoyed the rich taste. Delicate scents spread throughout the room as well as in my mouth and I felt as if my spirit became fresh. Conversations and sharing tea with the elder monk were enjoyable, enlightening, and memorable offering me a different perspective of life. It was this monk, that taught me about the meaning of the temple where my meditation led me to thoughts and feelings related to my mother.

It was dusk when I arrived back at my room. Again, through the dimming light, I felt and heard the drumbeat resonating through the temple and forests, symbolizing the sun's set. I organized my belongings for the early departure to Seoul the following day, and fell asleep. The last night of my temple stay was over.



Giving and providing services to families, children, and communities.<sup>1</sup>

As addressed in the first part of this section, the temple stay offers organized group activities to families, schools, companies, and communities. The temple stay is opened to groups for the purpose of education and bonding. During my stay at the temple, a family with four members---parents and two daughters under age ten---stayed next door to me. They participated in specially designed programs for children such as making a paper lantern with their wishes for the Lunar New Year and painting on canvas. It seemed that children were proud of their lanterns and paintings as these were made together with their parents.

Initiating regular group sharing sessions.

For visitors who participate in a group, the temple stay provides group sharing sessions in the evenings with monks. These group sessions are often accompanied by the tea ceremony of *Dahdoh*, allowing for a nice atmosphere so that participants can talk about and reflect upon their experiences of the temple stay, learn from the monks and from one another.

Engaging in physically challenging activities.

Buddhism regards labor and work as one of ways to enlightenment. For long-term stay visitors, the temple assigns the opportunity to engage in community work called *Ullyok*. During my stay at the temple, I met a visitor who planned to stay for a week. As a *Ullyok*, he engaged in gardening and cleaning and assisted the monks in fixing the temples. Some temple stays offer *Ullyok* and/or hiking as a group experience. As an independent participant, I choose to go hiking as a means of moving my body, becoming refreshed, being in communion with nature.

## Was My Temple Stay Experience Travel Transformative?

I realize now, from personal and professional perspectives, that my temple stay was transformative. Through my temple stay in their *relaxation program*, I directly experienced 7 of 10 activities conducive for transformative travel (Ross, 2010). I did also have the chance to observe visitors engaging in the other three transformative travel activities, which were offered to groups of travelers and long-term stay visitors.

My temple stay at *Hwaeomsa* was different from my previous visits to other temples based on the fact I had not been immersed in a culture residentially, for a multiple-day period. Whenever I visit monastic sites, I like take time to

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<sup>1</sup> As explained, the author experienced the three remaining activities of transformative travel through indirect experience by observing group participants and/or long-term visitors.

explore my true nature and observe different life perspectives. I have visited the following sites: Tibetan temples in Nepal, Buddhist temples in Thailand, Angkor Wat in Cambodia, Hindu temples in Indonesia and many Cathedrals and Churches throughout Europe. The experience during my Korean temple stay was unique to my previous experiences because it afforded me a chance to encounter my true self, even in a short period of time. This was possible because I embraced the entire experience, resided in the sacred place, and followed the monastic life at historic *Hwaeomsa*. I felt the awe of being surrounded so completely by nature and connected with the famous Jirisan National Park through my body and soul. The traditional experiences such as the break of dawn ceremony called *Yebul*, along with *Balwoo Gonyang*, *Chamseon*, and *Dahdoh* collectively, helped me to experience a different world, understand a simpler and reverent way of being, and find my true self. Although my experience in the remote temple was more than five years ago, the teachings I received from the monks such as, “genuine respect of all living creatures”, “understanding of individual’s differences” and “seeking answers from the bottom of my heart”, have never died and continue to guide my life. Even today, six years after my travel to *Hwaeomsa*, I still open my photobook and keep looking at and reminiscing over my temple stay when I feel empty.

