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UNDERSTANDING GUIMI HOLIDAYS: AN INTERDEPENDENCE PERSPECTIVE

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School of Hotel and Tourism Management

UNDERSTANDING GUIMI HOLIDAYS: AN INTERDEPENDENCE PERSPECTIVE

XIAOLIAN CHEN

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

July 2021

CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINALITY

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Xiaolian Chen

ABSTRACT

Women's studies in tourism are dominated by various feminist perspectives with research themes that merit travel constraints, empowerment, independence, sexualized gaze, and so on. Moreover, women's friendship is a special chosen relationship to which women usually attach great personal, emotional, and cultural importance, as it not only provides them with a sense of identity, but also confirms their social worth. Nevertheless, due to the less tightly scripted nature of women's friendship, women's friendship travel and its group dynamics have not been stressed or well-studied in tourism research when measured against the bundles of literature regarding the familial holiday and couple holiday. This phenomenological study examines the lived holiday experience of female friendship dyads, namely, guimi in Chinese pinyin through the data gathered from dyadic interviews.

This study takes an interpretive research paradigm and proposes guimi holidays as mirroring contemporary women's demands for a diversity of leisure opportunities and interests as well as their yearning for a wide range of social and various intimacies in their lived touring experiences. A total of 25 friendship dyads were interviewed in semi-structured phenomenological interviews for the purpose of exploring each participant's views of their guimi holiday experiences with the specific enquiry into the meanings and the group dynamics of interdependence.

The findings reveal that the experiences and meanings of guimi holidays are multiple and contextual for women with different marital statuses. Data analysis also revealed essential sub-dimensions which underlay the group dynamics of interdependence in the guimi holiday experience, including power over and power to, mutual dependence, coordination, and compromise. However, the guimi holiday conflicts were less mentioned by the participants in this study, but more coordination and compromise cases were reported. This is not surprising, as Chen, Mak, and Kankhuni (2020) indicated that it is a common Chinese cultural practice to emphasize the positive aspects and hide the negative parts, especially when interviewing Chinese participants about their personal relationships.

The findings regarding the experiences and meanings of guimi holidays support previous literature about such experiences and meanings of girlfriend getaways and extend this line of literature by including the examination of women's close friendships and travel dynamics. However, the difference is: single women tended to have more guimi holidays than the married ones. Furthermore, single women emphasize the value of social connectedness from guimi holidays while married women tend to view guimi holidays as escapism from familial responsibilities. Moreover, all the participants in this study indicated that guimi holidays are authentic leisure and recreation activities. The authentic guimi holidays provide them with gendered fun and entertainment, escapism and freedom, a sense of empowerment, social connectedness, as well as a buffer to

life events such as a break-up of a relationship, divorce, changing or losing a job, and so on.

Clarifying the essence and the group dynamics of guimi holidays benefits the literature by illuminating this under-researched topic. This also provides directions for research and suggests actions that the tourism industry and health counselors might consider providing for females of different marital status to experience the benefits that guimi holidays can accrue fully.

Keywords: Guimi holiday, girlfriend getaways, interdependence theory, Chinese women

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Publications arising from the thesis

Chen, X., & Mak, B. (2020). Understanding Chinese girlfriend getaways: an interdependence perspective. ***Annals of Tourism Research***, *81*, 102878. doi:10.1016/j.annals.2020.102878 (SSCI, Q1: 3/140 in Sociology; IF=5.908)

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Chen, X**.,** Calder, I., & Mak, B. (2020). China's second child baby boom and fertility tourism: Strategic considerations for Malaysia. ***Journal of Destination Marketing & Management,*** 15, 100377. doi:10.1016/j.jdmm.2019.100377 (SSCI, Q1: 9/56 in Hospitality, Leisure, Sport & Tourism; IF=4.279)

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

This study is an essential investigation of the guimi holiday experience of Chinese women. Specifically, this thesis examines what triggers a guimi holiday, what this experience means to women, and how the central idea of dyads, namely, interdependence, shapes the guimi holiday experience. This introductory chapter describes the background of the study, sketches the direction of the study, and specifies the research questions of the study. At the end of this chapter, the organization and structure of the thesis are summarized.

1.1 Background of this research

For women, vacations are shaped by all kinds of relationships, for example, with friends, children, partners, and other family members (Carr, 2011; Chen, Wang, & Prebensen, 2016; Choo & Petrick, 2015). The existing literature has shown that three types of companionship exist for female travelers: travel with their family members with or without children (Li, Wang, Xu, & Mao, 2017), solo travel (McNamara & Prideaux, 2010), and "girlfriend getaways" (GGAs) (Khoo-Lattimore & Gibson, 2018), also called all-female travel (Song, 2017).

However, researchers have argued that vacations with family members are not always harmonious, and conflicts and stress occur quite often (Gram, 2005; Johns & Gyimothy, 2002). For example, Gram (2005) reported that, during a nuclear family vacation with children, women still cannot escape the role of 'babysitter' in caring for their children, and felt even more stressed rather than relaxed. Couples who do not have children usually seem to have different agendas regarding vacation activities. Negotiations are always needed to balance the travel preferences between men and women (Löfgren, 2008). Interestingly, Korstanje (2016)

found that the divorce rate in Buenos Aires increased vacations, which he called the phenomenon of "post-vacation blues syndrome."

Researchers have reported that almost half of women traveling solo were professionals or executives and thus were business travelers (Brown, 2015). For those who travel solo by choice, the solitude of independent travel acts as resistance and empowers them to search for identity and freedom (Chiang & Jogaratnam, 2006). However, some women would not travel unless opportunities to travel with family or friends were provided (Yang & Tung, 2018). Specifically, single women travel solo simply because they have no partner, or their friends have no time. For those who have a partner, the reasons for solo travel are usually that their partners have no interest in their preferred activities. Heimtun and Abelsen (2013) even argued that many young women avoided solo travel due to safety considerations. Another reason to avoid traveling solo is that social bonding is an essential component of their travel experience. Moreover, Heimtun (2012) posited that some midlife single women were fearful of solo vacations, and concluded "this fear is associated with social exclusion, especially when eating out alone in a resort of an evening" (Heimtun, 2012, p. 83).

The gradual popularity of GGAs could facilitate social ties through the provision of female comforts and overcoming the constraints for safe travel (Khoo-Lattimore & Gibson, 2018). The term "girlfriend getaways" is a contested term without clear boundaries, except for the exclusion of males (Berdychevsky, Gibson, & Bell, 2016). Song (2017) and Berdychevsky, Gibson, and Bell (2013) defined it as all-female-based leisure travel. The term GGAs is frequently used for product marketing in the tourism industry and by popular media in the Western countries (Durko & Stone, 2017). This term has since been directly adopted in academia by researchers (e.g., Khoo-Lattimore & Prayag (2018); Gibson, Berdychevsky, & Bell, 2012). However, the use of "girl" in academia should be cautioned (Durko & Stone, 2017),

because it might not be suitable to refer to adult women who comprise most participants in GGAs. Bond (2008) portrayed these women as married with children under 18. Moreover, GGAs seem more popular among retirees and preretirees over 50 years old in Western countries, according to Brophy (2018).

In contrast, Asian countries have similar travel phenomena among young women, which is to travel with one or two best female friends. This phenomenon is called as guimi (閨蜜) holiday in China. China was selected as the research context for the following reasons. First, China is an emerging tourism market with rapid growth and provides researchers with numerous valuable cases and phenomena to be studied (UNWTO, 2016). Second, the guimi economy has developed rapidly in China, where the guimi holiday is an essential part of guimi economic activities. Third, more social phenomenological studies are needed to address the China's changing social structure, as mentioned by Tsang and Lamont (2018).

Chinese women and the travel forms of small groups of friendship dyads were chosen as the research subject for the following considerations. First, Chinese female tourists are reported to have immense potential spending power (Li, Wen, & Leung, 2011), which has begun to attract attention from both industry and academia. Second, existing studies on Chinese female tourists mainly focus on travel constraints and risks (see section 2.1). Their travel experiences in the form of friendship dyads of guimi holidays are under-investigated. Third, the meanings and the dyadic, interdependent group dynamics of friendship dyads' travel is unknown in the tourism literature despite the sparse studies addressing the girlfriend getaways from Western countries. In view of these, this study aims to bridge the gap in revealing the experience, meanings, and the small group travel dynamics of Chinese women's guimi holidays.

1.2 Research context

The “sheconomy” (她經濟) and “guimi economy” (閨蜜經濟) have continuously been in the headlines of newspapers and magazines in China regarding several products, festivals, and marketing activities (e.g., guimi dress, guimi festival, guimi meals, etc.) targeting Chinese women and the related niche market (Chen, 2017; Xinhua, 2017). The sheconomy, also called the “women economy,” is defined as the rise of the economy due to women’s active participation in business and consumption (Gorcakovaite, 2013). The guimi economy in China refers to a market economy based on the sheconomy, emphasizing the social exchange networks among close female friends (Song, 2015; Xinhua, 2017).

Based on female friendship networks, various concepts and economic activities have arisen. For example, the word “mixuan” (蜜選), which appears on the internet is the abbreviation of selecting and buying products with one’s best female friends (Sohu, 2018). Mixuan (蜜選) is a new service launched by some websites in China to provide women’s commodities and services. Likewise, the so-called guimi economy (閨蜜經濟) refers to a market economy based on the concept of guimi, which covers many fields such as tourism, clothing, photography, cosmetics. It emphasizes a robust economic network of exchanges among guimi.

The guimi holiday is a manifestation of the guimi economy. Although no officially released statistics are available on the guimi holiday market, some industry reports have described this market. For example, Lvmama (驢媽媽), the pioneer of China’s well-known tourism website, provided statistics on Chinese women’s travel in 2016. Lvmama indicated traveling in same-sex friendship pairs is the most common travel pattern among females, at a proportion of 59%, followed by friendship groups of three to four that comprise 25% (Zhihuilvyou, 2016). For

Chinese female singles, the role of guimi and the associated social activities (e.g., dining, traveling, and shopping) seem even more critical (Sohu, 2018).

The Chinese guimi holiday shares a similarity with GGAs in terms of all-female travel. In contrast, a guimi holiday in China generally refers to women's travels with their best female friends, while traveling with females, such as a mother or a female stranger, is excluded. This study uses the term "guimi holiday" rather than GGAs because of the different scope of the two term and the underlying Chinese culture behind the word *guimi*.

The Chinese character "閨" means "boudoir," which refers to the inner chamber of a woman's residence, while "蜜" is a homonym of "密," which means sweet and secret. In classical Chinese literature, guimi, as a whole, refers to female friends with whom women can talk and share secrets. Guimi has historical and cultural origins. In imperial China, women should practice "women's morality" in the boudoir, based on Confucian rules. When they are married, they should help their husband, teach their children (相夫教子), and do housework. They need permission from their husbands, fathers, or brothers to socialize outside of their families. As such, traditional Chinese women have limited freedom and social networks. Due to the narrow choices of interpersonal networks within their limited freedom, they highly rely on their female friends with whom they grew up in the same family or even distant relatives. This kind of female friendship was called guimi in ancient China.

Few Chinese women can travel in imperial China (Zhang, 2005). Due to the narrow social networks and patriarchal society, most of them engaged in leisure activities (such as visiting gardens 遊園, admiring the beauty of flowers 賞花, and going to the temple fair 廟會) with their female friends or family members. According to Zhang (2005), Chinese women's earliest travel can be traced back to the Han Dynasty (206 BC to 220 AC).

There were two types of women that had chances to travel in ancient China. One type was women from imperial, noble, or other official families from ancient times to the beginning of the twentieth century (Guo, 2008). The official travel of Ban Zhao (班昭) is one of the examples. Ban Zhao, who was a prominent female scholar in the Han Dynasty, was mentioned in history to have followed her son on a business trip in history (Guo, 2008). The other traveling women were prostitutes who traveled with clients and provided companionship and entertainment to their clients (Zhang, 2005). However, overall, women in ancient China were taken as movable property by their male family members or clients, and they had limited social networks and travel choices (Yang, Khoo-Lattimore, & Arcodia, 2017a).

In modern society, Chinese women are increasingly independent and widely involved in work and various social activities. According to the Report on Chinese Female Tourist Consumption in 2017-2018 by Tuniu (途牛), which is one of China's largest professional leisure and tourism reservation platforms, the proportion of Chinese female tourists surpassed half of the total number of Chinese tourists, reaching up to 54% (Tuniu, 2018). Categorized by age group, the number of white-collar women aged 20 to 35 was the largest group, accounting for 54% of the total number of female Chinese tourists, followed by the group aged 36 to 60, which comprised 32% of female tourists (Tuniu, 2018). China's female tourism market is conspicuous in the existing literature for its strong consumption power (Li et al., 2011).

1.3 Research questions

Previous studies on women's travel usually take feminist perspectives without putting women's relationships at the center for analysis. Instead, several tourism studies have analyzed female tourists at an individual level, even when they travel in group patterns of two or more people. Furthermore, scarce research exists on the lived experience of guimi holidays in the

collectivistic cultural context of China. The research questions of this study are based on the dyadic, relational perspective, and the philosophy of phenomenology, having been generated from the research gap identified in the existing literature. Asking such questions enables the researcher to address issues concerning women's friendships, dyads, and interdependence in terms of group dynamics in the context of a guimi holiday. The overarching question: What are the experiences, meanings, and travel dynamics of the guimi holidays of young Chinese women?

Influenced by the author's understanding of phenomenology and designed to focus on the investigation and description of the overarching question, three sub-questions are identified. They are:

RQ1: What is it like to have a guimi holiday, and how does it differ from traveling with family members?

RQ2: What are the meanings of guimi holidays as attributed by each member of the friendship dyad?

RQ3: How does the central idea of the friendship dyad, namely, interdependence, shape the experience of the Chinese guimi holiday?

1.4 Research objectives

Drawn from the research questions above, the purpose of this study is to advance the current understanding of the guimi holiday, aiming to approach the essence of the guimi holiday experience performed of Chinese women traveling in same-sex friendship pairs. Specifically, the objectives of this study are three-fold:

- To investigate female Chinese tourists' lived experience of the guimi holiday;

- To examine female Chinese tourists' subjective perspectives of the meanings of guimi holidays, and

- To explore the characteristics of dyads, namely, interdependence, and their effects on the guimi holiday experience.

1.5 Significance of the study

1.5.1 Theoretical contributions

This study aims to develop a new conceptual understanding and interpretation of Chinese GGAs in general, and guimi holidays in particular. This study distinguishes thinking and acting as an individual, namely, the "I or individual perspective" (I-mode) and as a member of a friendship dyad, the "we or collective perspective" (we-mode), as reflected in the methodology. In this way, the research provides some additional evidence on the core idea of Tuomela (2007), that is, compared with the I-mode, the we-mode is regarded as the primary mode. As such, guimi holidays are not only about the individual pursuits of females, but also the collective experiences with an emphasis on sociality. This study also contributes to the theory of interdependence within the dyadic friendship. Several tourism studies are governed by individual pursuits of the Western societies, whereas collective pursuits guide most family research. This study argues that friendship travel, such as a guimi holiday, can bring individual pursuits and collective pursuits together.

Specifically, the theoretical contributions are as follows: First, this study contributes to the literature on dyads and interdependence from a vacation perspective. Second, this study advances the understanding of the essence of a guimi holiday experience in academia. Third, this study conceptualizes and employs friendship dynamics in tourism studies. Fourth, this

study contributes to women's studies in tourism from a relational perspective. Fifth, this study reconstructs and contextualizes the understanding of the essence of the guimi holiday in China. Finally, this study has given Chinese women a voice from a dyadic friendship group perspective, as Chinese women have seldom been given attention in tourism studies (Figueroa-Domecq, Pritchard, Segovia-Pérez, Morgan, & Villacé-Molinero, 2015).

The following methodological contributions are also provided. First, this study contributes to applying an existential-phenomenological approach to studying female tourists and specifically to the research on GGAs. Second, this study introduces dyadic interviews into tourism studies that are dominated by individual-centered methods, such as the quantitative standard statistical methods and the qualitative method of individual interviews.

1.5.2 Practical implications

This study has some implications for travel agencies, hotels, and destinations that target female markets and specifically GGAs or the guimi holiday market. Through a deep understanding of the experiences and meanings of guimi holidays, destination management organizations and service providers could better target their marketing and improve or adjusting their products or services.

Specifically, service managers can benefit from providing an environment in which women unload female roles as mothers, wives, and the so-called "leftover lady (剩女)" while enhancing communal and sharing practices among female friendship travelers—and attracting female tourists with common interests or goals by promoting a sense of solidarity and empowerment. Furthermore, by emphasizing the atmosphere of the guimi holiday settings, female gender roles that are centered on the importance of the family unit can be temporarily eased. For instance, hotels, scenic spots, and destinations could intensify the ritualistic shift from the daily gender

roles to the "*chora*" interactive consumption space using "girly" or "womanhood" decorations through colorful doorways, rooms, lights, and festival symbols, such as artistic performances. Emphasizing the use of guimi dressing (閨蜜裝) could also help promote a shared identity and a sense of equality. More importantly, the analysis of strong social ties reveals that individuals are more likely to share tastes across product and service categories among close friends (Wallace, Buil, & De Chernatony, 2012). The strong relationship of guimi could work as an acquaintance endorsement for tourism services or destination marketing to design, serve, promote, and sell tourism products to female friendship pairs.

1.6 Definition of key terms

Throughout the study, the terms "guimi," "confidantes," "sisterhood," "sisterhood relationship," or "female close friends" are used interchangeably. The author has employed the following definition of guimi as a framework within which to discuss women's guimi holiday experiences.

Guimi is a Chinese word, known as "friends in boudoir," which relates to women's best friends with whom is shared a mutual feeling of affection or sympathy. The relationship is not based on blood ties, nor sexual appeal (Chen, & Mak, 2020).

