



# A Study on Perseverance, Psychological Resilience, and Flow Experience in Extreme Pilgrimage Challenges: A Case Study of the Baishatun Mazu Pilgrimage to Beigang

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**Abstract:** This study explores the relationship between psychological resilience, perseverance, flow experience, and faith in the context of the Baishatun Mazu pilgrimage. Through in-depth interviews with 12 participants, the study reveals that faith plays a crucial role in extreme challenges, helping participants demonstrate significant psychological resilience and perseverance when facing physical and psychological pressures. The findings indicate that with faith support, participants enter a flow state, transforming discomfort and fatigue into motivation, while enhancing their psychological resilience through group interactions and ritual practices. Faith not only provides emotional support but also facilitates the construction of psychological resources, aiding participants' spiritual and emotional growth. Based on these findings, the study suggests that social and religious organizations design similar activities that combine faith with challenging tasks to further enhance individuals' psychological flexibility and resilience.

**Keywords:** Baishatun Mazu, pilgrimage, psychological resilience, perseverance, flow, sport tourism

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Against the backdrop of globalisation and postmodern society, the significance of religious pilgrimage has progressively transcended its traditional religious practice boundaries, evolving into a multi-layered cultural phenomenon (Shinde & Olsen, 2023). This transformation not only facilitates cultural exchange and religious dissemination but also emerges as a vital driving force for manifesting personal exploration, strengthening social connections, and promoting local economic growth (Collins-Kreiner, 2020). This trend indicates that pilgrimage activities are no longer confined to the singular impetus of religious faith; their forms and functions have gradually expanded into expressions of individual meaning-seeking and cross-cultural interaction. The distinctive cultural tension inherent in religious pilgrimage not only attracts widespread participation from devotees but also establishes it as a unique research domain for exploring psychological, cultural, and physical boundaries.

As one of the most representative religious-cultural phenomena in the Chinese-speaking world, the Mazu belief system possesses a millennium-long history since its earliest written records. It stands as both a religious symbol rooted in Chinese folk belief and a crucial constituent of cultural identity and spiritual belonging. The global influence of Mazu worship is manifested not merely in the breadth of its cultural impact but also in the contemporary interpretation of its traditional practices. In 2009, the Mazu belief and customs were inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, further enhancing the international recognition and academic attention afforded to this faith tradition (UNESCO, 2009). This global acknowledgement of religious culture has positioned research surrounding Mazu belief as a significant topic within the fields of religious studies, cultural anthropology, and tourism research.

In Taiwan, the Mazu belief system is deeply embedded within the local socio-cultural ecology. The annual Mazu pilgrimage activities serve not only as religious and cultural celebrations but also as crucial ritual practices that catalyse collective identity formation within Taiwanese society. The "Dajia Mazu Circumambulation," renowned for its massive participation and touristic characteristics, has emerged as a representative activity of national-level religious tourism, garnering considerable domestic and international attention (Liu et al., 2023). However, in contrast, the Baishatun Mazu Walking Pilgrimage,

with its distinctive "forced march" characteristics and unpredictable route arrangements, presents a pilgrimage experience markedly different from the Dajia Zhenlan Temple's circumambulation pilgrimage to Xingang Fengtian Temple. This activity is characterised by its prolonged duration and high-intensity rapid walking, creating a compelling synthesis of religious devotion and physical endurance challenges, thereby establishing itself as a significant case study for examining extreme experiences within religious pilgrimage research. Given its unique attributes, the participant experiences and psychological resilience transmission effects of the Baishatun Mazu pilgrimage merit deeper academic investigation.

Whilst religious pilgrimage as a research topic has accumulated substantial academic scholarship, systematic investigations focusing on participants' psychological characteristics within the Taiwanese religious context remain insufficient. Existing research predominantly examines the Dajia Mazu Circumambulation's promotional functions for local economies, cultural industries, and cultural exchange (Chang et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2020). Regarding the Baishatun Mazu pilgrimage, scholars have analysed its impact on the health of middle-aged and elderly participants (e.g., Lin et al., 2022); however, empirical research on participants' psychological dynamics and experiential mechanisms under extreme conditions remains particularly inadequate. Some existing studies (e.g., Lee et al., 2020) employ economic models to focus on participants' perceived benefits and costs, whilst others (e.g., Huang & Lin, 2023) explore the impact of perceived authenticity on pilgrimage image. Nevertheless, these studies predominantly concentrate on macro-cultural or societal levels, failing to elucidate the deep-seated psychological mechanisms, such as psychological resilience and flow experience, exhibited by individuals during extreme pilgrimage processes.