## Temple Stays and Transformative Travel

Temple stays, by virtue of the environment, ethics, practices, residential culture steeped in living history, and activities delivered, are poised to be transformative and as such, attract transformative travelers. Recent studies by the World Tourism Organization identify “new shifts in traveler profiles” (Ateljevic, Sheldon, & Tomljenovic, 2016, p. 10), which recognized “transformative tourists” as “conscious consumers” (p. 12). These adventurers are highly educated, mostly young to middle age, well-traveled, and prefer a longer stay. The transformative traveler is motivated to “re-invent themselves and the world by taking action towards life-dreams (79%), personal growth (78%), exploring their life’s purpose (75%), learn new skills, connect with local people, and volunteer (2016, p. 11). In juxtaposition, a recent study found that temple stay visitors from in-country gain satisfaction by being in nature, experiencing self-growth, and relaxation, while the international guests gained fulfillment through aspects of the stay that involve nature and relaxation (Chun, et al., 2017). Although satisfaction is a worthwhile goal for mass tourism, we suggest that analysis of temple stay experiences concentrate on psychological and spiritual experiences in order to capture the monastery’s most valuable product: *a container for personal growth, self-realization, and transformative experiences*. We are curious if the apparent disconnect between the actual visitor outcomes and potential transformative

outcomes stem from the manner in which temple stays have been packaged and marketed and to whom.

The temple stay is well-suited to be transformative because the traveler is immersed into a living system, a community of practice, where for a brief time, the guest enters into an entirely different domain of deliberate, immersive spiritual activities. Research in transformative travel indicates that the degree to which the travel experiences “that removes individuals as far as possible from experience with which they are familiar” (Lean, 2009, p. 203) is “one of the primary reasons for [the traveler’s] transformation (p. 199). This is so because the individual, when in a radically novel environments, is forced to reconsider deeply held ontological meaning-perspectives about herself, others, what constitutes reality, and how the world operates---all key necessities to predicate transformative experience (Mezirow, 1978).

For example, living in the temple requires the visitor to let go of ingrained social, behavioral, and even cognitive patterns, enter liminal space, and learn how to eat, pray, be, and sleep with attention to the sacred. When travelers enter the temple and the landscapes that surround them, become acquainted with the monks and their reality, we argue it likely if not inevitable that the adventurer experiences (at the very least) a *perspective transformation*---a new way to understand themselves, others, and the world (Mezirow, 1978). Based on the congruence between the transformative traveler motivations and the Buddhist monastery life (as a spiritual center founded on practices and principles of looking within and spiritual enlightenment), there appears to be a substantial opportunity for a shift in marketing focus by the hosts and discovery by the “cultural creatives” or transformative travelers as guests.

## Discussion

### Potentials.

There exists a plethora of opportunities for research in the area of temple stays. The phenomenon of a temple stay is a nascent tourism segment that is beginning to gain attention of scholars and scientists internationally. In a review of literature, we found only seven publications sourced outside of Korea (Choe, Blazey & Mitas, 2015; Chun, Roh, Spralls, & Kim, 2017; Kaplan, 2010; Lee, Lawton, & Weaver, 2012; Moon, 2008; Raguram, Venkateswaran, Ramakrishna, & Weiss, 2002; Song, Lee, Park, Hwang, & Reisinger, 2015), one master’s thesis (Wang, 2011), and a related study on leisure motivations among people visiting a Buddhist temple in the United States (Choe, Blazey & Mitas, 2015). The uniqueness of this tourism niche gives rise to a host of possibilities for scientific analysis. Research indicates for example, that temple stays as Korea has designed them, offer travelers and scientists a distinct brand of ecotourism where nature is

viewed as “unity and interdependence” between humans and the natural world and sustainability is transpires through “creative transformation for harmony” (Lee, Lawton, & Weaver, 2012, p. 530). Lee et al. reveal that Korean Buddhist ontology offers a radical departure from Western ways that can be relationally dissociated, taking action-towards-connection and in regard sustainability, approaches change through sequential processes rather than transformation.