A holiday means traveling and staying at least one night away from the usual environment for leisure and pleasure. While the terms "tourism," "tourist" and "touristic" experience seem to be, from a scholarly perspective, more accurate representations of the activity under study, there are also studies that interchangeably use some similar terms like "family holiday" (Schänzel, Smith, & Weaver, 2005) and "family tourism" (Schänzel & Yeoman, 2015). In the current study, the author opines that "holiday" more closely reflects the "everyday," "common-sense" understanding of the activity under examination. Moreover, for females, guimi is the second most important relationship after family (Comas-Diaz & Weiner, 2013). Therefore, the

author uses the guimi holiday as a contrast to a family holiday. But the terms “travel”, “tour”, and “tourism” will also be used interchangeably with the term “holiday”, likewise, travelers and tourists.

Guimi holiday refers to “the shared travel among female best friends” (Chen, Mak, & Calder, 2021, p.1).

1.7 Limitations

Social science research usually presents various limitations when it is conducted. This study is no different. Specifically, the limitations include:

The generalizability is limited due to the relatively small sample size. However, according to Giorgi (2009), “generalizability” in phenomenology means the results themselves must be generalized rather than the numbers of participants in the study.

As a Chinese woman, the author entered the field with her assumptions and goals in terms of the research project even though the author tried her best to “bracket.” These attributes are acknowledged to have the potential to contribute or detract from the success and usefulness of the project. Nevertheless, interpretive phenomenologists also acknowledge that a pure, objective description is almost impossible (Prus, 1996), as biases of interpretation are inevitable. Phenomenologists are also aware of the value of embracing interpretation because it provides a way to understand what the phenomenon means to those involved (Prus, 1996), which allows flexibility for the researcher.

The term “guimi” is a contested term in Chinese society. The word is evolving with the development of the internet. Initially, the word “guimi” refers to a woman’s female best friends only, but now with the breakthrough of gender and age, the word “male guimi (男閨蜜)” means

the women's male friend has emerged. The feelings and meanings of traveling with a male guimi are perhaps quite different, which could be one area for future studies.

Within guimi as a type of friendship, the intimacy varies from close, closer to the closest, and the friendship could last from short to long, while in this study, the degree of intimacy is not defined by the author but by taking the self-identified approach to let participants nominate their guimi by themselves.

Due to the interviewing length, fatigue might be a potential limitation of this research. Since it is a recollection of respondents' past holiday experiences with their best same-sex friends, memory decay could be another possible drawback of the study.

Besides, as is always the case, most of the data about a holiday experience are collected after a holiday. There is a chance that the collected data are influenced by the effects of social desirability (Berdychevsky et al., 2016).

1.8 Thesis structure

This thesis is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 justifies the current research as a valuable and viable area for study by providing the necessary background and outlining the research questions. Chapter 2 reviews the literature on female tourists, friendship, dyads, and tourism. It begins with a broader review of women's studies in tourism and related feminist research perspectives before moving on to girlfriend getaway studies. A relational perspective is emphasized in women's studies in tourism instead of the widely discussed gender equality of feminists and then is followed by a discussion on women's friendship and the characteristics of dyads.

Chapter 3 outlines the research paradigm, research strategies, and approaches used in this study. It elaborates on the research approach and research steps of this study. The methods of data collection and analysis are described. There is a particular focus on the proposed trustworthiness and credibility of the research. The researcher's role is also discussed at the end of the chapter.

Chapter 4 provides research findings and conclusions relating to all of the research questions and discussions with previous literature. Chapter 5 is the contribution and implication chapter including theoretical and practical contributions, along with recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 2. FEMALE TOURISTS, FRIENDSHIPS, AND VACATIONS: A LITERATURE REVIEW

Relevant literature is reviewed in this chapter to support the research questions under investigation. Since the research subject of this study is female travelers, the literature review starts from a broad overview of the perspectives, theories, and methods that had been used to study female tourists. Specific attention is then given to the topic of girlfriend getaways, as termed in the Western countries but sharing some similarities and differences with the guimi holiday phenomenon in the Eastern countries, which is also the research context of this study. As guimi refers to female friendship, the literature on friendship travel is also reviewed. A guimi holiday is defined as, "the shared travel among female best friends" (Chen, Mak, Calder, 2021, p.1). Accordingly, there is a need to shift from a feminist perspective to a relational, dyadic, and friendship perspective, to establish a conceptual framework that includes both the individual and dyadic dimensions representing the holiday experiences of female friendship dyads. This chapter also includes literature about Chinese guanxi (relationship), on which the guimi relationship is based. However, the author is also aware that it is the international literature on female tourists, friendships, and holidays that provides the core explorations of concepts and theories to this study of the guimi holiday in China. As a result, the literature review shown here tends to remain sensitive to the local social environment but also tries to start conversations with global audiences as well as addressing gaps in the study of female tourists and their same-sex friendship holidays in an international context.

2.1 Research perspectives on female tourists

When studying female tourists, it is necessary to ask the question, "When were women's studies noticed and introduced into tourism and leisure research?" The author of this study uses

women's studies rather than gender studies to emphasize studies that put women's experiences and daily lives at the center of analysis. Such studies of women began to emerge as a subfield of leisure studies in the late 1970s by examining women's involvements and related constraints in leisure activities. However, it was not until the early 1990s that studies of women or female tourists began to gain attention and become a valid research field in tourism studies (Aitchison, 2005). The last two decades have witnessed a bundle of tourism studies on female tourists. Topic areas range from travel fears and constraints to solo travel. Despite the growth of literature in this area, theoretical underpinnings are lacking for tourism studies of women. The extant studies of female tourism are less diverse and profound than the number of articles might indicate (Aitchison, 2005); therefore, a macro-level approach with the associated perspectives is more to the point in identifying research gaps and placing this study in context.

Female tourism studies are another way of showing that women's studies in tourism are closely linked with feminist theories and gender studies (Grewal, Kaplan, & Gunew, 2002). Several tourism studies have taken either feminist theories or feminist perspectives, although some of the tourism literature does not explicitly state that feminist perspectives or theories are taken or used in the study (Yang et al., 2017a). Just like what Kinnaird and Hall (2000, p.71) stated the following:

> *Not only have feminist theories assisted the shaping of our understanding of gender-related social, economic and political change within tourism, but they have also helped to inform theoretical discussion surrounding notions of 'rurality,' 'participation,' 'globalization,' 'work,' 'sustainability,' 'heritage,' and 'nationalism' serving to further enrich our conceptual understanding of these experiences and processes and tourism's gendered position within them.*

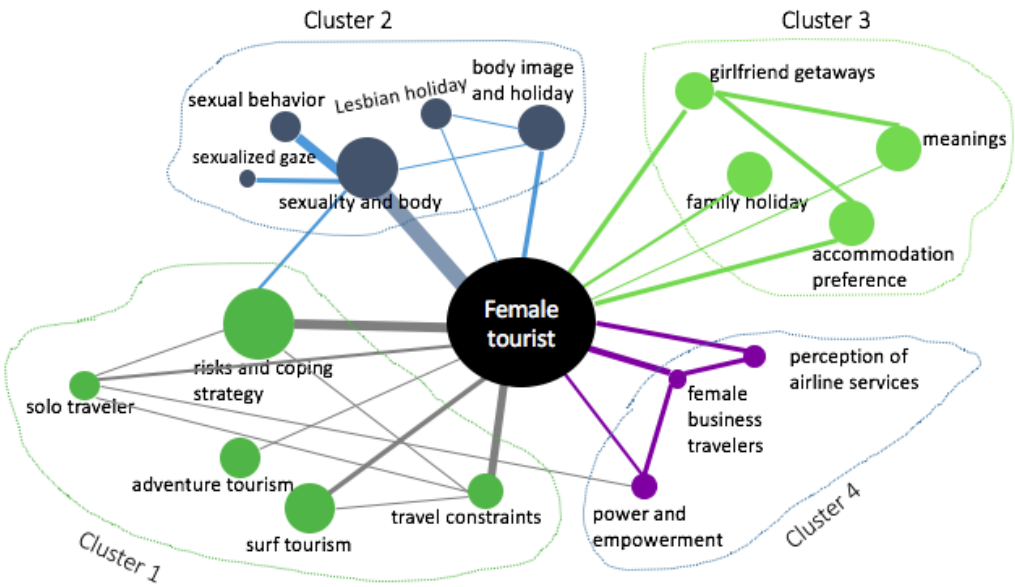
However, many labels exist for different types of feminism: liberal, socialist, black, lesbian, post-colonial, and eco-feminism. This list can go on indefinitely (Aitchison, 2005). Considering the importance of feminist perspectives and theories in studying female tourists, this review of female studies in tourism and leisure employed the approach proposed by Aitchison (2005) based on the relevant literature.

The search for relevant literature followed these steps. First, a cursory initial search of keywords "female tourist AND experience," "female traveler AND experience," "woman AND holiday experience OR vacation experience," and "girl AND holiday experience OR vacation experience" in the period from 1980 to 2018 in Scopus, identified 181, 290, 75, and 13 papers, respectively. A total of 559 papers were collected for scrutiny. Second, a filter of the subject category was used to limit journal articles to those within the disciplines of social science, business, management and accounting, psychology, and related multidisciplinary studies to restrict the range further. A total of 234 papers were selected for further scrutiny. Third, the researcher performed further scrutiny by reading the article titles to determine their relevance. This process resulted in 52 papers. Finally, a thorough reading of each paper was completed. The perspectives of two papers did not fit with the research purpose of this study. A final dataset of 50 journal articles remained. The details of the 50 journal articles are provided in Appendix E (suggested by the supervisory committee), while a summary of the articles is presented in Table 2.1. Given the significance of feminist perspectives and theories as mentioned above, and following the epistemological approach mentioned by Aitchison (2005), the author noticed that most of the efforts of tourism scholarship regarding women were from the feminist perspective, the feminist empiricism perspective, and post-structural feminism perspective. This categorization does not mean that all of the papers reviewed take only one perspective. In many of the papers, the authors only mentioned the feminist perspective in

general without differentiating which specific type of feminist perspective was used. Instead, categorizing the studies is just trying to establish which feminist perspective is more emphasized in the reviewed papers.

An overview of the selected articles is categorized into the following main themes and sub-themes. A visualization of these research themes on women's studies in tourism is presented in Figure 2.1. The four main research groups (clusters) include female adventure travelers and the associated travel constraints, risks, fears, and coping strategies (e.g., solo travelers, surfing tourism, mountaineer tourism, etc.); women's body and sexuality (e.g., body image and vacation experiences, sexual behavior on vacation, sexualized gaze, etc.); travel companionship (e.g., family vacations, GGAs and the associated meanings); and female business travelers, power and empowerment, and their perceptions of airline services. Under each cluster, the sub-themes are also identified (see Figure 2.1).

Figure 2. 1 Research themes on female tourists in tourism and leisure studies



The first popular research perspective of female tourist studies is the feminist empiricism perspective. Feminist empiricism can be understood as a perspective that brings the observations and objectives of feminism together with empiricism as a research method. Several articles took this perspective to investigate and segmentize the female tourist market, and to categorize travel constraints, motivations, and perceptions. For example, Khoo-Lattimore and Prayag (2015) found that the GGA markets are homogeneous in their demographic characteristics but heterogeneous in their accommodation and service preferences. The motivations of GGAs can be categorized as driven by delicacy, amenities, safety, social, and emotion. In relation to the accommodation preferences of GGAs, Khoo-Lattimore and Prayag (2016) reported that GGA consumers desire amenities that reflect both individuality and modernity, while their actual self-image negatively influences hotel activities. A further investigation by Khoo-Lattimore and Prayag (2018) found that Western women and Eastern women rate accommodation preferences significantly differently. Another study by Khoo-Lattimore, Prayag, and Disegna (2018a) noted that three segments of GGAs could be differentiated into socializers, enjoyers, and rejoicers.

In addition to studying accommodation preferences and GGAs, the feminist empiricism perspective has been applied to examine travel constraints, souvenir purchasing intentions, wellbeing, travel benefits, and satisfaction. Doran, Schofield, and Low (2018) confirmed three dimensions of constraints: “the intra-personal,” “the inter-personal,” and “the structural” constraints from previous studies. The authors also added family constraints, which were previously tacit but not emphasized in leisure studies. Using a survey, Kim and Littrell (2001) examined factors that influence female tourists’ purchase intentions of three categories of Mexican textile products. Drewery, Jiang, Hilbrecht, Mitas, and Jakubowitz (2016) used the positive psychological framework with conditional analysis to examine the relationships

among vacation experience, subjective well-being, and the role of emotions in between. Pennington-Gray and Kerstetter (2001) outlined nine benefit dimensions of travel and three categories of female travelers based on a survey of university-educated women: relaxation searchers, family/social bonding pursuers, and exciting activity seekers.

The feminist empiricism perspective with quantitative methods is useful to examine female tourists' motivations, perceptions, travel constraints, travel benefits, and well-being. However, this perspective cannot explain how and why such preferences, patterns, and positions of female travel exist.

Table 2. 1 Summary of selected research on female tourists in tourism and leisure research

Author (year)	Topic area	Journal	Research methods (sample size) / Data analysis
FEMINIST EMPIRICISM PERSPECTIVE			
Doran et al. (2018)	Travel constraints	LS	Survey (307)/CFA
Kim & Littrell (2001)	Influencing factors of purchase intentions	ATR	Survey (277)/FA/RA
Drewery et al. (2016)	Wellbeing	WLJ	Diary-based questionnaire (74)
Pennington-Gray & Kerstetter (2001)	Dimensions of benefits/	JTR	Survey (485)/PCA, cluster analysis
Khoo-Lattimore & Prayag (2018)	Motivations and accommodation preferences	JHMM	Survey (749)
Khoo-Lattimore & Prayag (2016)	Accommodation preferences and satisfaction	IJCHM	Survey (540)/SEM
Khoo-Lattimore et al. (2018)	Market segmentation of GGA	JTR	Survey (749)/Fuzzy C-Medoids
Khoo-Lattimore & Prayag (2015)	Segmentation of GGA	IJHM	Survey (540)/K-means clustering
Mirehie et al. (2018)	Motivations of GGA	JHMM	Survey (328)/PCA
Song (2017)	Preferred activities of all-female travel	JCTR	Survey (177)
Westwood et al. (2000)	Perception of airline service/business travelers	TM	Interviews (25) and focus group
Chiang and Jogaratnam (2006)	Motivations of female solo travel	JVM	Survey (194)
McNamara and Prideaux (2010)	Motivations of solo travel	IJTR	Survey (228)
STANDPOINT FEMINISM PERSPECTIVE			
Berdychevsky and Gibson (2015)	Risks of women's sexual behavior on holiday	TM	Interviews (15)/phenomenology
Spencer and Bean (2017)	Female sex tourism	JDMM	Interviews (34); Survey (262)
Fendt et al. (2014)	Women's experience of surf tourism/Australia	ALR	Interviews (37)/ phenomenology
Weichselbaumer (2012)	Western female travelers' romantic tourism	TM	Interviews (22)/ thematic analysis
Stone and Nichol (1999)	Holiday motivations of old, single females /UK	JVM	Interviews (10)/ thematic analysis
Davidson (1996)	Gendered meaning of the holiday	LS	Interviews (24)/Phenomenology
Berdychevsky, Gibson, & Bell (2013)	The links between GGAs and women's wellbeing	JLR	Interviews (15); focus group (11)/ grounded theory
Gibson, Berdychevsky, & Bell (2012)	The main themes of GGAs	ALR	Interviews (15); focus group (9)/ grounded theory
Therkelsen, Blichfeldt, Chor, and Ballegaard (2013)	Lesbian tourists' preferences on holiday	JVM	Interviews (21) / thematic analysis
Small (2003)	Older women's holiday experience	TRR	memory-work (17)/thematic analysis

Small (2008)	Childhood holidays of Australian women and girls.	ATR	Memory-work; individual writing and group discussion (86)/thematic analysis
McDermott (2004)	The reasons women prefer the all-female space when canoeing;	LS	In-depth interviewing and participant observation (7)/thematic analysis
Heimtun and Jordan (2011)	Conflicts of women's friendship holiday	TS	Focus group and solicited diaries (39)/thematic analysis
Seow & Brown (2018)	Asian solo female tourists' travel constraints, motivations, and experiences.	CIIT	Interviews (10)/thematic analysis
Gao & Kerstetter (2016)	Travel constraints of old Chinese females	TM	Interviews (16)/thematic analysis
POSTSTRUCTURAL FEMINISM			
Heimtun (2010)	Women's feelings of solo dining.	LS	Focus group; interviews; diaries (32)/ constructivist grounded theory
Jordan & Aitchison (2008)	Solo travel experience of female travelers	LS	Interview (39)/ thematic analysis
Thomas & Mura (2019)	Foreign solo female travelers' experience in India	TRR	Travel blogs (21)／thematic analysis
Khoo-Lattimore and Gibson (2018)	The main themes of girlfriend getaways	CIIT	In-depth interviews (12); focus groups; secondary data analysis.
Berdychevsky, Gibson, and Bell (2016)	The meaning of girlfriend getaways	TM	Focus group (11); interviews (15)/ (83) discourse analysis
Durko and Stone (2017)	The motivation of women's travel without their partner	TMP	Open-ended survey (38)/thematic analysis
Berdychevsky, Gibson, and Poria (2013)	Women's sexual behavior on holiday	ATR	Interviews (21)/constructivist grounded theory
Berdychevsky, Gibson & Poria (2015)	Perceptions and related meanings of women's sexual behavior on holiday	LS	Interview (21)/constructivist grounded theory
Jordan (2008)	Solo female travelers and encounters in enclavic spaces	IJTR	Interviews (39)/thematic analysis
Brown & Osman (2017)	The female tourist experience of Egypt	ATR	Interviews (14)/thematic analysis
Yang, Khoo-Lattimore & Arcodia (2018)	Asian solo female tourists' perception of travel risks	TM	Interviews (35)/constructivist grounded theory
Wilson, Holdsworth, and Witsel (2009)	The conflict discourses on women's travel guidebooks	TRR	Travel guide books (2) /discourse analysis
Small (2016)	The influence of women's body image on holiday experience	ATR	Interviews (16)/thematic analysis
Laing and Frost (2017)	Travel and women's wellbeing	TM	Non-fiction Books (9)/phenomenological Methodology
Zhang and Hitchcock (2017)	Young Chinese women's travel experience to Macau	CIIT	Travel blogs (74)/netnography
Wilson and Little (2008)	The travel fears of solo female travelers	CIIT	Interviews (82) /grounded theory

Harris & Ateljevic (2003)	Empowerment of female business travelers	TRR	Focus group (6); interviews (16)/discourse analysis
Heimtun and Abelsen (2012)	Gendered meanings of tourism bonding	CIIT	Survey (270)/descriptive analysis
Chang, H.H (2013)	Comparing the wayfinding strategy between men and women	TG	Survey (540)/ descriptive analysis
Yasin, Baghirov, and Zhang (2017)	Gender differences in travel information sources	JHTT	Survey (270)/descriptive analysis
Torres, Fu, and Lehto (2014)	Gendered differences in delighted hotel experiences	IJHM	Interviews (228) /content analysis
Poria (2006)	The hotel experiences of gay men and lesbians	JTR	Interviews (54) /IPA analysis

Notes on abbreviations: LS: Leisure Studies; WLJ: World Leisure Journal; IJHM: International Journal of Hospitality Management; JHMM: Journal of Hospitality Marketing and Management; IJCHM: International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management; JCTR: Journal of China Tourism Research; IJTR: International Journal of Tourism Research; TG: Tourism Geography; JHTT: Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Technology; TRR: Tourism Recreation Research;

The second main research perspective of female tourist studies is the standpoint feminism perspective. Standpoint feminism contains a diversity of different 'standpoints' or positionalities of oppressed or marginalized groups (e.g., race and ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, nationality, and citizenship, etc.).