Furthermore, from a psychological perspective, academic research on extreme challenge activities (such as marathons, triathlons, or high-altitude mountaineering expeditions), particularly explorations concerning grit, psychological resilience, and flow state, has yielded significant theoretical contributions (Duckworth et al., 2007; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). These studies reveal how individuals achieve breakthrough performances in high-intensity challenge activities through motivational adjustment and psychological resources. However, current mainstream research predominantly focuses on purely athletic or adventure contexts, with insufficient exploration of how faith factors support individual psychological resilience or trigger flow experiences within religious pilgrimage contexts. Consequently, how religious devotion and spiritual faith as psychological resources empower participants to overcome extreme activities whilst conferring meaning, and their potential facilitative effects on mental health, remain inadequately addressed domains.

Based on the aforementioned research gaps and literature deficiencies, this study employs the Baishatun Mazu Walking Pilgrimage's forced march activity as a research case, aiming to analyse how religious pilgrimage participants manifest psychological resilience and flow experiences within the dual interweaving of faith support and physical endurance challenges. Specifically, the objectives of this research include:

- [1] Exploring how participants utilise grit to overcome physical and psychological challenges during the forced march process, whilst demonstrating recovery-oriented and adaptive psychological resilience characteristics;
- [2] Investigating whether participants enter flow states during the long-distance walking process and analysing the key conditions that may trigger flow experiences;
- [3] Examining how Mazu belief, as a psychological resource, supports the generation of psychological resilience and flow experiences.

In summary, the Baishatun Mazu forced march represents a unique form of religious pilgrimage, significant not merely for its core expression of religious devotion but also for its profound challenges to mind and body under extreme conditions. This study, adopting psychological and faith-based perspectives, will elucidate the operational mechanisms of grit, psychological resilience, and flow experience within the Baishatun Mazu forced march, attempting to construct an academic framework for the interaction of individual psychological characteristics under extreme pilgrimage activities. This endeavour aims to provide theoretical support and empirical contributions to research on religious pilgrimage and extreme challenges.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. Research on Religious Pilgrimage and Psychological Challenges**

The history of the Baishatun Gongtian Temple Mazu pilgrimage to Beigang Chaotian Temple (one of the world's three major Mazu temples) spans over a century, and the absence of a fixed route represents a distinctive feature of Taiwanese folklore and religious practice. However, why has the Baishatun Mazu pilgrimage evolved into a forced march activity? The primary reason is that the annual pilgrimage schedule to Beigang Chaotian Temple is determined by the temple's incense burner master for that year, who consults Mazu through moon block divination on the 15th day of the 12th lunar month to decide the pilgrimage dates and times. The ritual proceedings comprise: raising the head flag (a crucial ceremony announcing the commencement of the pilgrimage in different directions), Mazu's departure in the palanquin, arrival at Beigang Chaotian Temple, the fire-receiving ceremony, return to the temple, and finally, the opening of the incense burner (Baishatun Gong Tian Temple, 2025). According to the Baishatun Mazu Beigang Walking Pilgrimage Cultural Yearbook, the term "forced march" has only circulated amongst Mazu's devotees (xiangdengjiao, literally "incense lamp feet") in the past one to two decades. Since records began in 1996, there have been 12 instances of Mazu forced marches, comprising seven outbound journeys and five return journeys, with the most recent outbound forced march occurring in 2018. The forced march is characterised by time constraints, with Mazu's grand palanquin not stopping overnight, meaning there is no "dismounting" during the process. The inability to obtain adequate rest poses a significant challenge to the pilgrims (xiangdengjiao). According to temple records, the Baishatun Mazu round-trip covers approximately 400 kilometers, with 200 kilometers each way. For instance, the 2025 Baishatun Mazu pilgrimage schedule indicates that the palanquin will depart at 23:25 on 1st May, with the expectation of rushing to Beigang within 37 hours, arriving at Beigang Chaotian Temple on 3rd May, conducting the fire-receiving ceremony at 00:40 on 4th May, returning to the temple on 11th May, and opening the incense burner on 22nd May. Baishatun Gongtian Temple emphasises that the forced march represents a significant physical and psychological cultivation for devotees, and those wishing to participate should be psychologically prepared.