#### Pitfalls.

The commencement of temple stays has not been without problems. One temple in India known as a refuge for people with serious mental illness was identified in one study as a community resource for improving mental health (Raguram, Venkateswaran, Ramakrishna, & Weiss, 2002) with reports of decreased symptoms after a stay of six weeks. A professor of medicine wrote an editorial response to Raguram et al. article that delivered a strong warning to scholars and politicians to avoid giving the general public the impression that “healing temples can heal their diseases” (Kalantri, 2002, p. 958). Less dramatic albeit important ethical, cultural, and sociological concerns point out that temple programming “clearly involves...staging...where monks turn into tour guides and curators of an eclectic, traditional, ‘authentic’ Koreanness” (Kaplan, 2010, p. 140). A few scholars took note and discussed the risks of the “tourisification of religious sites” (Olsen, 2006, p. 121) that can run the risk of causing dramatic environmental, social, and spiritual impacts if not well supported with infrastructure and programming (Kaplan, 2010).

Because both the government and Buddhist denomination have economic motives (which are valid motives) and the majority of publications pertaining to temple stays still originate from Korean sources, international exposure to this phenomenon will no doubt help the collective to gain clearer understanding of the volume, growth, demographics, and experiences of temple visitors. An example of this need for analysis free from domestic bias is demonstrated in a manuscript written by a Korean university professor (Bayer, 2016) who cited (in a three-paragraph section labeled, “Sources and Previous Research”) three manuscripts—one of which was a master’s thesis (p. 72).

#### Future Directions in Research

Because this touristic experience explicitly engages the traveler’s inner world, ontology, and/or spirituality, we suggest that in the early years of this tourism segment’s development, research rely heavily on qualitative analysis to examine lived experiences of Buddhist and non-Buddhist, Korean and international travelers. Research methods (at least in the outset) such as phenomenology, cooperative inquiry, appreciative inquiry, heuristic inquiry, or insight dialogic

inquires that employ principles and practices that complement Buddhist (and ecotourism) values and practices of presence or mindfulness, internal inquiry, and relationship/community building will be an imperative means to better “see what is” rather than projecting or extracting. Implementing research that employs reflexivity, which is “analytic attention to the researcher's role in qualitative research” (Gouldner, 1971, p. 16, as cited in Dowling, 2006) and brings conscious awareness of “specific ways in which our own agenda affect the research at all points in the research process” (Hesse-Biber, 2007, p. 17).

Until qualitative analysis yields a richer and more diverse understanding of the confluence between modernity and monastic paradigms, scientific analysis risks imposing Western or secular constructs (that are inherently divide and compartmentalize) upon the people and lands that are inherent to this tourism niche. Along this vein, “it is not sufficient to merely provide ‘alternative and special interest tourism’ experience only, which are solemnly based on market segmentation principle” (Ateljevic, Sheldon, & Tomljenovic, 2016, p. 17), hosts need to align with and demonstrate their lived values and practices so as to attract guests who want to pay for, appreciate, and be conveyors of these venerated and unsullied people, practices, places, and knowledge.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this paper is to deliver a rich narrative of one Korean-American scholar's account of her temple stay in a Korean monastery called Temple *Hwaeomsa*, as a means to examine how temple stays can be constitutive of transformative travel. Using ten activities of transformative travel (Ross, 2010), a Korean American scholar, Jungyun Christine Hur, discovered that she did indeed engage in transformative activities and found the experience to be transformational. As temple stays become increasingly studied and frequented, we deduce that this unique eco-travel can produce far more than cultural, educational, and biopsychospiritual rejuvenation outcomes. Based on the interests of current temple stay participants, we argue that the travelers may be surprised to discover the spiritual nature of their experiences. We look forward to future research that analyzes spiritual dimensions of temple stays. It is possible for example, that the “healing power” of a temple stay may “reside in the site itself” (Raguram, et al., 2002, p. 38) and this possibility alone, offers a rich line of inquiry. Similar to travelers who visited the sacred site of Mt. Athos in Greece, temple goers may also initially “admit they are just taking a look [at the sacred site, and] when they return...realize that they have made a pilgrimage” (Gothoni, 1994, p. 179). The degree to which we know the gifts of a place and people relies entirely upon the question and our approach.

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