The literature on women's studies in leisure and tourism has extensively taken the standpoint feminism approach. For example, old and single women are socially constructed as disadvantaged; however, with the increase in the an aging population, Stone and Nichol (1999) suggested that the tourism industry should think about the specific needs of this market segment. Likewise, the standpoint feminism approach has also been widely applied to studies of lesbian tourists, as lesbians are viewed as a marginalized female group. Monterrubio and Barrios (2016) found that, for lesbians, sexuality is not as important as the culture for their travel experience. In the leisure and tourism studies of Asian solo women (Seow & Brown, 2018; Yang, Khoo-Lattimore, & Arcodia, 2018a, 2018b), Asian women are regarded as an oppressed group. The studies revealed that Asian women travel solo as a resistance to the sociocultural expectations from family and society (Seow & Brown, 2018), despite how they encounter several constraints and travel risks (Yang, Khoo-Lattimore, & Arcodia, 2018a, 2018b).

However, one should be cautious about using the concept of Asian women or regarding them as a homogeneous group. For example, the study by Zhang and Hitchcock (2017) indicated that, for Chinese women, solo travel is not the first

choice, without mentioning that a significant number of solo female travelers are businesswomen. The lack of studies in tourism and leisure about businesswomen makes them marginalized. In a niche research area, the study by Westwood, Pritchard, and Morgan (2000) demonstrated that airline companies have almost no awareness of businesswomen's wants and needs. Moreover, businesswomen perceive that airline services and facilities are male-oriented. Some studies take the feminist standpoint perspective, including the interpersonal conflicts of midlife solo travelers (Heimtun & Jordan, 2011), young women's sexual behavior on vacation (Berdychevsky & Gibson, 2015), and older women's vacation experiences (Small, 2003).

Overall, standpoint feminism effectively brings the female marginalized or emerging groups into the discourse but has been criticized for the epistemology of trying to generalize women's experiences. Although women's experiences are considerably diverse across time and space, post-structural feminists claim no single or universal women's experience exists (Benhabib, 1996).

Poststructuralist feminism is a branch of feminism that incorporates insights from poststructuralist ideologies. Chris (1987, pp. 40-41) defined poststructuralist feminism as "a mode of knowledge production which uses poststructuralist theories of language, subjectivity, social process and institutions to understand existing power relations and to identify areas and strategies for change." Poststructuralist feminism posits that no absolute truth or objectivity exists and resists structured definitions or identifications but

emphasizes language and discourse (Gavey, 1989). Therefore, discourse analysis is usually regarded as consistent with feminist poststructuralist perspectives and theories (Gavey, 1989). No restrictions are placed on methods when taking the poststructuralist feminism perspective, but poststructuralist feminists pay more attention to the "procedures and aim for knowing" (Heimtun & Abelsen, 2012, p. 430), which differs from feminist empiricism and standpoint feminism.

Several female tourist studies also take the poststructuralist feminism approach. Spencer and Bean (2017) conducted interviews and surveys with female tourists in Jamaica and concluded that female tourists also search for romance and sex on vacation, demonstrating no apparent difference from what men seek on vacation. Berdychevsky et al. (2016) examined the meaning of GGAs by conducting 11 focus groups and 15 interviews with 83 American and Canadian women. They found that the GGA is a contested term with various meanings. Although some women found it appropriate, precise, cute, and is a reflection of their exclusively female travel experiences, there are also some women who described it as stereotyped, claustrophobic, inappropriate, and not thoughtful. Likewise, Wilson, Holdsworth and Witsel (2009) posited that several conflicting discourses exist on "empowerment" and "fear" in contemporary women's travel guidebooks by using critical discourse analysis. Small (2016) deconstructed the connotation of a holiday as a heterotopia using thematic analysis and interviews with 16 white, middle-class, tertiary educated,

nondisabled, heterosexual Australian women. Small (2016) concluded that women's body images have significant effects on their vacation experience and that a vacation cannot be regarded as a heterotopia, because sometimes physical appearance is sometimes even more important on vacation than at home. Taking poststructuralist feminism as the lens, Heimtun and Abelsen (2012) studied the gendered meanings of tourism as a space for bonding. Their research results indicated that women have more needs for gathering, chatting, and sharing emotions, and experiences with friends. The company of friends makes women feel safe, which is also a way to respond to women's geography of fears. Lastly some other topics that take tha e poststructuralist feminism perspective also include: female business travel as empowerment (Harris & Ateljevic, 2003), travel risks, and coping strategies (Wilson et al., 2009; Yang et al., 2018a, 2018b), women's body image and holiday experience (Small, 2016), sexualized behaviors (Berdychevsky, Gibson, & Poria, 2013; Berdychevsky, Gibson, & Poria, 2015), and sexualized gaze (Brown & Osman, 2017).

By emphasizing difference and diversity, poststructuralist feminism stresses multiple realities and the relative nature of knowledge, providing insights into loosening and challenging the previous structuralism in tourism research. Poststructuralist feminism deconstructs the "woman." More specifically, in tourism studies, poststructuralist feminism challenges the category of "female tourists" as the object of feminist knowledge by emphasizing women's solo/independent, sexualized behavior on holiday, power empowerment and

discourse, and so on (Aitchison, 2005). However, poststructuralist feminism has been criticized for its anti-essentialist worldview, specifically the abandonment of the human nature of being female (Hemmings, 2005).

Apart from the above mentioned three perspectives, studies also have taken a gender perspective in comparing similarities and differences in terms of perceptions and behaviors between men and women. For example, Chang (2013) found that female tourists experience a high level of anxiety and prefer using a route wayfinding strategy, whereas male tourists are less anxious and prefer an orientation wayfinding strategy. Poria (2006) indicated that gay men and lesbians prefer to be treated the same as heterosexuals when their sexual orientation is known. Torres, Fu, and Lehto (2014) found that female tourists are more likely to be delighted by tourism service employees' friendliness and professionalism. In contrast, male tourists are more inclined to be delighted when their needs were met and by the availability of complimentary amenities or upgrades.

The travel information search behaviors of males and females are also different. Yasin, Baghirov and Zhang (2017) concluded that female tourists rely on internal information sources, such as friends' recommendations and past travel experiences, whereas men use more external information sources, such as social media, newspapers, and guidebooks.

Despite the gradual awareness of the necessity of putting women as a focus in leisure and tourism research, with the emergence of diversified research themes, there are several problems in the existing literature on female tourists' study in general, and GGAs in particular. First, the research perspectives and theories are quite limited, as presented in Table 2.1, and most studies lack theoretical underpinnings. Feminist and gender perspectives seem to dominate the area, with Valentine's (1989) geography of women's fear, Foucault's gaze and surveillance (Jordan, 2008), and the life course (Gibson et al., 2012) as the main theories. Other sociological, anthropological or psychological theories are absent. This lack of theories and perspectives is also reflected in the studies of GGAs.

Second, although there have been several research themes about female tourists over the last 30 years of development, all of these research themes can be grouped into freedom and constraints. On the one hand, women have more freedom and choices to travel in different patterns, such as solo travel or GGAs. Both solo and GGAs are challenging traditional gender stereotypes of women to free them from traditional roles of daughter, wife, and mother, and travel is regarded as empowerment for women to pursue new identities. Beyond GGAs and solo travel, this empowerment is also observed in studies on the identity construction of lesbians (Therkelsen, Blichfeldt, Chor & Ballegaard, 2013) and women's sexual behaviors on holiday (Berdychevsky, Gibson & Poria, 2015). On the other hand, despite being given considerable freedom in modern society

after three waves of the feminist movement, the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural travel constraints and geography fear of travel still exist.

Third, despite the appearance of new travel patterns (e.g., travel solo, GGAs, and guimi holiday), the existing analysis units of the female tourist experience are unexceptionally focused on the individual, the "self" but at the group level (specifically, the dyadic level in this study). The reason most tourist studies, specifically female tourist studies, emphasize individual experience is understandable, as most tourism research has been conducted in Western countries with individualistic cultures that stress personal goals, experience, and fulfillment ahead of group goals.

However, such Western-dominated individual-level analysis is not entirely applicable to the contexts of collectivist cultures where group goals are put ahead of individual experience. Social scientists have acknowledged that people from collectivistic cultures usually pay substantial attention to the influences of their actions and presentations on others and feel more involved in the dedications, sharing, and participation in group members' lives (Wiggins, 1996).

Finally, though some female tourists travel solo, this does not mean that solo female tourists have no connectedness with others. The so-called GGAs are actually in the pattern of all-female group travel. However, neither of the studies mentioned above examined women's group travel experience through group-level analysis or, more specifically, dyadic analysis of the same-sex joint

friendship travel experience to explore how friendship dynamics shape women's travel experience from a relational perspective in general or a dyadic perspective in particular.

Table 2.2 Summary of research on girlfriend getaways

Research topics	Author/year	Number of respondents	Country or region	Method/sampling/theory/philosophy	Main findings
Motivations; Accommodation preference and experience; satisfaction	Khoo-Lattimore & Prayag (2018)	749	Malaysians, Americans, British, Singaporeans, Australians, and New Zealanders	Survey; ANOVA analysis, correlation and factor analysis; invitation-only online panel recruitment/ Qualtrics third-party research company;	Motivations and accommodation preferences are various based on nationalities and ethnicities.
	Khoo-Lattimore & Gibson (2018)	12	Malaysia	Action research; in-depth interviews; focus group; secondary data analysis;	Feminine comforts, shopping, discount promotions of GGA, facilitating friendship, and safety are the main motivations.
	Mirehie, Gibson, Khoo-Lattimore, & Prayag (2018)	328	US	Survey; Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with varimax rotation, and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA); Online survey by Amazon Mechanical Turk	Motivations include: spending quality time with friends/relatives, a break from routine, or to celebrate a special occasion predominantly in the beach or urban locations; Cleanliness and safety are a requirement for accommodation;
	Khoo-Lattimore, Prayag, & Disegna (2018)	749	United States (38.1%), United Kingdom (17.8%), Australia (13.6%), and Malaysia (12.6%)	Clustering algorithm; Fuzzy C-Medoids clustering for fuzzy data (FCM-FD); Qualtrics	Three segments of girlfriend getaways are differentiated: socializers, enjoyers, and rejoicers.
	Khoo-Lattimore & Prayag (2016)	540	Malaysian (54.7%); Singaporean; Indian; Chinese; Thai; Indonesian	SEM; membership of resort; by mail to guests	Women's actual self-image influences accommodation preferences, satisfaction with hotel experience, and loyalty. A significant relationship was also

					found between overall satisfaction and loyalty of guests.
	Khoo-Lattimore & Prayag (2015)	540	Malaysian (54.7%); Singaporean; Indian; Chinese; Thai; Indonesian	Non-hierarchical K-means clustering; membership of resort; by mail to guests	GGA market is heterogeneous in its accommodation and service preferences but homogeneous in its demographic characteristics. GGAs are food & beverage driven, safety and amenity driven, safety and activities driven, social and emotional safety-driven.
Vacation satisfaction and relationship satisfaction of girlfriend getaways	Durko & Stone (2017)	38	NA	Interviews; Thematic analysis; snowball sample	Girlfriend getaways were beneficial to healthy relationships with friends and partners; Vacation satisfaction lower if partners had joined.
Meaning of girlfriend getaways	Berdychevsky, Gibson & Bell (2016)	11 focus groups; 15 individual interviews; 83 American and Canadian women	American and Canadian	Focus group; interviews; discourse analysis; existential authenticity;	"Girlfriend getaway" is a phrase with contested and various meanings. While some women found it to be adequate, accurate, cute, and reflective of their all-female tourist experiences, others described it as stereotypical, narrow/claustrophobic, "pink," inadequate, and unreflective of their experiences.
Well-being and girlfriend getaways	Berdychevsky, Gibson, & Bell (2013)	11 focus groups; 15 individual interviews; 83 American	8 Canadian cities and 1 Southern US sate	Grounded theory; Snowball and theoretical sampling; existential authenticity; empowerment; escapism	The well-being of girlfriend getaways can be divided into four domains: escapism; different gender dynamics, existential authenticity; empowerment. Free

		and Canadian women			from social structures and gendered expectations
Lifecycle and girlfriend getaways	Gibson, Berdychevsky, & Bell (2012)	Nine focus groups; 15 interviews; 79 in total	Eastern and Western Canada and the South-eastern United States / 4 Blacks, 1 Asian and 1Hispanic, with the remainder White/Caucasian.	Constructivist grounded theory	Getting rid of daily routine, dealing with life transitions, and re-bonding with female friends are the main themes of GGAs. GGAs can fulfill female diverse psychological needs in the various life stages: adolescence, early adulthood, middle adulthood, and later adulthood.
Tourism activities of all-female tours	Song (2017)	177 surveys	Hong Kong	Descriptive statistics, factor analysis, and cluster analysis; convenience sampling	Sightseeing, sports, relaxation, and entertainment are the four preferred tourism activities.
Group dynamics of girlfriend getaways	Chen & Mak (2020)	35 travel blogs	Chinese	Constructivist grounded theory	The findings from 35 travel blogs reveal that Chinese girlfriend getaways demonstrate two types of power relations: power over and power to. The blogs exemplify four types of mutual dependence: skill, time, knowledge, and psychological dependence; as well as three types of conflict: cognitive, process-related, and relationship-related conflict.

2.2 A dyadic, relational perspective on women and vacations

Relationality and the associated 'relational ontologies' manifests as a worldview that puts relationships at the center of study. Relationality is to compare and contrast with the ontology of substantive and objectivist ontology that advocates entities. Researchers have approached the relational perspective or (relationality) from various disciplines spanning the natural sciences to the social sciences and humanities, resulting in different theories and methodologies (Lucarelli & Giovanardi, 2019). In sociology, the relational ontology is regarded as a new paradigm or 'the relational turn' for social science research (Dépelteau, 2013; Donati, 2010). To advocate a relational perspective as the center of studying female tourists in this research is to stress that the women's vacations with their best female friends builds connections with the inner self and others, rather than evading the various responsibilities of social relations and daily life (Larsen, Urry & Axhausen, 2007).

In women's studies, several theories have been based on the worldview of relationality (e.g., see Jordan, 1991, 1997, 2010). Being relational is considered to be a woman's nature (English, 2006). Several studies have shown that women's developing their sense of self is rooted in the context and in their ability to make and maintain their relationships with others (e.g., Condon, 2004; Liang et al., 2002; Stoppard, 2014). This research does not aim to illustrate all the relational theories in women's studies, but instead emphasize the importance of assessing the nature of relationality when studying women's experiences or

even all human experience. As Jordan (1997, p. 9) advocated, "a larger paradigm shift from the primacy of separate self to relational being must be considered to further our understanding of all human experience." Accordingly, relational perspectives and theories have been widely used to examine women's various experiences, for example, the experience of pregnancy (Smith, 1999), childbirth (Dahlberg & Aune, 2013), breastfeeding (Dykes & Flacking, 2010), motherhood (Brown, Small, & Lumley, 1994), and postnatal depression (Mauthner, 1998).

However, the relational perspective and relationality, and its implementation in examining women's sociality and their collective or group travel experience are neglected in tourism studies, especially in the context of friendship vacations. As in tourism studies, the relational perspective primarily focuses on host-guest relationships (Bimonte & Punzo, 2016; Tasci & Severt, 2017; Zhang & Kwong, 2017), with few studies mentioning about tourists' sociality on vacation. Jonas Larsen is one of the key authors who extensively researches sociality and tourism (Larsen, 2008; Larsen, Axhausen & Urry, 2006; Larsen et al., 2007). Larsen et al. (2007, p. 244) argued that, "existing tourism research has largely neglected the issues of sociality and therefore, overlooked how tourism is increasingly concerned with (re)producing social networks—with (re)visiting and receiving the hospitality of friends and kin living elsewhere and fulfilling social obligations." Similarly, Gössling, Cohen and Hibbert (2018) posited that

tourism functions as a mechanism of social connectedness in the developed world where it is characterized by individualization, competition, and loneliness.

In the context of China, relationship (guanxi in Mandarin) is significantly emphasized and deemed as the basic unit of China's social systems (Chen, Chen & Huang, 2013). Rather than advocating that China is a country characterized by collectivism, it is more on point to argue that Chinese society is based on guanxi (Wang & Liu, 2010). Guanxi shares some similarities with the relational perspective and relational theories in Western literature by emphasizing interpersonal relationships.

To communicate internationally, a few researchers use "relationalism" to refer to the Confucian relational perspective of guanxi (Chen & Chen, 2009; Hwang, 2009). This relationalism emphasizes dyadic sentiment and obligations rather than large group identity (Chen & Chen, 2004). The dyadic relationship is emphasized in the Chinese culture of Confucianism, as one could observe from the work by Mencius called Five Key Relationships (Wulun五倫: ruler to ruled (君-臣), father to son (父-子), husband to wife (夫-妻), older brother to younger brother (兄-弟), friend to friend (朋-友) (Mackerras, 2006). All these relationships are one-on-one dyadic in nature.