### **2.2. Psychological Resilience Theory**

Psychological resilience refers to an individual's capacity to psychologically adapt and successfully recover when confronting stress, adversity, or challenges, thereby achieving higher degrees of personal reinforcement and growth (Masten, 2014). In contemporary psychology, psychological resilience is regarded as a dynamic characteristic that is not merely an innate trait but can continuously develop through environmental interaction and experience. This characteristic is particularly salient in high-pressure environments or extreme challenge contexts, such as high-intensity physical activities or psychological tests (Southwick et al., 2014). Masten (2014) metaphorically describes psychological resilience as "ordinary magic" in resisting stress, with its foundation derived from an individual's cognitive flexibility, self-efficacy, and emotional equilibrium capabilities. In extreme challenge contexts, psychological resilience not only assists individuals in managing stress but also promotes the enhancement of internal psychological strength, rendering psychological resilience a crucial core competency in multiple stress environments.

Research indicates that individuals with high psychological resilience can achieve personal growth through challenging processes, thereby enhancing psychological adaptability and life satisfaction (Fredrickson et al., 2003). During challenges, highly resilient individuals can more effectively process stressors and extract positive meaning from negative experiences, further realising emotional regulation and goal attainment. For instance, research by Tugade and Fredrickson (2004) indicates a significant cyclical relationship between psychological resilience and positive affect: positive emotions help highly resilient individuals recover more rapidly from emotional distress, whilst successful stress recovery processes further reinforce the sustained development of positive affect. Concurrently, psychological resilience has been demonstrated to facilitate interpersonal connections. Research by Southwick et al. (2014) indicates a crucial interaction between social support and psychological resilience, with individuals possessing greater interpersonal support resources in stressful contexts typically exhibiting stronger resilience. This further elucidates that within religious or cultural communities, positive collective emotions may play a vital role in the manifestation of psychological resilience.

In extreme challenge religious tourism environments, such as the Baishatun Mazu forced march, participants must confront multiple challenges including prolonged high-intensity physical activity, sleep deprivation, and psychological stress. These conditions provide an excellent research context for demonstrating psychological resilience, with faith potentially playing a crucial supportive role therein. Previous research indicates that spiritual faith can help individuals better cope with high-pressure challenges and enhance psychological resilience, as faith can imbue actions with meaning and provide psychological support for individuals (Wilt et al., 2024). For instance, religious rituals and pilgrimage activities may construct group support systems through the creation of spiritual connections, rendering participants more resilient during psychological challenges.

Furthermore, psychological resilience is not a unidimensional static capability but encompasses multi-level dynamic interactive processes. For example, Kobasa's (1979) theory of "hardiness" proposes that psychological resilience manifests in three key characteristics when confronting stress: commitment, control, and challenge. These characteristics are highly correlated with the qualities exhibited by Baishatun Mazu forced march participants. Participants' commitment to Mazu faith motivates them to overcome physical and psychological challenges; their acceptance and adaptation to uncontrollable environments during challenges demonstrate flexible adjustment of their sense of control; whilst continuous self-challenge further deepens participants' psychological growth.

In summary, psychological resilience theory provides an important theoretical framework for exploring how individuals cope with extreme challenges in religious pilgrimage activities. It not only explains how participants demonstrate adaptability and recovery in stressful environments but also highlights the crucial role of religious faith in strengthening psychological resilience therein. Future research should further integrate psychological resilience theory to explore how Mazu faith stimulates intrinsic motivation and guides participants in obtaining positive psychological growth from challenges.

### **2.3. Flow State Theory**

Flow theory was proposed by psychologist Csikszentmihalyi (1990), with its core focus on exploring the optimal psychological state of heightened concentration that humans can achieve during specific activities. Flow is frequently described as an experience of "complete immersion", where individuals become entirely oblivious to their own existence and external distractions, concentrating wholly on the present activity whilst experiencing intense satisfaction and a sense of control. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) posits that one of the core characteristics of flow state is its highly self-reinforcing nature, as it provides profound psychological pleasure and intrinsic feedback, which not only enhances individual concentration but also facilitates sustained engagement in challenging activities.