The dyadic relationalism culture continues in modern China. King (1991) provided an example by comparing the rationale of relationships between

Chinese and Japanese families and concluded that, although both Japan and China belong to collectivistic countries:

> *Relations in Chinese families are built upon multiple one-on-one dyadic relations between the husband and the wife, the father and the son, the mother and the son, etc., whereas in Japanese families, it is through a common family membership and identity." (as cited in Chen & Chen, 2004, p.306)*

In summary, King (1991) viewed Chinese societies as dyadic guanxi-based rather than group-based, as in Japan, or as individual-based, in most Western societies. These differences in terms of interpersonal relationships among Japanese, Chinese, and Western societies indicate the need to attend to the interpersonal and dyadic nature of Chinese relationships. Therefore a dyadic, relational perspective is taken in this research, with the belief that the studying of dyads, specifically, female friendship dyads and the relationship dynamics in depth, provides a foundation for exploring the Chinese small-group travel practice. The dyadic, relational perspective that is emphasized in this research does not mean that a feminist perspective is not important, inapplicable, or is not referenced in this study. However, it is intended to put the dyadic relationship and specifically women's friendships at the center of the study rather than anything else.

In addition to the example mentioned above of Chinese family relations, Chinese friendship is primarily based on "common social identities" (Jacobs, 1982 as cited in Chen & Chen, 2004, p. 311), which is *tong* (同) in Mandarin, meaning shared, or the same. According to Chen and Chen (2004, p.311), "the most frequently claimed common social identities are birthplace (*tong xiang* 同鄉), educational institution (*tong xue*同學), and workplace (*tong shi* 同事)," and guimi is also based on these collective social identities.

In the above section, the researcher discusses the relational perspective in the Western literature and refers to related literature on Chinese dyadic guanxi, which is an indigenous construct of Chinese society, to avoid being "culture-free" by merely implementing Western theories and perspectives in the China context. The researcher proposes a unified relational perspective for conceptualizing all dyadic peer relationships. This perspective has four key features. First, female same-sex close friendships must be studied as relationships, which means a continuous set of female-to-female interactions. Furman and Rose (2015, p.) described, "this friendship are dyadic phenomena with a history and are influenced by each person's characteristics, the interaction of their characteristics, and the pattern of their interactions over time. Each person affects the other's behavior within an interaction occurrence, and each occurrence affects subsequent occurrences. Such relationships acquire meaning, which is reflected in the participants' cognitions, emotions, behavior, and subsequent relationships." Overall, in the present study, the dyadic,

relational perspective was mentioned to illustrate women and Chinese relationships, while the interdependence perspective mentioned in Section 2.6.3 is tailored for describing the travel dynamics of the guimi holidays.

2.3 Research themes of female tourists

After reviewing the research perspectives that dominate female tourist studies, this section presents the key research areas on female tourists based on the selected articles in Table 2.1. Figure 2.1 illustrates that the research themes regarding females are not limited to the following three considerations. The author only chose the themes that directly or indirectly related to this study for further detailed review. First, travel constraints are still the focus of existing studies on female tourists. Second, the phenomenon of solo female travelers seems to be contrary to the segment of GGAs. Third, studies of Chinese female tourists have been increasing during the last few years. Additionally, a section on lesbian tourist studies has also been added as suggested by the supervisory committee, because it also relates to women's close relationships.

2.3.1 Travel constraints and risks

Historically, travel is usually regarded as a male-dominated activity (Stanford, 2017). In modern society, the situation has not changed much, as women's leisure and tourism activities are still largely restricted due to various types of constraints and travel risks. The intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural constraints are the three main types of constraints that restrict women's participation in tourism, as described in previous studies (Crawford &

Godbey, 1987). Specifically, intrapersonal barriers refer to "individual psychological states and attributes which interact with leisure preferences rather than intervening between preferences and participation" (Crawford & Godbey, 1987, p. 122), and interpersonal constraints are "the result of interpersonal interaction or the relationship between individuals' characteristics" (Crawford & Godbey, 1987, p. 123). Structural constraints, however, refer to the external factors (e.g., society, climate, season, etc.) that constrain women's participation in tourism. Moreover, Doran et al. (2018) added the fourth type of constraint, the family constraint, which were mentioned previously but have not been emphasized in leisure and tourism studies. Family constraints refer to familial responsibilities that constrain women's travel through their roles as caregivers and supporters and the social norm that women's leisure should have a 'domestic flavor.'

Furthermore, external and perceived travel risks also constrain women's travel. External risks individually or collectively represent incidences of crime, terrorism, natural disasters, accidents, and epidemics, whereas perceived travel risks refer to personal perceptions of risk, especially traveling in risky destinations, such as Egypt and India. Brown and Osman (2017) studied female tourist experiences in Egypt and found that female tourists encountered unwanted sexualized gaze from local men and felt that it was necessary to behave like the local females to protect themselves. In a study on solo female travelers in India, where is generally regarded as a

destination with a high level of risks against women in terms of domestic and sexual violence, Thomas and Mura (2019) found that solo female travelers must become accustomed to India's image of being unsafe for women. Whether the travel risks are from external or personal perceptions, women are generally more concerned about personal safety and security when traveling (Khan, Chelliah & Ahmed, 2017; Yang, Khoo-Lattimore & Arcodia, 2017b).

Additionally, researchers also examined the coping strategies of negotiating travel constraints and risks, including having a positive attitude, making plans and preparations, stepping out of one's comfort zone (Fendt, Wilson, Jenkins, Dimmock & Weeks, 2014), and behaving like local females. However, neither of these studies noted that traveling with a female same-sex friend could also be a coping strategy.

2.3.2 Solo female travelers

The past few years have demonstrated the rise of the solo female travel market (Christoff, 2018). According to the study by Chiang and Jogaratnam (2006), women's motivations for solo travel include relaxation, escape, socializing, self-esteem, and experience. These motivations, however, do not seem to be significantly different when traveling with friends. McNamara and Prideaux (2010) surveyed 228 solo female travelers in North Queensland and concluded that the primary motivations for solo travel are challenging oneself, extending

beyond personal comfort zones, developing feelings of autonomy, independence, and self-empowerment, and extending oneself.

Beyond the above-mentioned motivations, the constraints and travel risks that solo female travelers encountered are also no less or even more when traveling with someone else, according to several studies. For instance, Wilson and Little (2005) investigated 40 Australian women who had solo travel experiences and concluded that four interrelated types of constraints (sociocultural, personal, practical, and spatial) had significant effects on the women's travel experiences. Yang and Tung (2018) study specifically focused on the influence of the family on solo travel and posited that the effects of the family on travel constraints are culturally dependent. Consequently, the authors developed a scale for assessing family pressures on solo travelers in the Confucian cultural context.

In terms of travel experience, solo experiences are both good and bad (Jordan & Gibson, 2005). On the one hand, solo travel is thought to be a kind of resistance to the social norm of gendered roles and empowerment of the self. On the other hand, solo travel is considered to be a risky and dangerous experience for females. For example, Yang et al. (2018b) studied Asian solo female travelers and found that gendered and racialized risks, such as sexual assault, street harassment, and discrimination, are the main risks perceived by Asian women. Likewise, Jordan and Aitchison (2008) also found that solo travel is a quite challenging experience for females, and the problematic encounters with other travelers, especially the dominant heterosexual couple travelers,

largely marginalize solo female travelers and lead them to avoid any encounters with couple travelers while seeking other alternative practices. Similarly, Wilson and Little (2008) indicated that others' perceptions, susceptibility to vulnerability, sense of restricted access, and the feeling of conspicuousness are the primary sources of travel fears when women travel alone. Additionally, Heimtun and Abelsen (2013) surveyed young Norwegians aged between 18 and 29 and found that young Norwegians actually prefer to travel with family and friends; and are not willing to travel solo because bonding plays an important role in their vacation experiences. Most of the young female Norwegians felt that traveling alone is frightening, and they would only be willing to travel solo to places with which they are familiar. Wantono and McKercher (2020) grouped Asian solo female travelers into voluntary solo travelers and solo travelers by circumstances. They concluded that three types of risks and worries permeate among Asian female solo travelers: physical, culture-induced difficulties, and social/psychological risks and worries. In conclusion, solo travel is typically not the top choice for Asian female travelers (Mehmetoglu, Dann & Larsen, 2001).

2.3.3 Research on Chinese female tourists

Chinese women have become independent in terms of economic, political, and social status (Guo, 2014) compared with the past. Chinese women in modern societies are increasingly engaging in a variety of recreational and tourism activities. Another noticeable phenomenon is that nowadays, more Chinese females, whom Stanford (2017) defined as independent female travelers, are

traveling unchaperoned by a male companion or are not on an organized packaged tour. Nevertheless, this does not mean that they have no other companionships. The so-called GGAs (referring to female same-sex companions of traveling) represents a way to cope with potential travel risks and constraints. This situation has continued even as Chinese women's traveling spaces have expanded from home and nearby (in the form of garden tourism) to domestic travel and international travel (Li et al., 2011).

In spite of the rising number of Chinese female tourists traveling domestically and internationally, tourist studies of this potential niche market are still scarce. The early study by Hwang (2007) surveyed 289 Chinese female tourists and argued that hotel services are designed for men in China. The study suggested that the hotel industry should take measures to meet the expectations of female tourists.

Li et al. (2011) examined Chinese females' motivations of travelling abroad and concluded five pull factors and four push factors. Specifically, the push factors are; pursuing knowledge and prestige, enhancing social relationships, rest, adventure, and excitement, whereas the pull factors include the modern image, natural environment and attractions, safety and cleanliness, ease of tour arrangements, and shopping.

Using travel blogs as data sources, Zhang and Hitchcock (2017) concluded that female tourists from the mainland China travel to Macau not only for leisure

purposes but also to bond with family and friends. It could be inferred that Mainland Chinese female tourists to Macau did not travel alone but with family members and friends, as bonding plays a leading role beyond leisure.

Taking an intersectionality perspective, Gao and Kerstetter (2016) studied the perceived travel limitations and the associate coping strategies among senior Chinese women. Eight types of constraints were observed: "Limited knowledge of tourism," "health and safety concerns," "culture shock," "lack of travel partners," "low-quality service facilities," "limited availability of information," "negative reputation of tour guide," and "few employer-paid vacations" (Gao & Kerstetter, 2016, p. 128). Elderly Chinese females commonly used coping strategies, such as group travel with friends, finding partners through square dancing, and taking donkey travel.

Although studies have discussed Asian women by incorporating Chinese female tourists as a sub-segment, they focus on Asian women concerning travel constraints and risks (e.g., see Yang et al., 2018b). Based on the aforementioned studies, it can be concluded that travel safety and security remain the major concerns for both Chinese females and females from other countries.

2.3.4 Lesbian vacation

Though sexuality is one of the key themes that permeate extant female tourism studies, research on lesbian tourists remains scarce. As aforementioned, one of the travel constraints facing women is the unwanted sexualized gazes from men.

This is more prominent when traveling solo (Jordan & Aitchison, 2008). However, some studies have also examined women's active sexual behaviors on vacation. Spencer and Bean (2017) posit that regarding sex and tourism, men and women search for different outcomes, with men searching for sex while women search for romance.

Nevertheless, based on an online survey of 852 young US women, Berdychevsky and Gibson (2015a) argued that touristic contexts serve as liminoid playgrounds for young female tourists to explore sexual behavior. Further, Berdychevsky and Gibson (2015) concluded that women's sexual risk-taking on vacation is complex with multiple dimensions. In another study, Berdychevsky et al. (2015) interviewed 21 Israeli Jewish women and concluded that women's sexual behavior on holiday works as a resistance to social stereotypes and can be viewed as self-exploration and self-transformation. Overall, most of the existing studies on Western women hold a viewpoint that vacation is a space to behave hedonistically.

Regarding lesbian tourist research, Monterrubio and Barrios (2016b) posited that there is a lack of lesbian tourist experience studies from developing countries and argued that sex is not the primary motivation for lesbian tourists. Therkelsen et al. (2013) studied lesbian tourists' identity construction and concluded that unlike gay men who usually visit gay destinations, lesbian tourists behave no differently from other general female tourists. Poria (2006) interviewed 54 self-identified lesbian and gay men in the United Kingdom and

Israel and concluded that lesbian tourists and gay tourists want to be treated the same as heterosexual couples. Weeden, Lester and Jarvis (2016) surveyed 171 lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people (LGBT), with 46.2% of them being lesbians, and found that lesbians share the same travel motivations as heterosexual couples, and cruise ships provide a safe space for them to express themselves freely. Likewise, Apostolopoulou (2016) also concluded that lesbian tourists favored neither well-known gay destinations nor homophobic destinations. In a nutshell, lesbian tourists prefer to hide their homosexual orientation and want to be treated as ordinary heterosexual tourists.

2.4 Review of girlfriend getaways

Though GGAs have been sparsely reviewed from the above mentioned three perspectives, a specific, holistic review of GGAs is conducted as another separate section because the GGA is directly linked with the research subject of the guimi holiday in this study, which refers to the female friendship based travel group of only two people.

The GGA is a contested phrase among academics (Berdychevsky et al., 2016). Song (2017) and Khoo-Lattimore and Prayag (2015) referred to the term as "all-female tours." Specifically speaking, GGA refers to females traveling with only their female friends, family members, colleagues, sporting team members, and fellow members of their organizations (Gibson et al., 2012; Khoo-Lattimore & Gibson, 2018). The GGA has enjoyed very rapid growth in recently published literature on recreation and tourism (Cavallari, 2008; Khoo-Lattimore & Prayag,

2018; Mirehie, Gibson, Khoo-Lattimore & Prayag, 2018). For instance, the girlfriendsgetaways.com website focuses exclusively on traveling with girlfriends. Moreover, a number of online travel agencies have developed GGA itineraries, products, and services. Some hotels, such as the Hilton, have already built floors reserved for women.

Information on publications related to GGA was collected from Science Direct (http://www.sciencedirect.com), EBSCOhost (http://search.ebscohost.com), and Google Scholar (http://scholar.google.com.hk). Science Direct and EBSCOhost are the two largest online databases, whereas Google Scholar is the most popular search engine. The searching keywords included "girlfriend getaways" and "all-female travel." Attempts were made to trace references cited in published articles. In total, 12 published articles were determined to be relevant to this study (see Table 2.2).

An examination of the current research topics indicates that accommodation preferences, activities, motivations, well-being, satisfaction, and related discourses are the focus areas. For instance, Khoo-Lattimore and several of her co-authors took an active interest in exploring GGA's motivations, accommodation preferences, and satisfaction through a quantitative approach. The conclusions of these studies are: though the demographic characteristics of the GGA market are homogeneous, the needs of the GGA market are heterogeneous in terms of accommodation and service preferences (Khoo-Lattimore & Prayag, 2015). The key motivations of the GGA are the female

comforts, safety, the bond with friends, shopping, and the use of discount promotions with one's female friends (Khoo-Lattimore & Gibson, 2018), escaping the daily routine, or celebrating some special moments in life (Mirehie et al., 2018). The reasons for the GGA and the lodging preferences vary by citizenship and ethnicity (Khoo-Lattimore & Prayag, 2018). Additionally, three segments were found: rejoicers, socializers, and enjoyers (Khoo-Lattimore, Prayag & Disegna, 2018b).

In contrast, Berdychevsky and her co-authors took a qualitative method in examining the experiences, meanings, well-being, and discourses among GGAs. Likewise, Gibson et al. (2012) adopted a qualitative phenomenological approach to examine the experiences and meanings of GGAs. Their findings indicated that the GGA provided for a variety of psychological needs at different stages of women's lives and exhibited some common topics, such as escaping routines and stress, managing life transitions, and strengthening relationships with friends. Furthermore, Berdychevsky et al. (2013) examined the importance and effects of GGAs on women's wellbeing and concluded that women gained autonomy, temporary freedom, and escape through their GGA holidays. Moreover, Berdychevsky et al. (2016) interviewed 83 American and Canadian women and using discourse analysis. The authors concluded that the phrase GGAs was a contested term. Although some women deemed the term adequate and suitable to depict their all-female travel, other women thought the term was stereotypical and inadequate to describe their travel experience. Song (2017)

studied the preferred tourism activities of Hong Kong ladies' all women travel, showing that sports, tourism, relaxation, and recreation are the top four activities. However, shopping is not listed as one of the main activities in Song's (2017) study, which contradicts previous studies that reported shopping as one of the top activities for women's travel (Lyu & Noh, 2016). Moreover, Durko and Stone (2017) argued that GGAs provide benefits to healthy relationships, and the holiday satisfaction of GGAs is usually lower if ones' partners join in. Chen and Mak (2020) examined the Chinese GGAs from an interdependence perspective. Their study can only be considered the first step toward a more profound understanding of women's friendship and travel.

2.5 Friendship, best friends, and friendship travel

2.5.1 Friendship, best friends, and women

Friendship refers to positive interpersonal relationships characterized by different levels of equality, affection, and help (Rawlins, 2007). Price and Arnould (1999, p. 39) defined friendship as "a voluntary, personal relationship, typically providing intimacy and assistance, in which the two parties like each other and seek each other's company." Friendships are characterized by reciprocity, loyalty, intimacy, and trust (Rawlins & Jerrome, 1994). Humans make friends based on their own values and standards. A major and unique aspect of friendship is its voluntary nature, compared with kinship.

Beyond the general connotation of friendship, another more intensive friendship is called passionate/romantic/best friendship among women (Diamond, 2000).

Such relationships often include emotional and behavioral characteristics common to romantic relationships and include preoccupation, jealousy, inseparability, cuddling, and handholding (Diamond, 2002). Furman (1999) posited that people learn about the affiliation processes of romantic relationships through friendships. Thompson (2006) claimed that women's close friendships share the characteristics of romantic relationships in terms of intimacy, commitment, exclusivity, fears of betrayal, devotion, companionship, and so on.

There have been continuous debates and discussions about the gender differences between male and female same-sex friendships. For instance, Migliaccio (2010) posited that women are more inclined than males to disclose personal information with their friends. According to Baril, Julien, Chartrand and Dubé (2009), the bonds of friendship between women are closer and more favourable than those between men. Similarly, Rawlins (2007) argued that friendship between women tend to be more interdependent and emotional. Besides, Rawlins (2007, p. 3) even opined that, "many married women view their husbands as a good friend, they have a woman friend whom they consider as close or closer," which indicates that women's same-sex close friendships have almost equivalent or irreplaceable importance to women in comparing to family. Furthermore, Johnson and Aries (1983) identified that talking permeates female friendships. In particular, Winch (2013b) highlighted that female friendship has tremendous power in shaping feminine identities and values,

whereas, on the negative side, the girls or women in the friendships can also be "mean, two-faced, unable to keep secrets, betrayed, and talked about by one another" (p.32).

Based on the existing literature, female same-sex friendships play a significant role in women's growth. It is not the main focus of this study to examine the gender differences between men and women in terms of same-sex friendships. However, because the phenomenon of the guimi holiday in this study is about the joint travel experience between female same-sex friends in China, it is worth noting the characteristics and importance of women's friendships.

2.5.2 Female friendship travel

Visiting friends and relatives (VFR) has been regarded as one of the main motivations of travel and has been well-documented in the literature (Yousuf & Backer, 2015), but the phenomenon and dynamics of traveling with friends seem to be too insignificant, unstructured, and ephemeral. As a result, this phenomenon is usually marginalized in tourism literature (Yousuf & Backer, 2017). Larsen et al. (2007) and Larsen (2008) had advocated the "social turn" in tourism by emphasizing the situating of friendships and family relationships at the center of tourism study to "de-exoticize" and to "re-socialize" theories in tourism. While familial and couple tourism has been well established and researched by authors, such as Schänzel and Smith (2014), studies of friendship

relations and the associated dynamics and effects on holiday experience are still scant and unstructured.

A search of the literature by using the keywords “friend(s)” and “tourism,” or "“friend(s)” and “travel” in Scopus, found a few studies that examined the travel decision making of friendship groups (see Table 2.3). For example, the study by Marcevova, Coles, and Shaw (2010) used a survey and individual interviews to examine group travel decision making and found that among travel parties of young people, the ability of persuasion, financial and knowledge resources, and size of the travel party, all play essential roles in the processes of holiday decision making. Interestingly, Stone (2016) demonstrated that some individual members do not make travel decisions when traveling with friends. They rely on their travel companions to make decisions. Stone (2016) termed this phenomenon as social surrogates or delegated decision making.

Gradually, some studies have begun to focus on the friendship group travel of young Chinese. Song, Sparks, and Wang (2017) examined young Chinese friendship tourists’ travel decision making and confirmed that young Chinese tourists rarely express disagreement or conflicts due to the cultural values of forbearance and authority. The common strategies for dealing with disagreement are compromising, problem solving, delaying, forcing, and accommodating. In a study about Chinese friendship groups, Song et al. (2018) applied observation techniques to 10 small groups of university students. Their findings indicated that activity, cost, travel timing, transportation, climate,

safety, and distance determine young Chinese friendship groups' travel decision making. Cai, Cohen, and Tribe (2019) studied the friendship travel among backpackers and acknowledged that more and more young Chinese prefer to travel in small, self-organized friendship groups. They studied the group dynamics of young Chinese backpackers who travel in small groups by recruiting donkey friends through online communities. However, this type of friendship travel group is temporary. The findings confirmed that Chinese cultural values of "guanxi" (networks in English) and "keqi" (polite in English) help keep the harmonious status of group relations. Moreover, Matteucci, Volić, and Filep (2019) explored the dimensions of friendship in tourism settings and concluded five dimensions, namely, the intimacy of environments, disclosure, quality time, navigating challenges, and relationship achievements, along with a sense of knowing oneself through the shared experiences.

Beyond the discussions of the travel decision making among friendship travelers, some studies have researched single women's travel with friends (see Table 2.3). Through focus groups and interviews with Norwegian and British single women, Heimtun and Jordan (2011) confirmed that interpersonal conflicts also penetrate women's holidays and influence women's holiday experiences and friendships. Women's strategies to deal with holiday conflicts include compromise, negotiating appropriate holiday behaviors prior to travel, or simply traveling alone (Heimtun & Jordan, 2011). In another study, Heimtun (2012) examined the different social identities of Norwegian midlife single

women on holiday and concluded that the social identity of being a friend on holiday is to bond with others. The social identity of the loner relates to fears of the solo travel, whereas the social identity of being an independent traveler indicates that one must enjoy traveling solo. Based on a survey with young male and single female students. Heimtun and Abelsen (2012) concluded that young women have significantly more needs to keep company, have conversations, and to share experiences with friends. They need the company of friends to feel safe.

In a nutshell, for girls and women to have a fun, enjoyable, and memorable holiday, the presence of other people (e.g., friends and relatives) is necessary and important (Small, 2008). Similar to the conclusions made by Small (2008, p. 780), "for the present-day 12-year-olds and many of the 20- and 40-year-old groups of girls and women, the preferred playmate is a girlfriend of the same age." Further, Small (2008) referred to the work by Wearing (1998) and confirmed that sociability could provide emotional support and personal control for women.

A few research gaps were found in the existing studies on friendship travel: First, friendship travel is a group social activity and experience, but almost all of the above-mentioned studies take individual research approaches and data analysis; Second, the dominant topic areas include travel decision making, but the group experience and dynamics of friendship travel have been neglected. Third, although some studies mentioned the size of the travel party, neither of these

studies discussed small-group travel or friendship dyads: the traveling of two close friends. However, the industry report by the Boston Consulting Group (2011) found that, "around 41% of Chinese tourists travel with their friends, and approximately 60% of them travel in a party of two to four people" (as cited in Song et al., 2018, p. 772). The small-group travel dynamics of Chinese female tourists are not well researched in tourism studies, specifically, the travel of female friendship dyads. Fourth, studies on women's traveling with friends have mainly focused on the Western context, not on collectivistic cultures, such as China.

Table 2.3 Selected literature on friendship travel

Author (year)	Topic areas	Major findings	Theory	Method of data collection	Sample characteristics	Sample size	Data analysis
Marcevova, Coles & Shaw (2010)	Group decision making; tourist behavior; university students;	Resources such as money and expertise, together with the age, gender, and skills of persuasion, influence the amount of power exerted by individual group members in final travel choices; Besides, the size of the party also has greater influences on travel decision making.	/	Survey and interviews	Snowball sampling; Norwegian and British women aged between 30 and 70 years old.	412 questionnaires; 10 interviews;	Descriptive analysis;
Heimtun & Abelsen (2012)	Singles; bonding and experience;	Single's meanings of bonding with friends during the holiday are linked to complex power relations; they are gendered and based on class distinctions.	/	Survey	Convenience sample; single students aged 18-25 years	270	Descriptive analysis;
Heimtun & Jordan (2011)	Women's traveling with friends; in-group interpersonal conflicts; coping strategies;	Holiday conflicts influence women's holiday experiences and friendships. And the strategies that women take to deal with conflicts include avoidance of conflict through compromise, negotiation of appropriate holiday behaviors before travel, or ultimately choosing to travel solo.	Social identity	Focus groups; solicited diaries; interviews;	Snowball sampling; Norwegian and British women aged between 30 and 70 years old.	Norwegian women (32); British women (39)	Thematic analysis with constant comparison

Heimtun (2012)	The social identities on holiday; midlife single women;	The social identity of being a friend on holiday is to bond with others; the social identity of the loner relates to fears of the solo holiday; the social identity of the independent traveler refers to enjoying traveling solo.	Social identity	Focus group interviews; diaries;	Snowball sampling; Norwegian midlife single women	32	Thematic analysis with constant comparison
Stone (2016)	Tourist delegated decision making among friends; social surrogates;	Tourists often delegated decisions. The findings show that 25% of American respondents delegated destination choice and 50% of delegated dining and activity decisions during the travel. Within groups of friends traveling together, a delegation of decisions has been found to be a common occurrence and that some friends were willing to sacrifice their wishes to let someone else organize travel activities. Social surrogates play significant roles in making decisions.	Social surrogate	Online survey	Purposive sampling; Americans	404	Descriptive analysis;

Song, Sparks & Wang (2017)	Young Chinese friendship travelers; group decision making; disagreement prevention and resolution;	Travelers generally not express disagreements or conflicts in the group decision-making process as the Chinese cultural values, including "forbearance" and "authority," influence travelers' disagreement prevention and the coping strategies concerning disagreement, including compromising, delaying, problem-solving, forcing, and accommodating.	/	Semi-structured, face-to-face, in-depth interviews	Purposive criteria sampling	25	Thematic analysis
Song, Wang & Sparks (2018)	Friendship group; group travel decision making;	Activity, cost, travel timing, transportation, climate, safety, and distance determine young Chinese friendship groups' travel decision-making.	/	Observation	Snowball sampling;	10 small groups	Content analysis
Cai, Cohen & Tribe (2019)	Group dynamics; travel experience; backpackers;	Chinese backpackers keep group relations by applying the cultural attributes of 'respect for authority' and 'keqi'; The harmonious status is achieved through the codes of 'guanxi' and 'keqi.'	/	Participant observation and interviews	Mobile ethnography;	21 interviews	Thematic analysis
Matteucci, Volić, & Filep (2019)	Dimensions of friendship; shared travel experience	The intimacy of spaces, quality time, disclosure, navigation of challenges and relational realizations, and a sense of learning about oneself are the five dimensions underpinning the friendship in the context of tourism.		Interviews	Convenience sampling	12	Grounded theory

2.6 Dyads and interdependence

2.6.1 Dyads and their characteristics

Being relational or connected in groups is the nature of human existence (Yeganehlayegh, 1981). Beyond various forms of large groups in a society (e.g., a package group in tourism), there are also many small groups that are of the same importance to researchers (e.g., small self-organized friendship travel). In sociology, a dyad is the smallest possible social group, consisting of two people. The dyad is an essential concept in sociology because, according to James (1953), 73% of naturally formed groups in our society are dyads (as cited in Kenny and Voie, 1984, p.142), which implies that studies on group dynamics should not neglect the functions and interactions of dyads.

According to Simmel (1964), for two people to be regarded as a dyad, they should meet the following requirements: First, a dyad composes only two individuals. Second, there should be face-to-face, intimate relations between them. Third, the social relations (including both attraction and repulsion) must last long enough to establish an identifiable pattern of interactions, which means intimacy and mutual actions must exist to be a dyad. And fourth, the distinction between a dyad and two individuals is that a dyad implies a relationship in which each party regards the other as a functionary or representative regarding a specific purpose. Yoon, Thye and Lawler (2013) posited, dyads demonstrated high levels of interdependence because of their intimacy. Accordingly, dyads form deep emotional attachments (Yoon et al., 2013). The interdependency and emotional attachment arise from the understanding that both pair members in

the pairs should accept responsibility for any coaction. Thus, each person in the dyad is confronted only with the other, and each of them has the power to destroy the relationship.

Sociologists are quite interested in exploring the reasons and how dyads form, whether as the outcome of birth (e.g., mother-son), by choice (e.g., two friends), or because of other social needs (e.g., teacher-student, doctor-patient, author-editor). Each dyadic pair has its unique qualities. What is in common about the pairs mentioned above is these dyadic relationships are not built among strangers but between people who know each other. However, no one can know everything about another person.

In assessing a dyad, sociologists divide dyads into two main types by closeness. One is called comprehensive dyads, which involve parties who have substantial knowledge about each other's temperaments and life. The other is named as segmentalized dyads, meaning that parties know little about the other's character and personal life, and what they do know is confined to a specific situation, such as the classroom, hospital, or some other specialized settings (Becker & Useem, 1942).

What makes a dyad different from larger groups is that it needs less diffusion of responsibility, and the two parties' contributions and expertise are easily observable (Williams, Harkins & Latané, 1981). In addition, dyads share greater intimacy than a large group, but the immense intimacy could also cause some

conflict, which can sometimes be destructive to the relationship (Malloy, 2018). Cooley (1902) mentioned that, in intimate dyads, the two people are intertwined with shared values, purposes, aims, and identities (as cited in Malloy, 2018).

A crucial alteration of the members' selves occurs when the intimate dyadic relationships end or rearrange (Malloy, 2018). Malloy (2018) provided an example, mentioning the case of a divorce between a couple and its fundamental change in the parent-child dyad. A dyadic relationship can also change due to one member's hanged views of the other or due to some life events, such as graduation, marriage, or death. For example, friendship pairs may be broken by misunderstanding, and some female's same-sex dyad friendships can be ended because one party gets married whereas the other does not.

In conclusion, the dyad is the fundamental unit of interpersonal interactions. Comprehensive dyads share the same characteristics with close friends in terms of intimacy and interdependence, where interdependency is the central notion.

2.6.2 Contextualizing the guimi holiday as female friendship dyads' travel

Guimi is not a unique cultural phenomenon in China. A similar phenomenon is also found in Western culture, artistic work, and literature. For example, such terms as passionate friendship, romantic friendship, or affectionate friendship are used to describe the intimate but nonsexual relationships between close friends in the Western culture, which often involves physical affections in the forms of kissing, hugging, holding hands, cuddling,

and sharing a bed without sexual intercourse (Diamond, 2000). Based on the above discussions and comparisons about male-female and general-intimate friendship, it could be argued that the guimi holiday shares some similarities to a couple's vacation, at least in terms of some of the dyadic interactions and romantic connotations, but more differences should be stressed. The author of this study uses 'friendship dynamics' to distinguish and differentiate with the 'couple dynamics' delineated by Mottiar and Quinn (2004).

Although a few studies have discussed GGAs, there is also a call for emphasizing the importance of socializing and sociability in tourism studies, as mentioned in the previous sections. However, the so-called GGAs in the Western countries are illustrated by some studies as being more like a sorority with large numbers of women at retirement age coming together for fun and play (van Bohemen, van Zoonen & Aupers, 2014). For instance, the organization Red Hat Society (RHS), founded in 1998 in the US, is an international women's network that offers "fun" and "friendship" specifically for women over fifty (van Bohemen et al., 2014). The functions and dynamics of GGAs in the Western countries cannot be equated with the guimi holiday of two close female friends in the context of the collectivistic culture of China, which distinguishes this study from the existing literature on the GGAs in the Western countries, even though the group dynamics of this is also under-researched in tourism literature. To equate GGAs with guimi holidays risks overlooking the unique cultural contexts of guimi holidays, especially if such

observers are ignorant of this collectivistic culture and its significance in the guimi relationship. This significance is embodied in the ancient origins of guimi relationships with their adaptations and evolutions throughout the many cultural and social changes across the long history of Chinese society. Realizing this significance demands more from research (than viewing guimi holidays as a Chinese version of the Western GGA). By anchoring on the collectivistic culture in which guimi relationships operate, such contexts are fundamentally realized and not overlooked. A truly operative understanding of guimi holidays becomes attainable.

2.6.3 Interdependence and theory of interdependence

Based on the dyadic, relational perspective mentioned in Section 2.2 and the central idea of interdependence of dyads, a holistic view of the concept of interdependence and the theory behind is elaborated in the following paragraphs.

The conception of interdependence has a long history and has been interpreted from different perspectives, including relational, interactional, and psychological, and others. (Bonito, 2002). In the early work by Elias (1978), the author argued that human interdependence is the heart of sociological inquiry, and that all human relations should be viewed as part of the broader figurations of interdependence. Marcus (1998) noted that interdependence relates to the dynamic nature of a group which differs from individual actions. According to Kenny and Cook (1999), the core of interdependence is the influence of one's behaviors and thoughts regarding the actions and thoughts of other members.

As a result, interdependence consists of a partner effect and an actor effect (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003). A partner effect means that one person's behavior or characteristics are affected by his or her partner (Kenny & Cook, 1999), while the unique impacts of predictors on their results are called actor effects (Wickham & Knee, 2012).

Developed by Harold Kelley and John Thibaut in the 1950s, the interdependence theory analyzes dyadic behavior among individuals who affect each other through various interactions in six structural dimensions (Arriaga, 2013; Rusbult & Van Lange, 2011). The details of the six structural dimensions were presented in the paragraphs below. The interdependence theory has been renowned as an influential framework for studying the dynamics of dyadic interaction and interdependent processes in close or intimate relationships (Wickham & Knee, 2012). The core idea of interdependence theory indicates that individuals who belong to the same dyad influence each other in intricate ways (Wickham & Knee, 2012). Beyond the mutual influence between dyad members, the joint decisions displayed by parties of a dyad also influence the outcomes of each individual. Any changes in the behavioral decisions or the attributes of either member of the dyad may affect both members' outcomes. Rusbult and Van Lange (2011) described the interdependence rationale using the example of Mary and John. The illustration is as follows:

> *"In the context of a social relationship, interaction (I) describes two people's (A's and B's) needs, thoughts, and motives in relation to one*

another in the context of the specific interdependence situation (S) in which their interaction transpires. Expressed formally, I =f (S, A, B). That is, to predict what will transpire in an interaction between Mary and John, we must consider (a) what situation they confront (e.g., are their interests at odds, does one hold greater power?), (b) Mary's needs, thoughts, and motives with respect to this interaction (e.g., which traits are activated, is her perspective short- or long term?), and (c) John's needs, thoughts, and motives with respect to this interaction. As a result of their behavioral choices in a given situation, each person experiences good versus poor outcomes—consequences that are more versus less satisfying or pleasurable. The outcome of the interaction is satisfying to the extent that it gratifies (vs. frustrates) the individual's most important needs, such as survival, exploration, or belongingness" (p.2).

According to Rusbult and Van Lange (2008), there are six structural dimensions of interdependence: level of dependence (power), mutuality of dependence (mutual dependence), basis of dependence (coordination), covariation of interests (conflict), temporal structure (future interdependence), and information certainty. In a recent study by Gerpott, Balliet, Columbus, Molho and de Vries (2017), the researchers rephrased the six dimensions into power, mutual dependence, conflict, coordination, future interdependence, and information certainty.

*Level of dependence (**power**)* depicts the degree to which an actor's behaviors or thoughts are affected by his or her partner. For example, in the case mentioned above, Mary is independent if John's actions have no influence on

Mary's wellbeing, which is termed as high actor control. In contrast, if John can unilaterally cause Mary's experience of pleasure versus displeasure outcomes, Mary is dependent on John. The effect of John in this condition is called partner control (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2008).