Flow theory has garnered widespread attention for its clear framework, with the process of flow experience summarised into several key elements. Firstly, clear goals are essential; when individuals engage in an activity, clarity of behavioural objectives provides them with a distinct sense of direction and motivation, avoiding psychological confusion caused by ambiguous goals. Secondly, the necessary condition of challenge-skill balance dictates that individuals are most likely to enter flow state when the challenge level of an activity is balanced with the individual's skill level (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). Insufficient challenge leads to boredom, whilst excessive challenge may induce anxiety; only appropriate balance can facilitate the emergence of optimal psychological states. Additionally, another key characteristic of flow is the distortion of time perception; when individuals are immersed in an activity, they often lose awareness of time's passage, even experiencing the peculiar sensation of "time standing still" or "time dilation". Finally, concentration and sense of control are also crucial elements of flow, with concentration requiring individuals to focus entirely on the current activity whilst excluding external distractions, and the sense of control allowing individuals to feel comprehensive mastery over the situation whilst trusting their abilities to meet the challenges within the activity (Jackson & Eklund, 2002).

Research indicates that flow is not limited to sports and creative work but can equally occur in extreme religious pilgrimage contexts. Swann et al. (2017) emphasise that in extreme activities (such as extreme sports and extreme religious experiences), individuals often enter highly immersive psychological states more readily due to continuous physiological challenges and immense psychological pressure. Beyond general psychological requirements, religious faith is also considered an important factor facilitating flow. This point is addressed in Pargament's (1997) research on religious psychological comfort:

religious activities provide participants with "transcendent meaning" for their actions, and this sense of meaning can amplify their focused state, promoting the generation of flow. For instance, a participant might view completing an arduous journey as an act of devotion to their faith, and this sacred goal-setting satisfies the "clear goals" condition in flow theory.

In research on religious pilgrimage behaviour, it has been observed that most participants enter flow states, prominently manifested during walking pilgrimages, activities that typically require prolonged concentration and physical-psychological balance. Enhanced spiritual goals and focus on the pure action of each step enable many participants to achieve psychological characteristics associated with flow within religious environments. When challenging scenarios occur, such as long-distance trekking or nocturnal forced marches, the triggering conditions for flow become more pronounced. For example, the prolonged irregular progression, physical fatigue, and psychological pressure experienced by participants in the Baishatun Mazu forced march represent extreme cases of perceived challenge-skill matching. Simultaneously, the group cohesion emphasised within the religious atmosphere and the sanctity of pilgrimage objectives imbue these activities with special significance, facilitating more rapid entry into flow states.

Furthermore, Harris et al. (2017) discovered that flow experiences have positive effects on long-term satisfaction in extreme service activities and self-transcendent challenges. Through flow, participants not only help themselves overcome challenges but also experience profound psychological balance and wellbeing. Therefore, it can be inferred that the forced march challenges during the Baishatun Mazu pilgrimage can bring significant emotional benefits to participants and constitute an important context for facilitating flow.

In summary, flow experience represents a highly self-reinforcing positive psychological state that holds significant research value in extreme religious contexts, particularly in extreme challenge activities such as the Baishatun Mazu forced march. Future in-depth exploration of the religious and cultural specificities of flow-triggering conditions will not only further expand the application scope of flow theory but also emphasise the profound influence of spiritual power in psychology.

#### **2.4. Grit Theory: Integrating Psychological Resilience and Religious Experience**

In research on the Baishatun Mazu pilgrimage to Beigang, Grit theory provides a crucial theoretical framework for exploring how participants overcome extreme challenges and complete the long-distance journeys and psychological trials within religious activities. The Baishatun Mazu pilgrimage represents a typical extreme-challenge religious activity, where participants must confront physiological pressures including prolonged walking, irregular route progression and weather conditions, and sleep deprivation, whilst simultaneously enduring psychological feelings of solitude and fatigue. Consequently, the pilgrimage process poses immense tests to individuals' physiological, psychological, and faith dimensions, and Grit theory effectively explains how devotees, through passion for religious goals (such as seeking Mazu's protection and pursuing spiritual salvation) and sustained effort, transcend physical exhaustion and psychological resistance to complete this challenge (Duckworth, 2016).