*Mutuality of dependence (**mutual dependence**)* illustrates whether members of a dyad are equally dependent upon one another. In the case of Mary and John, if Mary is more dependent on John, then John has greater power in this relationship. Expanding this rationale into the tourism context; partners with lower dependence tend to exert greater control over travel decision-making and the associated resources, while partners with higher dependence bear a greater load of interaction costs and are more helpless to possible neglect of personal pursuits. Therefore, mutual dependence makes dyads feel 'safer,' and mutual dependence tends to produce a relatively stable and trusting interaction (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2011). Interactions with unilateral dependence can bring risks, because the unilaterally powerful partner may behave as he or she wishes without concern for the well-being of others. As a result, the more powerful partner has the opportunity to act generously or heroically while the more dependent partner is more likely to suffer potential exploitation or abandonment (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2011).

Basis of dependence depicts how partners influence each other's thoughts or behaviors – whether one party impacts on the other depends on partner control or joint control. In terms of partner control, it means the outcomes of actors are

in the hands of one's partner. Therefore, interaction usually involves commitment or threat and activation of ethics. On the contrary, joint control requires emergency-based action coordination, which makes competency-related features more essential, including expertise, intelligence, initiatives, and strategic skills.

Covariation of interests explains whether the joint activities of partners bring about equally satisfactory results for both parties. According to Rusbult and Van Lange (2008), covariation ranges from fully corresponding mode through hybrid patterns to completely conflicting modes. The corresponding mode is relatively smoother. For example, John and Mary are just pursuing their interests, while at the same time producing good results for each other. On the contrary, conflicts of interests often lead to negative perceptions and emotions.

Temporal structure captures the dynamic and continuous processes of the interactions between actor and partner. In the case of John and Mary, "temporally extended situations afford the expression of self-control and the inclination to 'stick with it' – the dependability versus unreliability, as well as loyalty against disloyalty (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2008, p. 2054)".

The final dimension is *information certainty*. Information certainty is to illustrate whether both members of a dyad possess certain or uncertain information about their own or the other party's outcomes for various combinations of behaviors, motives, or future interaction opportunities.

Information is exceptionally essential in the novel or risky situations, as well as in the interactions with unfamiliar persons (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2008). Incomplete information produces misunderstandings and ambiguities, thereby hindering interaction (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2011).

According to Rusbult and Van Lange (2008), beyond the dimensions of interdependence mentioned above, two processes could be found in interdependence dimensions: *transformation process and adaptation process*. According to Rusbult and Van Lange (2008), the process of transformation consists of serial rules that a person might adopt during interactions. Some examples of those rules include: "waiting to see how the partner behaves, or adopting strategies such as tit-for-tat or turn-taking; altruism, or maximizing the partner's outcomes; cooperation, or maximizing combined outcomes; competition, or maximizing the relative difference between one's own and the partner's outcomes; and individualism, or maximizing one's own outcomes irrespective of the partner's outcomes (p.2055)". A*daptation* refers to the process in which repeated experience produces habitual response tendencies under similar situations, and it usually produces good outcomes on average. Adaptations may be embodied in interpersonal orientations, relationship-specific motivations, or social norms (Bonito, 2002).

Overall, interdependence theory provides a flexible conceptual framework for understanding dyadic interactions and has been widely used in explaining the interactions of couple dyads (specifically heterosexual couples) in the context

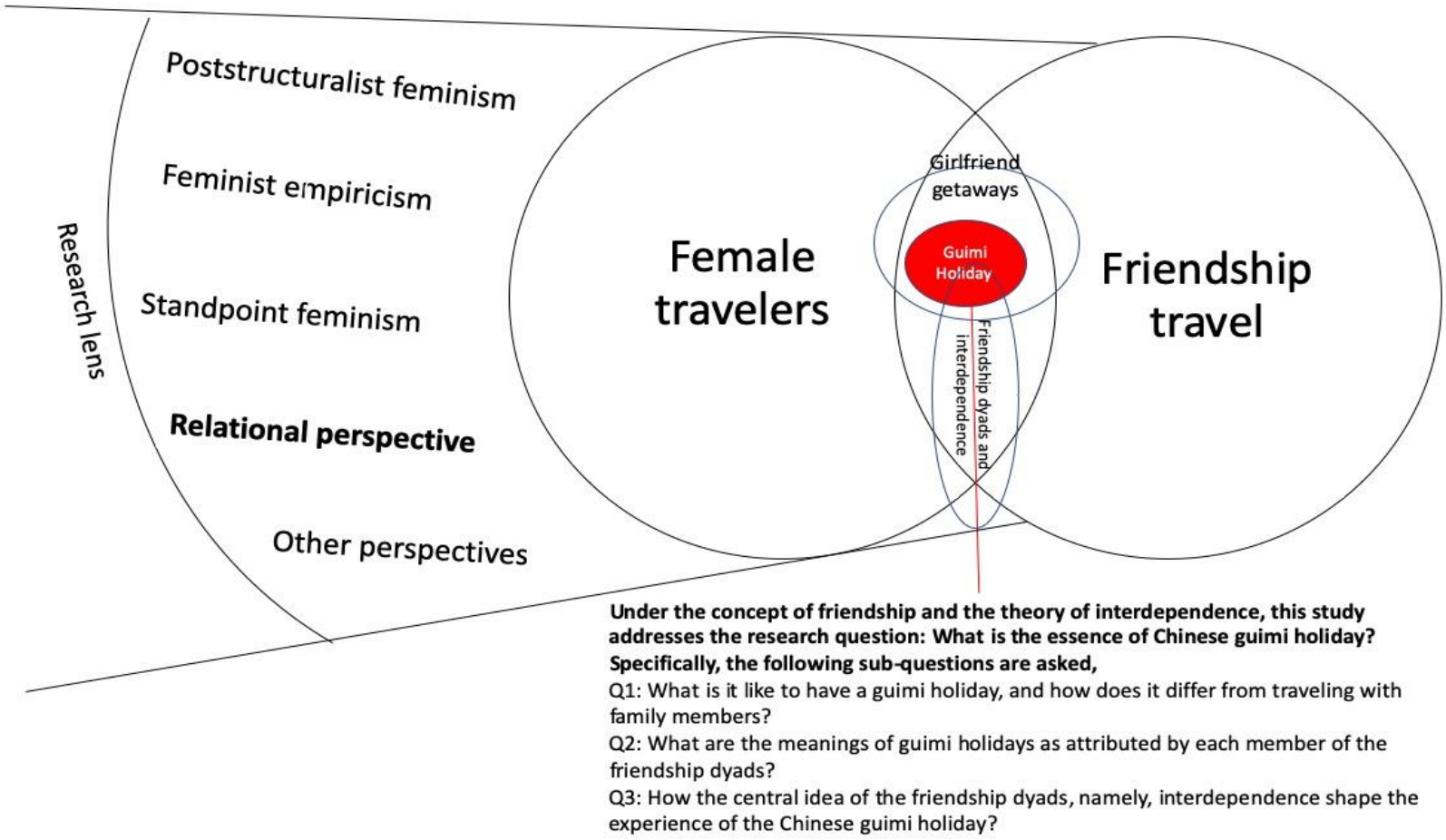
of family relationships (Agnew, Van Lange, Rusbult & Langston, 1998; Holmes, 2000; Wickham & Knee, 2012), but there is a lack of female same-sex friendship elements in the theory. Based on the six dimensions and two processes of the interdependence theory, considering its flexibility in combining other theoretical lenses (Wickham & Knee, 2012) and tailoring the theory to examine the vacation experience of female friendship dyads, the functions of women's same-sex friendships are incorporated into interdependence theory to develop the theoretical framework of friendship dynamics in this study.

2.7 Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework consists of two principal subsets with one overarching question and three sub-questions at the bottom (see Figure 2.2). The set on the left summarizes existing research perspectives on female tourists and describes the lens used in this study. There are two small blocks within the block of female travelers. The author uses the small blocks to describe girlfriend getaways and the guimi holiday. Since the scope of girlfriend getaways equates to all-female travel, the guimi holiday only refers to holidays with one's best female friends. Therefore, the guimi holiday is a segment of girlfriend getaways. The right block refers to friendship travel. The sociological concept of dyads (friendship dyads in this study) and the central idea of interdependence is drawn within the friendship travel block because this study only focuses on the travel experience and group dynamics of female same-sex friends who share the

characteristics of dyads. The block below is the research question with one main research question and three sub-questions.

Figure 2. 2 Conceptual framework



CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the research design and methodology of the thesis by following the research cycle opined by Denzin and Lincoln (2008). Denzin and Lincoln (2008) suggested the five phases of a research process, namely, research paradigms, research strategies, data collection and analysis, research evaluations, and lastly, the researcher's role. The five phases were taken as the methodological framework of this study, as well as the structure of this chapter. The research paradigm (P), ontology (O), epistemology (E), and methodology (M) underpinning this study were introduced as the research POEM after the Research ethics section. The discussions of the POEM inform the specific choices of research strategies, approaches, and methods for this thesis, which is qualitative existential phenomenology with semi-structured dyadic in-depth interviews as the data collection method. The evaluation was explored in terms of dependability, credibility, confirmability, and transferability (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008), concerning the chosen methods and prospective data. The detailed procedures of conducting the research, the respondent profile, transcription details, and coding are explained in full in the following sections.

3.1 Research ethics

For the study to be considered ethical, each facet needs to be carefully thought through. Freedom to choose whether or not to participate in research is a basic principle, and participants were informed before deciding their consent. A statement of the overall purpose of the research was explained before conducting the data collection. All of the respondents' real names were anonymized. If any other issues were raised by participants, special efforts were made to respect the requirement.

The research followed the ethic codes /guidelines prescribed by The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, which is in line with the following ethical aspects proposed by Jennings (2001, p. 99).

- Voluntary participation by the individual;
- Informed consent will be given to the participant after being provided with either oral or written information on the research;
- The right of the individual to refuse to answer any questions or perform any actions;
- The right of the individual to withdraw from the research at any time while it is being conducted;
- The right of the participants not to be deceived regarding any aspect of the research (purpose, sponsors, or usage of the findings);
- The right of the participants not to be harmed during any state of the research as well as after the research has been conducted;
- The right of the individual to have any personal information, data, or empirical materials treated as either confidential or anonymous as befits the circumstances of the research; and
- The right of the research participants to access the research findings.

3.2 Research POEM

As mentioned above, the POEM refers to the research paradigm (P), ontology (O), epistemology (E), and lastly, the informed methodology (M) underpinning this study. Each part is discussed in the following sections.

3.2.1 Paradigm

The research paradigm refers to a set of beliefs or worldviews that guide researchers' investigations. Specifically, paradigms are "basic belief systems that are based on ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 107). Therefore, the discussions about research methods should not be embraced without considering the philosophical paradigm underpinning the research. Researchers categorize different types and make various interpretations of paradigms. For example, Guba and Lincoln (1994) identified four typical paradigms: positivist, post-positivist, critical theory, and constructivism. In tourism research alone, Phillimore and Goodson (2004) highlight five qualitative approaches in tourism, which are termed the "five moments." The five moments have been extended to eight moments by Denzin and Lincoln (2008), but tourism investigators have not paid much attention to them (Westwood, Morgan & Pritchard, 2006). Creswell (2018) attempted to draw distinctions among post-positivism, social constructivism, advocacy/participatory, pragmatism, and interpretivism. In facing the diverse approaches and theoretical perspectives, Patton (2014) sought to guide research by asking a "foundational question" rather than differentiating philosophical views. Together these studies provide evidence that there is no agreement on the types of paradigms, and the boundaries between them are vague. As a result, elaborating on each of the paradigms remains a daunting task. After learning and comparing the concepts mentioned in the above texts, this study focuses on the "interpretivist" paradigm while mentioning other paradigms (e.g., positivism and constructivism) for comparison.

The interpretivist or the interpretivism paradigm posits that our knowledge about the social world derives from human interpretations (Prasad, 2018). In contrast to positivism, which emphasizes the objective causes of human behaviors, interpretivists are interested in how individuals explain their behaviors. Positivists believe that "social facts" shape individual action. In contrast, interpretivists propose that individuals are unique and complicated, as

different individuals experience, understand, and interpret the same "objective reality" in distinct ways and have their different, often very unique opinions and reasons for individual actions. Interpretivists denounce "scientific sociology" (positivism) by arguing that many of the statistics it relies on are themselves socially constructed (Prasad, 2018).

Moreover, interpretivists argue that researchers must achieve "Verstehen" (Outhwite, 1975 as cited in Prasad, 2018), or empathetic understanding, by viewing the world through the perspective of the actors performing their action. As a whole, interpretivism focuses on the social dimensions of reality construction and is usually employed with phenomenology (Prasad, 2018). However, misuse and misunderstanding occur regarding social constructionism and interpretivism (Schwandt, 2000). The following section presents a detailed illustration of the differences between the two paradigms. A comparison is also presented in Table 3.1.

3.2.2 Ontology

The term "ontology" derives from two Greek words-ontos and logos. The term ontos means being, whereas logos refers to knowledge. Ontology is a branch of philosophy concerned with the nature of existence and the essence of being. Ontological questions relate to the nature of reality and its characteristics by asking questions, such as "What is the nature of reality?" or "What is there that can be known?" For interpretivists, such ontological issues could refer to the philosophy of phenomenology, which posits that objective reality is impossible for humans to perceive "due to the 'intentionality' of our perception" (Chen, Shek & Bu, 2011, p. 133). The ontology of interpretivism neither shares the positivist view that human perceptions are determined by the objective outside world nor makes any assertions about the external world. The ontology of interpretivism lies in 'participants' subjective interpretations rather than the objective world (Chen et al., 2011). If one puts interpretivism on a continuous ontological

sequence from realism to relativity, many interpretivists are likely to be on the side of realism and label their research as, for example, 'hermeneutical realism' (Chen et al., 2011).

In contrast, the ontology of constructivism takes a relativism position by emphasizing multiple realities that are formulated in the minds of each individual rather than the single, objective reality characterized by positivism (Pernecky, 2012). Constructivists also question realism by stressing that no truth exists and arguing that "real phenomena, our perceptions, and experience, are brought into existence and take the particular form that they do because of the language that we share" (Burr, 2003, p. 92). Therefore, constructivists seem to orient themselves into a more relativist position, making it different from the more realist ontology of interpretivism.

3.2.3 Epistemology

Epistemology refers to knowledge about knowledge. In other words, epistemology is the way people understand the world. Epistemological questions relate to how we know about knowledge by asking questions, such as "How can we be sure that we know that we know?" or "What is the relationship between the knower (participant) and the would-be knower (researcher)?" Epistemologically, this study adheres to the interpretive view, which means knowledge comes from the lived experience of the participants, and sociality is considered inter-subjectively composed. The epistemology of interpretivism pinpoints the 'neutral discovery of meanings' by letting research participants' opinions flow naturally, and the way leading to meanings, ideas, concepts, and interpretations is through concrete lived experiences (Chen et al., 2011). To this end, interpretivism is nearer to the endpoint of realism.

Interestingly, constructivists also believe that our description of the world is presented in the format of language (Chen et al., 2011). However, constructionism has been extended to a broader sphere, and the related epistemology forms a continuum from realism to relativity, with

some different positions distanced from one another. For example, we have “strict social constructionism” versus “objective social constructionism” versus “contextual social constructionism” (Frankling, 1998, p. 63) and “objective social constructionism” versus “interpretive social constructionism” (Harris, 2010, p. 138). To elucidate the broader types of constructionism here is to illustrate that interpretivists are usually more cautious about their knowledge propositions and acknowledge that any propositions could be deconstructed (Gubrium & Holstein, 2008). As it is not the focus of this study to differentiate all the types of constructionism, they will not be discussed individually. For those who are so interested in constructionism, one can refer to the study by Harris (2010) for a detailed illustration.

3.2.4 Methodology

Guided by the researcher’s epistemology, methodology means the practical philosophy dealing with methods, systems, and rules for conducting research. Methodological questions relate to how we research by asking questions, such as “How can we find out about things?” or “What are the ways of finding out about knowledge?” The paradigms of interpretivism and constructionism share several similarities (Chen et al., 2011). For example, both automatically refer to qualitative research methods, but not quantitative methods. Both require researchers to engage in the research process actively, stress meaning in the context, and acknowledge the influence of subjectivity in the research process (Chen et al., 2011).

However, there are also some methodological distinctions between interpretivism and constructionism. In interpretive research, theories and explanatory models should be based on the participants’ experience. As a result, researchers are usually required to “defend the possibility of accounts offered by showing how results can reasonably be argued to relate to people’s meaningful experience” (Romm, 2001, p. 281). Interpretivist researchers must justify their choices of research methods and approaches, while acknowledging that there are

alternative ways of conducting the research. Similar requirements also suit constructionist and other qualitative research paradigms. However, classical constructionists assert that knowledge is contestable and not fixed (Burr, 2003), and they deny the notion that "human experience, thoughts, and feelings are accessible by research methods. This type of position is named as 'radical constructionism'" (Willig, 2008, p. 154) or strict social constructionism (Best, 2017).

Given the differences of the POEM between interpretivism and constructionism (see Table 3.1), to assess whether the contributions of knowledge of a study arise primarily from interpretivism or constructionism, it is necessary to have a clear understanding of the epistemological lens of the study. In summary, "a social constructionist constructs knowledge, while an interpretivist gains knowledge about the meaning behind human action" (Pernecky, 2012, p. 1122). This study posits interpretivism as the overarching paradigm with phenomenology as the methodology due to two reasons. First, the purpose of this study is not to construct theory but to gain knowledge through the interpretations of Chinese female friendship dyads regarding their small group travel experiences in their own words. Therefore, the overarching paradigm of this study is interpretative. Second, the author of this study also holds the belief that "tourism is an endlessly creative field of lived experiences that should be more deeply explored interpretively, and thereby 'qualitatively,' especially in the light of new insights gained across social science disciplines" (Schänzel, 2010, p. 77).