Furthermore, the sense of religious ritual, collective atmosphere, and sacred objectives conferred by faith emphasised in pilgrimage activities can stimulate individuals' intrinsic motivation, enabling them to persist in action when confronting difficulties. For instance, participants may regard the long journey as an expression of reverence for Mazu or a symbol of connection with their faith, with the sacred significance of such goals providing crucial psychological support for overcoming challenges. According to research by Lee, Jan, & Lin (2020), authentic sensory experiences (such as group walking, integration with nature, and ritual atmosphere) constitute important factors in devotee engagement, further emphasising how grit in pilgrimage activities is amplified and reinforced by religious faith and group connections.

The Baishatun Mazu pilgrimage also encompasses the cultural significance of challenging individual limits, such as continuously adapting to rapidly changing routes and rhythms, which aligns with Basil's (2023) findings in pilgrimage research: the overall journey brings not only physical challenges but also opportunities for spiritual departure from routine and self-transcendence. Simultaneously, mutual assistance amongst the group during pilgrimage strengthens connections between companions, providing external supportive force that enables individuals to persevere through challenging processes.

Therefore, Grit theory can be employed to explain how participants, through combining intrinsic motivation for long-term goal pursuit with external support during the pilgrimage process, enhance psychological resilience, thereby reaching peaks of religious experience, and how they achieve physical and psychological self-breakthrough within the framework of religious faith. Such research not only enables in-depth exploration of devotees' experiences but also further elucidates the profound influence of religious culture and psychological characteristics on human behaviour and challenge response.

### **3. RESEARCH METHODS**

#### **3.1. Research Design**

This study adopts an interpretivist approach as the dominant paradigm. As this research examines tourist perceptions, which are determined by the interaction between individuals' subjective states and the environment, a qualitative interpretivist approach appears more appropriate. As this research was conducted at Beigang Chaotian Temple—a typical Mazu faith pilgrimage site—this unique location attracts numerous Mazu devotees for worship, thus this study can also be considered a case study. Under the guidance of the interpretivist paradigm, we acknowledge the researcher's subjectivity in the research process. The researcher employed in-depth personal interviews as the primary data collection method to gather detailed descriptions of pilgrimage tourism experiences at the research site. The researcher was present on-site to obtain first-hand experience of the research phenomenon. Additionally, the researcher also adopted participant observation as a means of triangulation. Field observation primarily focused on the environment during the Baishatun Mazu pilgrimage process, landscape characteristics, the appearance and behaviour of pilgrims/tourists, and interactions amongst pilgrims/tourists.

#### **3.2. Research Scope and Participants**

This study focuses on pilgrims who participated in the complete outbound journey on foot during the 2025 Baishatun Gongtian Temple Mazu pilgrimage to Beigang Chaotian Temple. The 2025 Baishatun Gongtian Temple Mazu deity departed on palanquin at 23:25 on 1st May, arriving at Beigang Chaotian Temple after 36 hours of continuous walking on 3rd May. The fire ceremony was conducted at 00:40 on 4th May, with the return to the temple on 11th May and the opening of the incense burner on 22nd May. As the Baishatun Gongtian Temple palanquin is carried by a team of 30 bearers working in rotation, the 120-kilometre journey to Beigang Chaotian Temple can be completed in 36 hours without stopping the palanquin. However, for individual participants, this resembles a military forced march—walking for one day and one night without sleep, with only brief rests during the pilgrimage route, otherwise they cannot keep pace with Mazu's palanquin. Prior to departure, this study identified 12 participants willing to be interviewed through Facebook communities related to Baishatun Mazu. All participants were male, aged between 24-36 years, and had completed the entire outbound forced march pilgrimage by 24:00 on 3rd May.