3.2.5 Application of the interpretative paradigm and phenomenology to this study

This study aims to understand the essence of a guimi holiday in general and the lived holiday experience of female friendship dyads, including the characteristics of female friendships, group dynamics, and meaning-making in particular, based on the paradigm of interpretivism. Lived experiences are topics that are hardly quantified and require qualitative methods to obtain rich and detailed results. Therefore, the qualitative approach was chosen to gain a

deeper understanding of the core meanings behind friendship dynamics and the collective travel experiences of female friendship dyads' travel (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2011; Sandelowski, 2004). Qualitative methods are helpful for the in-depth study of these experiences, and through the empirical analysis of the results to comprehensively understand the meanings and interpretations of individuals. According to Weitz et al. (2011) and Creswell (2018), the five widely used methodologies of conducting qualitative research are ethnography, narrative, grounded theory, phenomenology, and case study. Their characteristics, merits, and rationale are compared in Table 3.2. After evaluating the extent to which these methodologies meet the ontology, epistemology, and methodology of interpretivism and considering the research aims, the author employed phenomenology as the methodology with dyadic interviews as the method in this study.

Phenomenology is neither original nor unique in tourism research. The seminal work by Cohen (1979), "A Phenomenology of Tourist Experiences," was seen as the earliest paper in tourism that used phenomenology as the methodology (Wassler & Schuckert, 2017). Though Eric Cohen started the pioneering work in 1979 in emphasizing the application of phenomenology into the studying of the tourist experience, for quite a long time, phenomenology was not popular in tourism research until recent decades (Pernecky & Jamal, 2010). Some recent papers include "An Existential-phenomenological Analysis of the Local Gaze in Tourism" (Wassler & Kirillova, 2019), "The Dark Tourism Experience in a Festival Context" (Podoshen, Yan, Andrzejewski, Wallin & Venkatesh, 2018), and "The Lived Travel Experience to North Korea" (Wassler & Schuckert, 2017). Few studies have used phenomenology to study women's travel with the exception of Berdychevsky et al. (2016)'s phenomenological study on the meanings of GGAs, not to mention the phenomenological examination of guimi holidays in the context of China.

Researchers have questioned the methodological rigor of existing tourism phenomenological studies (e.g., Kirillova, 2018; Pernecky & Jamal, 2010; Szarycz, 2009) because Husserl's phenomenology (descriptive phenomenology) and Heidegger's phenomenology (hermeneutic phenomenology) are generally regarded as two contrasting phenomenological orientations (Kirillova, 2018), with each only suitable to answer a particular question. However, according to the review paper by Kirillova (2018), the two contrasting orientations of phenomenology were not well-acknowledged and were primarily misused in the studies by Laing and Frost (2017), Podoshen et al. (2018), Chen (2017), and Fendt et al. (2014). Further, as Kirillova (2018) illustrated, a typical example of a Husserlian phenomenological research question is, "What is it like to use a hotel app as a guest?" while an example of a Heideggerian phenomenological research question is, "What does the experience of using a hotel app mean to a guest and why?" In conclusion, descriptive phenomenology focuses on "what an experience is like and how it differs from other experiences" (Kirillova, 2018, p. 3335), whereas hermeneutic phenomenology focuses on the meanings of the experiences to the individuals. In this study, both types of phenomenological questions have been explored to contribute a holistic understanding of the guimi holiday in the context of China. Therefore, an overarching approach that could bring these two orientations together is required. The existential-phenomenological approach provides the framework for this study.

Table 3. 1 Comparison of interpretivism and constructionism/constructivism

Paradigms	Content of the term	Branches	Ontology	Epistemology	Methodology (assessing criteria)
Interpretivism	A relatively clear research stream rooted in phenomenological philosophy	-Phenomenology -Symbolic interactionism -Dramaturgy and dramatism -Hermeneutics -Ethnomethodology -Ethnography	-Generally relativist -Some close to realism, e.g., hermeneutical realist	-Instrumental utility -Representational validity -Reflexivity untheorized	Concerns how results can be argued to relate to people's meaningful experience
Constructionism/ constructivism (C.)	A loose assembly, a big umbrella	-Micro-scope vs. Macro-scope -Objective vs. interpretive	-Classical C: relativist stance -C in a broad sense: ranging from realism to relativism	-Classical C: instrumental utility undercut; language constructs reality; -C in a broad sense: ranging from realist to relativist epistemology	Concerns how the researcher is implicated in the constructed reality

Source: Chen et al. (2011, p. 137)

Table 3. 2 Five ways of qualitative approaches

Method	Rationale	Focus	Applicability to this study (Y/N)	Suggested sample Size	Data Collection
Case Study	For case studies, the "case" must exist at a specific time and place or over a while (Creswell, 2018). The cases should represent a category of phenomena that provide an analytical frame (Thomas, 2011). Tourist experience does not exist in a frame but is affected by uncertain external stimulation and subjectivity.	Organizations, projects, entity, individuals or events	N	/	Interviews; documents; reports; observations
Narrative	Narrative focuses on the stories told by one or two individuals by collecting their stories as data, giving an account of their personal experiences, and sorting out the meanings of those experiences chronologically (or using life course stages (Creswell, 2018). The emphasis of chronologically ordering or linear time is not applicable to the temporal and random nature of a guimi holiday.	Individual experience & sequence	N	1 to 2	Stories from individuals & documents
Grounded theory	The use of grounded theory is to generate a theory for a process or an action (Creswell, 2018). However, this focus of this study is about the lived experiences of female tourists.	Develop a theory from field data	N	20 to 60	Interviews, then open and axial coding
Ethnography	Ethnographical studies focus on an entire culture-sharing group; it could be a small group but typically large, such as teachers in an entire school, a community of a village (Creswell, 2018). And it requires the researcher to get immersed into the participants' daily lives. However, the participants of this study are friendship dyads who are usually best friends. It is not possible for the researcher to travel with dyads who are close friends to observe their daily life.	Context or culture	N	/	Observations & interviews
Phenomenology	Some common features shared by all phenomenological studies include: emphasizing a phenomenon to be explored; and the collective experience of individuals (Creswell, 2018). To this study, the popularity of guimi holidays in China is a typical social phenomenon, while female friendship dyads share the joint travel experience, which shapes this research as phenomenological.	People who have experienced a phenomenon	Y	5 to 25	Interviews as the primary method; with poems, observations and documents as a supplement

Source: author's modification based on Creswell (2018)

Table 3. 3 Five ways of dyadic interviews

Mode	Strengths and weaknesses	Applicability to this study
Separate interviews	Strengths: -Each partner is free to express their views without forging the dyadic perspective; -Suitable but not limited for exploring sensitive topics such as holiday conflicts; Weaknesses: -Lack of interactions between participants;	Suits the examination of research questions of this study, though the weakness is a lack of interactions between participants. However, the lack of interactions can be an advantage for participants to express their true thoughts about their holiday relationships, power relations, and conflicts.
Separate interviews performed simultaneously by different interviewers	Strengths: - All the advantages mentioned above; -Interviewer not influenced by the previously interviewed informant; -Interviewees feel additional safeguard of secrecy; -Saves time; Weaknesses: - Each interviewer has a different point of view on the phenomenon, with unique strategies for devising the interview scenario; -Additional training and recruitment of interviewers are required;	It is not applicable for this study, because descriptive phenomenology emphasizes "bracketing," which means the interviewer/ researcher should not have preconceptions of the phenomenon.
Joint interview	Strengths: -"By sharing their points of view, the participants expand their coverage of the research topic. By comparing their points of view, the participants differentiate their thoughts on the research topic. ---Both these forms of interaction create possibilities to introduce and talk about ideas that might not have occurred to an individual" (Morgan, et al., 2016, p.110). Weaknesses: -When a silent participant convey a slight but strong hint that their partner's story is inadequate or disputed, researchers may confront a moral problem in the joint interview.	As mentioned in mode 1, joint interviews are not suitable for the exploration of the power relations, interdependence, and conflicts, because participants might hide their thoughts and emotions when friends are present, especially while talking about conflicts.
Both separate and joint interviews with the same participants	Strengths: -The advantages of joint interviews and separate interviews mentioned above; Weaknesses: -The interviewee might get tired and are unwilling to be interviewed twice; -The shift of modes on the same person might influence the quality of the version presented and might impact the benefits derived from both separate and joint interviews;	This approach is applicable, but it is still not the best approach as interviewing twice of the same person in different modes might dilute the explaining effects of the data.
Separate interviews with some informants and joint interviews with others	Strengths: -Advantages of both separate interviews and joint interviews; -Allows for comparisons, cross-checking, and a form of triangulation; Weaknesses: -More participants are required to reach saturation, which induces more costs;	This mode was used in this study because, on the one hand, it could collect necessary data for answering all the research questions of this thesis; on the other hand, participants are not required to be interviewed twice in different modes.

Source: Author's adaptation based on Eisikovits and Koren (2010)

3.3 The phenomenological approach

Phenomenology is a philosophy, an approach, and a methodology through which researchers aim to understand specific meanings and essences of an individual's lived experience. It has increasingly received attention and application in tourism research (Pernecky & Jamal, 2010). Phenomenological studies in tourism and related subjects tend to focus on conscious experience from the subjective or first-person viewpoint (Rakić & Chambers, 2012). Despite the various traditions, approaches, and manners of conducting phenomenological research, two main phenomenological orientations could be observed in tourism research: descriptive phenomenology, following Husserl, and hermeneutic/existential-phenomenology based on the works by Heidegger (Pernecky & Jamal, 2010). The following section discusses the characteristics of these approaches.

3.3.1 Descriptive phenomenology

Descriptive phenomenology was started by Edmund Husserl, who is generally considered the "father" of the original philosophy of phenomenology, though the term "phenomenology" was used in philosophical writings as far back as 1765, according to Kockelmans (1967, as cited in Schmidt, 2005). For Husserl, phenomenology is viewed as an exact science of the consciousness and search for universal truth, which has been called as "bracketing" by emphasizing "the separation of researchers' preconceived notions and biases on the phenomenon of interest, to be able to describe it as it 'appeared' in a participant's lifeworld"

(Kirillova, 2018, p. 3329). The quest for eidetic, essential essences naturally orients Husserl's descriptive phenomenology towards a relative (post)positivism (Pernecky & Jamal, 2010). Descriptive phenomenology enjoys more popularity overall than hermeneutic phenomenology in tourism research, with most of the studies following Giogi's (2009) steps of analyzing phenomenological data (see Table 3.4).

3.3.2 Hermeneutic phenomenology

The positivistic aspect of Husserl's phenomenology was challenged and doubted by Martin Heidegger in the forms of hermeneutic, interpretive, existential phenomenology by emphasizing thematic meanings or general structures, rather than universal eidetic ones (Pernecky & Jamal, 2010). Heidegger believed that personal background and cultural traditions unavoidably affect the explanations of experience. As a result, Heidegger posited that "bracketing" or phenomenological reduction that proposed by Husserl is almost unachievable (Kirillova, 2018). Furthermore, he suggested that context, language, and interpretations are how researchers and participants co-construct the interpretations of "lived experiences," and thus play a significant role in the activity of accomplishing the explanation (van Manen, 2016). Hermeneutic phenomenology premises that each individual's interpretations of a given phenomenon are distinctive and that generalizations cannot be made (van Manen, 1990). It is not the purpose of this study to distinguish and differentiate descriptive and interpretive phenomenology in

detail, as elaborated by several researchers (Kirillova, 2018; Sloan & Bowe, 2014), but researchers must consider the differences when using phenomenology as the methodology.

3.3.3 The existential-phenomenological approach

Based on the above-mentioned characteristics, Heidegger's phenomenology aims explicitly at discovering the meaning of being without reduction or 'bracketing.' In contrast, Husserl's phenomenology emphasizes phenomenological reduction or 'bracketing' in terms of suspending all beliefs about the phenomena under investigation to acquire knowledge about the essences of manifestations of consciousness (Goolaup & Solér, 2018). Heidegger's phenomenology is of a constructivist nature, whereas Pernecky and Jamal (2010) suggested that Husserl's descriptive phenomenology is relatively in the nature of (post)positivist (Kirillova, 2018). This obvious distinction seems to be problematic when researchers aim to explore both a lived experience and the associated meanings. Researchers suggest a third approach, the existential-phenomenology, which is a merger of these two orientations. Existential phenomenology is based on Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology with the incorporation of the philosophy of existentialism.

The central question of existentialism is, "What is it to exist, or to be human?" The phenomenological conception related to the existential lens is, "What is the nature of subjective experience?" Existentialists emphasize the prominence of

sociality (Zahavi, 2012) and posit that human existence can be interpreted by interpersonal encounters (Buber, 1923; Sartre, 1943, 1989 as cited in Kirillova, 2018). As a research method, existential phenomenology denotes "a merger of existentialism as a philosophy and the method of phenomenology." Meanwhile, the core idea of existential phenomenology is intentionality, which implies that "humans live (exist) in relation to a world, other persons, and objects; that is, as humans we exist and are constructed by our relations with others" (Olivares, Peterson & Hess, 2007, p. 78). As a unique form of social relations, friendship establishes "a particular union among individual human beings, which allows them to overcome diverse boundaries between individual subjects" (Dreher, 2009, p. 401), which is the foundation of a guimi holiday. As a result, the existential-phenomenological approach in this study postulates that 'traveling with' is equal to or even more critical than 'traveling to or from' (Larsen & Jenssen, 2004).

Existential phenomenology, developed initially in psychology, is well established in consumer research but is relatively new to tourism research (Goolaup, Solér & Nunkoo, 2018). Some of the examples include the studies by Wassler and Kirillova's (2019) on local gaze, Goolaup et al. (2018) on travelers' extraordinary food experience, and Kirillova, Gilmetdinova, and Lehto (2014) study on hosts' interpretation of hospitality across religions. The existential phenomenology approach is appraised and applied in this study due to the following considerations. In primis, existential phenomenology emphasizes

human connectedness and sociality, by which one of the aims of this study is to understand how friendship dynamics shape the joint travel experience of the guimi holiday. Additionally, existential phenomenology embraces both Husserl's phenomenology (based on the realist ontology) and Heidegger's phenomenology (based on a relativist ontology), which provides an overarching framework to enable a holistic understanding of the guimi holiday experience at both the individual level and group levels. In practice, a conceptually close study to the current research was the research by Kirillova and Wassler (2019) on local gaze. They applied existential phenomenology by synthesizing Husserl's phenomenology and Heidegger's phenomenology into the context of the host-guest relationship in tourism. Given the many tourism studies of the host-guest relationship, this research also took the existential-phenomenological approach, but in the context of the tourist-tourist friend dyadic relationship during female joint friendship travel with the implication of "the girlfriend gaze" (Winch, 2013a, p. 8). To gain a comprehensive view of how phenomenology has been employed in tourism research, a review was conducted as described in the following section.

3.3.4 The application of phenomenology in tourism research

Articles that use phenomenology as a research method (excluding conceptual articles) published from the year 2010 to present have been reviewed to identify research gaps, conceptualize research questions as well as to provide guidance for the research methods of this study. The terms "phenomenology" and

"tourism" or "travel", "phenomenology", and "hospitality" or "hotel" were used in the research platform of the main collection of the Web of Science. Journal articles that contained the above key terms in the abstract, title, and/or keywords were extracted. The year 2010 was selected as the start date for the search in order to find contemporary hospitality and tourism studies that used phenomenology as a research method (Pernecky & Jamal, 2010). Additional searches were carried out using Google Scholar and looking through the reference lists of selected papers to ensure key contributions were not missed. After retrieving the articles, the author further read the abstracts to confirm whether all the papers were phenomenological studies or not. A total of 30 papers were kept after this selection. Then the author conducted a thorough reading of the methodology parts of each of the 30 papers. Studies that provided no clear indications or were misconstrued about the type of phenomenological approach in the aforementioned journals were excluded from further review, as the ambiguity of fundamental tenets of phenomenology often leads to the misuse of such research methods, as has been elaborated by Kirillova (2018), Pernecky and Jamal (2010) and Szarycz (2009). A total of 16 articles were selected, and these are presented in Table 3.4.

Give the notion that phenomenology can be applied to examine those seemingly trivial and ordinary experiences as long as the researcher looks at it phenomenologically (Kirillova, 2018), the topic areas of phenomenological research in tourism studies become wide-ranging. For example, Stierand and

Dörfler (2012) used Husserlian phenomenology to investigate the essence of creativity and innovation in haute cuisine. Similarly, Shim and Santos (2014) applied Husserlian phenomenology to understand the experiences and meanings of tourists' attributions of their visits to the shopping malls in Seoul. Malone, McCabe and Smith (2014) took Heideggerian phenomenology as their philosophical stance with interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) as the method of data analysis to examine the role of emotion in the process of tourists' ethical choice. In a similar vein, to understand the complexity of agritourism on family farms, Ainley and Kline (2014) adopted the Heideggerian phenomenology approach with IPA as the data analysis method. Kirillova et al. (2014) explored the role of religion in the construction of the meaning of hospitality by the hosts. Her study was also based on the philosophy of Heideggerian phenomenology with van Mannen's (1990) method. Likewise, Mair and Frew (2018) examined the meanings of attending conferences for female academics by taking Heideggerian phenomenology as the philosophical lens with duo-ethnography as the data collection method.

Similarly, using Heideggerian phenomenology as the methodology, Chen (2017) examined how rural tourism was developed in a traditional Chinese agricultural village under *guanxi* lens. St-James, Darveau and Fortin (2018) investigated the role of film in tourist experience while Höckert, Lüthje, Ilola and Stewart (2018) studied the moral sensibility of tourists' photographing local people in tourist destinations. Positioning the inquiry as descriptively phenomenological,

Wassler and Schuckert (2017) explored the essence of the lived experience of traveling to North Korea by using the descriptive analysis mentioned by Giorgi (2009).

Based on the ontological and epistemological assumptions of existential-phenomenology, Kirillova, Lehto and Cai (2017) investigated the factors that lead to a transformative experience. Similarly, Podoshen et al. (2018) used existential phenomenology to examine the essences of a dark tourism experience of being closer to death. In the same vein, to explore the extraordinary experience of food tourists, Goolaup et al. (2018) used existential phenomenology as the philosophical stance with van Manen's (1990) iterative (whole-part-whole) method for data analysis. To understand tourists' experience of being gazed upon by residents, Wassler and Kirillova (2019) took the existential-phenomenological approach. They collected thirty experiences from ten participants, while the descriptive analysis followed the steps by Giorgi (2009), and the hermeneutic analysis followed van Manen's (1990) iterative (whole-part-whole) method.