#### **3.3. Data Collection**

Data for this study were collected through semi-structured interviews and participant observation. Interviews were conducted on the afternoon of 1st May 2025, prior to the pilgrimage departure, with 12 respondents at businesses near Baishatun Gongtian Temple. As the participants arrived in Beigang at 23:00 on 3rd May and required adequate rest due to lack of sleep, a second interview was conducted with each participant on the return journey between 4th-5th May to understand pilgrims' experiences and feelings regarding participation in the forced march. Regarding research ethics, informed consent was obtained throughout the study, with pseudonyms used to ensure privacy and research data used solely for academic purposes. Respondents could terminate discussion of inconvenient or sensitive interview content at any time. Interview content was recorded with participants' consent and transcribed into Chinese. Thematic analysis was conducted on interview data, supplemented by participant observation. The credibility of research findings was established according to two recommendations by Decrop (1999): (1) data triangulation: field notes were used to triangulate interview results; (2) researcher triangulation: the four authors cross-checked interview records and field notes independently to verify research findings.

#### **3.4. Interview Questions**

[1] What is your primary motivation for participating in the Baishatun Mazu pilgrimage? What roles does faith play in this?

- [2] What physical and psychological challenges did you encounter during the forced march process? How did you overcome these difficulties?
- [3] Have you experienced moments when you felt supported by the power of faith during the pilgrimage? Could you share these experiences?
- [4] How do you understand the test that the "forced march" activity format poses to devotees' body and mind? What deeper significance does such a challenge hold for you?
- [5] How did your psychological state change during the prolonged walking? Were there moments when you felt you entered a "flow state," completely immersed in the present moment of walking and faith?
- [6] What characteristics do you believe you demonstrated in terms of grit and psychological resilience during the pilgrimage? Are there specific experiences that could help you describe these qualities?
- [7] How do you view the spiritual significance generated by combining religious ritual with extreme challenges? How has such experience changed your life perspective or faith?
- [8] In your view, what is the relationship between the demonstration of psychological resilience and grit in such extreme pilgrimage processes and faith? Could you share a specific example?
- [9] Have you participated in the Baishatun Mazu pilgrimage multiple times? If so, what changes or improvements have you experienced in your psychological resilience and flow experiences over the years?
- [10] What similarities or differences exist between the flow experience in the Baishatun Mazu forced march and your flow experiences in other challenging activities?

#### **4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Through interviews with 12 participants in the Baishatun Mazu pilgrimage forced march, this study analysed the interactions amongst psychological resilience, grit, flow experience, and faith. Results indicate that these factors are interwoven, shaping participants' unique experiences amidst extreme physical and psychological challenges. The following presents and discusses findings according to three major themes.

##### **4.1. Relationship Between Psychological Resilience and Grit**

Most respondents believed that the key to completing the forced march was not simply physical strength, but rather the interaction between psychological resilience and grit. Many mentioned that during night walking, when feet developed blisters and sleep deprivation set in, physical energy alone would have been insufficient to sustain them. What truly propelled them forward was the belief "I must complete this journey" and the grit of "one more step brings me closer to the goal."

Participants noted that when internal beliefs were reinforced (e.g., "this is walking for Mazu"), a power transcending fatigue would surge within. Conversely, when beliefs wavered, grit weakened accordingly. Thus, psychological resilience and grit form a mutually reinforcing dynamic system: firm beliefs enhance the ability to resist pressure, whilst the demonstration of grit in turn strengthens self-efficacy.

This finding echoes research by Surzykiewicz et al. (2022), which indicates that religious and spiritual beliefs can positively promote psychological resilience, particularly by providing additional emotional and meaningful support when facing high pressure and challenges. Furthermore, Paley and Johnson (2025) noted in their review of extreme endurance athletes that grit and resilience often mutually reinforce each other through emotional regulation and cognitive restructuring, enabling participants to continuously face extreme adversity. Our research results indicate that religious beliefs further serve as the core of this complementary mechanism.

##### **4.2. Emergence and Impact of Flow Experience**

Approximately two-thirds of respondents mentioned experiences resembling flow. This experience commonly occurred during the middle or latter stages of the journey, when body and mind gradually entered a stable rhythm. They described moments of "focusing only on footsteps and prayer," "loss of

time perception," and even experiencing diminished pain, with a highly balanced and stable feeling emerging naturally. Three main conditions triggered flow: (1) Group dynamics: witnessing the large contingent advancing together and mutually encouraging each other generated strong belonging. (2) Religious environment: incense, hymns, and prayer sounds created an immersive atmosphere, facilitating entry into a focused state. (3) Faith power: transforming personal challenges into religious missions, such as "Mazu is watching over us," imbuing suffering with meaning. The impact of flow proved crucial. Many expressed that flow not only reduced focus on pain but served as a "turning point" for breaking through barriers, helping them sustain grit until completion.

Antonini Philippe et al. (2022) explored flow processes amongst athletes and musicians, noting that flow typically occurs most readily when "challenge and ability are balanced," with emotional states playing important roles in entering and exiting flow. This highly aligns with participants' descriptions of "painful yet just manageable." Additionally, Paley & Johnson (2025) noted that in extreme sports, reconstructing pain and fatigue as "part of the goal" facilitates entry into sustained flow states. Therefore, flow experience in the Baishatun forced march not only provides psychological relief but also yields practical benefits amidst continuous challenges.

#### 4.3. Interaction Between Faith and Psychological Challenges: Demonstration of Five Capabilities

From the interviews, faith catalysed five capabilities amidst psychological challenges: (1) Emotional balance supported by internal beliefs: prayer and scripture recitation reduced anxiety and fear, moderating emotional fluctuations; (2) Stress resistance: in harsh environments and physical pain, faith became the core reason to "continue walking"; (3) Self-reconstruction: participants re-recognised their own limits, viewing suffering as an opportunity to redefine themselves; (4) Enhanced endurance: repeat participants clearly felt yearly increases in psychological and physical endurance; (5) Psychological growth: after completing the activity, many expressed greater confidence in facing life's adversities, with the sense of meaning brought by faith extending into daily life.

These capabilities highly align with Chang and Lin's (2025) research on religious faith and psychological resilience. Their study indicated that religious practice can promote psychological growth and well-being through community support and meaning construction. Additionally, Surzykiewicz et al. (2022) confirmed that religious faith can enhance stress resistance and mental health in crisis situations. Interviews from the forced march demonstrate that faith is not merely an abstract concept but a concrete coping strategy, enabling people to demonstrate and develop these five capabilities under extreme challenges.

Synthesising these three dimensions, the research reveals that psychological resilience, grit, flow experience, and faith mutually support each other, collectively shaping participants' forced march experiences. Religious faith serves not only as a spiritual pillar but as a concrete psychological adjustment mechanism; flow experience becomes an opportunity to transcend difficulties; psychological resilience and grit are further strengthened within the faith context. These factors interact, enabling participants not only to complete extreme physical challenges but also to achieve psychological growth.

## 5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.1. Conclusion

Using the Baishatun Mazu pilgrimage forced march as a case study, this research reveals the close relationships amongst psychological resilience, grit, flow experience, and faith through interviews with 12 participants and comparison with relevant literature. Research findings indicate:

- [1] Psychological resilience and grit mutually reinforce each other: when participants faced extreme fatigue or pain, beliefs drove psychological resilience, which in turn supported the continuous demonstration of grit.
- [2] Flow experience becomes key to breaking through adversity: within group atmosphere, religious context, and internal focus, participants could enter flow states, temporarily transcending physical and psychological limitations and transforming these into sustained motivation.
- [3] Faith drives five major capabilities: including emotional balance, stress resistance, self-reconstruction, enhanced endurance, and psychological growth. These capabilities make the forced

march not merely a test of physical endurance but also psychological cultivation and reconstruction of life meaning.

Overall, this research demonstrates that religious ritual combined with extreme challenges can promote psychological adjustment and growth on multiple levels, highlighting the unique value of faith in constructing psychological resources.

## **5.2. Recommendations**

### *Practical Applications*

Religious or social organisations could design challenging yet safely controllable activities to help participants cultivate psychological resilience with faith support. Psychological counselling and clinical practice could reference the meaning-construction mechanisms within religious experiences as strategies for enhancing stress resistance and resilience.

### *Participants' Perspective*

First-time participants could reduce anxiety and increase confidence in completion through group support and prayer rituals. Repeat participants could transform their experiences into psychological resources for daily life and share these with newcomers, creating a positive cycle.

### *Future Research*

Future studies are recommended to incorporate quantitative methods, such as employing psychological resilience scales and flow experience scales, to complement the depth of qualitative research. Comparisons could be made across different age groups, genders, or faith intensities to further understand the interaction patterns between religion and psychological challenges.

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