However, despite the various topic areas, there have been several criticisms about the rigor of using phenomenology in the existing tourism and hospitality studies (Kirillova, 2018; Pernecky & Jamal, 2010; Szarycz, 2009). For example, Berdychevsky and Gibson's (2015) phenomenological study on young women's sexual risk-taking in tourism was questioned by Kirillova (2018) for neglecting the methodological diversity of phenomenology.

Likewise, Laing and Frost (2017) posited their research inquiry as hermeneutical phenomenology, but in practice, they used descriptive phenomenology. Golubovskaya, Robinson and Solnet (2017) took the Husserlian descriptive phenomenology as the philosophical stance, but in fact, they tried to interpret hospitality industry frontline employees' understandings about hospitality instead of just describing the phenomenon (see Kirillova, 2018 for more examples).

Beyond the ambiguity of the philosophical stance and methods in the use of phenomenology, the application of phenomenology into the explorations of the diverse lived experience of female tourists is still scant despite the study by Berdychevsky and Gibson (2015b). As such, this study aims to apply phenomenology to examine women's lived experiences of traveling with their best same-sex friends in the context of China.

Table 3. 4 Selected literature of phenomenological studies in tourism

Author (year)	Research questions and findings	Phenomenology as methodology	Theory	Methods of data collection	Sampling strategy	Sample size	Data analysis method
Stierand & Dörfler (2012)	*What is the lived experience of creativity and innovation in haute cuisine?* The research presented an empirical example of a phenomenological study by examining the nature of creativity in haute cuisine settings.	Husserlian phenomenology	/	In- depth unstructured interviews and field notes	Purposive sampling	18	Reduction procedure by Giorgi (1997)
Malone, McCabe & Smith (2014)	*How hedonism is experienced and the links between hedonic experiences and intentions for future ethical behavior?* The results show that emotional experiences are a powerful driving force for consumers' ethical choice, which could be an alternative form of hedonism.	Heideggerian phenomenology		Semi-structured interview	Purposive sampling	13	The steps of IPA by Smith et al. (2009)
Ainley & Kline (2014)	*What is currently understood about why farm families in North America are embracing agritourism?* The results show that farmers and family members taking part in this study view agritourism as a transitional process, suggesting that farm families should be supported throughout the process while business skills and capacities are built up over time.	Heideggerian phenomenology	/	Interviews	/	17	The steps of IPA by Smith et al. (2009)
Kirillova, Gilmetdinova, & Lehto (2014)	*How does religion influence the construction of the meaning of hospitality and its enactment by various religious groups?* Findings reveal that interpretation of hospitality and hospitable behavior in private and public	Heideggerian phenomenology	/	Semi-structured interviews	Snowball sampling;	30	Following Van Manen (1990)'s iterative (whole-part-whole) method

	domains varies according to religious values, while commercial hospitality, somewhat influenced by religion, is mostly understood as a money-making venture.						
Shim & Santos (2014)	To understand the experiences and meanings that tourists ascribe to their visits to shopping malls in Seoul, Korea. Findings show that malls can be understood as a negotiated reality between the forces that create placelessness and those that enhance the appeal of malls.	Husserlian phenomenology	/	Semi-structured interviews	Purposive sampling	26	Reduction procedure by Giorgi (1997) and thematic description by Hycner (1985)
Berdychevsky & Gibson (2015)	*What constitutes sexual risk-taking in tourism and its potential consequences from young women's perspective?* The findings show that women's sexual risk-taking in tourism is a multidimensional phenomenon. Specifically, the physical and cultural dimensions relate to the geography of fear and sexual terrorism. The social dimension is associated with sexual double standards as a form of control while the emotional and mental dimensions are interwoven with internalized self-surveillance.	Husserlian phenomenology	/	Semi-structured interviews	Snowball sampling	15	Follow the steps by Moustakas (1994), starting with epoche and transcendental-phenomenological reduction, proceeding to imaginative variation, and concluding with synthesis.
Laing & Frost (2017)	*What is the lived experience of women traveling in Italy in non-fiction travel books?* Findings show that eudaimonia and hedonic are important components of well-being, and the overall narratives constructed by the writers as transformative experiences are associated with a new identity.	Heideggerian phenomenology	/	Nine travel texts were written by women about Italy	/	/	Thematic analysis focusing on the narrative content (van Manen, 1997)

Golubovskaya, Robinson & Solnet (2017)	*How do hospitality frontline workers interpret hospitality?* The findings indicate that most of the frontline hotel employees feel they struggle to express their understanding and perceptions of the hospitality construct in Australia.	Heideggerian phenomenology	/	Dual-stage semi-structured interviews with open questions	Purposive sampling	22	Conventional content analysis
Wassler & Schuckert (2017)	*What is the essence of the lived experience of traveling to North Korea?* The findings show that the essence of the lived North Korea travel experience comprises dimensions of trepidation, self-regulation, doubt, and catharsis.	Husserlian phenomenology	/	Semi-structured interviews	Snowball sampling	8	Descriptive analysis following the steps by Giorgi (2009)
Kirillova, Lehto & Cai (2017)	*What is the essence of a transformative experience during travel and its enduring consequences via existential lenses?* The study presents nine existential themes related to a transformative experience in chronological order.	Heideggerian existential-phenomenology	/	Semi-structured interviews	Purposive and snowball sampling	10	Descriptive phenomenology following the steps mentioned by Giorgi (2009)
Mair & Frew (2018)	*What does it mean to attend an association conference for female academics?* Findings show that the importance of networking, personal and professional development opportunities, the conference venue, and the social program are the main motivational factors.	Heideggerian phenomenology		Duo-ethnographic approach; an unstructured and open interview	/	2	Van Manen (1990) approach
Podoshen et al. (2018)	*What are the essences of a dark tourism experience whereby there exists a feeling of being closer to death?* Findings show that transitory space acts as an important moment in the dark tourism experience, and there is a desire for experiencing abjection in a ritual-like context.	Heideggerian existential-phenomenology	Attribution theory	Participant observation; Unstructured or semi-structured interviews	Participant observation as a means of data gathering	30	Steps suggested by Hycner (1999)

Goolaup, Solér & Nunkoo (2018)	*What dimensions of surprise are contained in the extraordinary food experiences of food tourists?* Findings show that elements of surprise in extraordinary food experiences were connected to tourists' food cultural capital. Food tourists who possessed a high level of cultural capital were surprised by the simplicity or complexity of the experience, while those possessing a low level of cultural capital were surprised by the genuineness of the experience.	Heideggerian existential-phenomenology	Cultural capital	Semi-structured interviews	Purposive sampling	16	Following Van Manen (1990)'s iterative (whole-part-whole) method
St-James, Darveau & Fortin (2018)	*How consumers use film in their overall experience?* Findings expand the understanding of the relationship between film and tourist experiences by documenting instances of accidental film tourism wherein film plays an impromptu, meaningful role in tourist experiences	Heideggerian phenomenology	Appropriation theory	Semi-structured interviews	Snowball sampling (Researchers' networks)	13	Thompson's (1997) hermeneutically grounded framework for interpreting consumer stories
Höckert, Lüthje, Ilola, & Stewart (2018)	*How tourists photograph local people in tourist destinations?* Encountering ''the face of the other' is a disruptive experience that demands moral sensibility and calls for heightened respect and care towards the other	Heideggerian phenomenology		Writings	Recruiting participants through newspapers with guiding questions	25 written accounts	Following Van Manen (1990)'s iterative (whole-part-whole) method
Wassler & Kirillova (2019)	*How the local gaze is empirically lived by tourists?* Findings show that tourists experience local gaze as positivity, discrimination, alienation, and self-consciousness. Local gaze as a whole means connection to tourists.	Heideggerian existential-phenomenology	Foucault's (1963/ 1973) concept of the medical gaze,	Semi-structured interviews	Experience-based purposive sampling	30 experiences collected from interviews with 10 participants	Descriptive analysis by following the four steps of Giorgi (2009) and hermeneutic analysis by following Van Manen (1990)'s iterative (whole-part-whole) method

3.4 Research strategy: Dyadic interviews

Interviews are the primary research method of phenomenological study (see Table 3.3), and they are usually termed as "phenomenological interviews" or "experience-based interviews" (Wassler & Kirillova, 2019). An interview can "provide a unique opportunity to uncover rich and complex information from an individual" (Cavana, Delahaye & Sekaran, 2001, p. 138). Various types of interviews exist, including open-ended, structured, semi-structured, face-to-face, one-on-one, group interviews, telephonic, and computer-assisted. In tourism and hospitality studies, individual semi-structured interviews are popular. However, to achieve the research purposes of this study, dyadic interviews and dyadic data analysis were conducted because the topic under investigation is an experience shared by both parties of a friendship dyad.

Dyadic interviews are an ongoing, developing methodological approach (Eisikovits & Koren, 2010). Dyadic interviews and analysis are well established and enjoy a long history of use in family studies to examine spouses or partners or parents-children (see Reczek, 2014 for a review). Such interviews have also been used to study friendship pairs, especially adolescents (e.g., see Borland & Amos, 2009, for example). However, dyadic interviews are relatively seldom used in tourism studies, although most tourist experiences are shared with significant others, which provides abundant space for further use and development of the method. With joint

interviews and separate interviews as the two basic forms, “dyadic interviews can be conducted separately, jointly, or in a combination with each other” (Caldwell, 2014, p. 496).

A joint interview means the researcher gathers data through a conversation between only two people simultaneously (Morgan, Eliot, Lowe & Gorman, 2016). However, the differences between joint interviews and focus groups include the following. First, a joint interview is a two-person discussion, whereas the focus group refers to a group discussion. Second, for joint interviews, the advantage lies in the profundity and details of each person’s views relating to the experience on the subject. For focus groups, the advantage is hearing a larger number of people share and compare their different views (Morgan et al., 2016). Third, joint interviews could lead to a particularly lively dialogue when participants have shared travel experiences and have common feelings in a subject that could encourage them to initiate discussions. It also contributes to the advantages of joint interviews in terms of a relaxed atmosphere, because managing a two-person conversation usually takes less effort than managing multi-participant discussions (Morgan et al., 2016).

There are misunderstandings regarding individual and separate interviews. Although both individual and separate interviews are conducted in the form of one researcher and one participant, separate interviews are distinguished from individual interviews in several ways. Individual interviews consider

each participant alone, and individual participants do not belong to a group of people. A separate interview means conducting interviews separately with both parties who are closely related to each other. Specifically, separate interviews are regarded as dyadic interviews mainly because "“the unit of study is a dyad with a joint relationship and history, the partner is virtually present in the interview space, even though the interviews are conducted individually and separately” (Eisikovits & Koren, 2010, p. 1644). As a result, even conducting interviews separately, the interviewees might also describe the experience in the “we” perspective more often than the “I” perspective.

In this study, the separate dyadic semi-structured interviews were conducted in the form of semi-structured to allow the researcher to intervene, asking respondents to make further clarifications or to broaden the interesting areas (Arksey & Knight, 1999). Separate interviews allow the researcher to focus on friendship pairs as the unit of data analysis, whereby the researcher studies both parties’ distinct pespectives and understandings, while considering the context of their joint travel to understand the essence of their travel experiences, which is in keeping with the phenomenological tradition. Further, because the environment and situations of conducting interviews play a crucial role in data collection, in this respect, the researcher approached nine participants after office/school hours and endeavored to choose places where they felt comfortable for interviews. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the other interviews were conducted online. Participants were guaranteed

privacy and confidentiality for all the interview materials to allow them to share their views and experiences of the guimi holiday more freely.

3.5 Data collection

3.5.1 Sampling and recruitment of participants

This study applied experience-based snowball sampling and criterion sampling strategies. To address the diversity of the participants, various contact means were used to identify Chinese females who had guimi holiday experiences and to invite them to participate in this study. Participant referrals were applied, namely, asking existing participants to nominate their friends and other appropriate participants and inform the researcher (Creswell, 2018). All participants must have met the established criteria before being included in this research.

The criteria included: First, participants should be individuals whom the author did not know personally. Second, participants must be Chinese females between the ages of 18 and 40 years old. This age group is chosen because, first, women of this age group are the driving force for the guimi tourism market (Zhihuilvyou, 2016).–Third, participants must have had a holiday experience with the nominated guimi during the past year. Fourth, participants must refer to each other as guimi or best friend and must complete a pre-interview screening form in order to assess the level of closeness and their friendship quality (see Appendix C). Moreover,

participants were expected to have at least a university degree and to be well-traveled with their best friends.

The pre-interview screening form on best friendship quality, which has been frequently used and recommended in the friendship related literature, was based on Bagwell et al. (2005), Furman and Buhrmester (1992), and Camirand and Poulin (2019). The original best friendship quality form has five main components: intimacy, emotional support, approval, companionship, and satisfaction, as suggested by Bagwell et al. (2005) and Furman and Buhrmester (1992). The specific items under each component were derived from the Network of Relationship Inventory-Relationship Qualities Version by Buhrmester and Furman (2008). A shortened version of the original scales was employed in this study for screening purposes only, as suggested by Camirand and Poulin (2019). Specifically, eight items were used to measure friendship quality (see Appendix C). Respondents were asked to rate how much each item occurred in each relationship using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1, very little or none of the time, to 5, most of the time or always. Scale scores were calculated by averaging the items. Only respondent scores that are over 3.5 were given additional consideration in the interview process because a score of 3.5 meets the minimum qualifications of being a close friend and could indicate the desired competencies. Finally, participants must be sufficiently articulate to function well in an open-ended interview setting. Overall, the goal was to identify

pairs of close female friends that the author did not personally know who were willing to spend time and effort to be involved in this study.

With regard to the sample size, in phenomenology, the sampling unit and the unit of analysis are experiences instead of the number of participants (Englander, 2012). A total of 25 friendship pairs were interviewed. Thus the final sample size comprised 50 women with relevant domestic and international guimi travel experiences. This sample is justified in a qualitative inquiry because the focus is on meaning and context rather than generalization (Jones et al., 2013). The demographic details of the 46 participants are presented in Table 4.1 in Chapter 4.

3.5.2 Data collection process

The data were collected from December 2019 to June 2020. The potential participants were sourced using various WeChat public accounts. Each potential participant was given a copy of a pre-interview screening form to further ensure participants' eligibility. In the pre-interview screening form, potential participants were asked to indicate their own demographics (e.g., age, marital status, education, and the number of sisters or brothers), the name of their friend, the length of their friendship, and to indicate the friendship quality. As aforementioned, only those with high friendship quality (the score is over 3.5) were recruited for further interviews. A total of 60 women completed the pre-interview screen form consisting of eight items (a =.839) while 10 participants were removed due to the low scores.

The selected participants were given a copy of the consent form and informed that if they had questions or concerns at any point, they could contact the researcher through the information on the form (see Appendices A and B for a copy of the information sheet and consent form). Participants were informed that the interviews would be audio-taped. The resulting group comprised 25 female close friendship pairs. Nine interviews were conducted face-to-face between December 2019 and January 2020 in the homes of the participants. Each interview lasted for 30 to 90 minutes. This setup is consistent with the spirit of phenomenological research, which values engaging participants in a natural setting (Boss, Dahl, & Kaplan, 1996). However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, the later interviews were conducted online using either WeChat or Skype. During each interview, participants were encouraged to define "guimi" in their own terms.

Further, they were asked to share a photo taken with their guimis. The photo must have been taken during a trip in order to confirm they had taken a guimi trip and to facilitate the interviews. The specific details of each guimi friendship were asked using interview questions such as how long the friendship has lasted, where they met, how often they meet, and what they did, what they talked about, the significance of each friendship over time in their lives, comparison to other relationships (e.g., family), and specific events or turning points in the friendship. Ethical approval was granted

through the researcher's university research ethics committee. Pseudonyms are used to protect participants' identities.

Depending on the purpose, dyadic interviews may be conducted separately, jointly, or as a combination of the two. Eisikovits and Koren (2010) differentiated five modes of dyadic interviews. The first mode is joint interviews with both members of a dyad. The second mode is separate interviews with each member by one interviewer at different times. The third mode is separate interviews by two interviewers simultaneously. The fourth mode is incorporating separate and joint interviews with the same participating dyads. Finally, the fifth mode is separate interviews with some dyads and joint interviews with other dyads within the same study. The benefits, drawbacks, and applicability of this study are presented in Table 3.3.

This study encompasses the epistemological, ontological, and methodological positions of Husserlian and Heideggerian phenomenology. Specifically, the first research question of this study is based on Husserl's phenomenology, whereas the second research question, which aims to understand the underlying meanings are best addressed by the hermeneutic phenomenology (Wassler & Kirillova, 2019). The challenges of using two contrasting phenomenological orientations in one study should be acknowledged. The study by Wassler and Kirillova (2019) provided an example of employing both orientations in tourism research. This study followed the steps mentioned by Wassler and Kirillova (2019) to design the

research into two phases with different data collection methods and analysis. As Wassler and Kirillova (2019, p.119) mentioned the following: *"Two distinct methodologies need to be distinguished regarding the approaches to interview the participants and data analysis. For instance, the practice of bracketing is relevant in descriptive (Husserlian) phenomenology but cannot be employed under the hermeneutic (Heideggerian phenomenology) principles. On the other hand, the final phenomenological account, presented as research findings, should read as a coherent analysis and reconcile results from both approaches."*

Considering this study's research questions and following the steps of employing Husserlian and Heideggerian phenomenology simultaneously by Wassler and Kirillova (2019), the first mode of separate interviews with both parties was used to collect dyadic data in this study (see Table 3.3). The rationale for interviewing the friendship dyads separately is two-fold. First, it enables both sides to provide feedback from their respective perspectives, "to capture the individual within the dyad, without forgoing the dyadic perspective" (Eisikovits & Koren, 2010, p. 1643). Second, it allows them to be free and open to discuss some sensitive unhappy issues (such as holiday conflicts, interpersonal tensions, power, etc.) if they had any, and to do so without being influenced by the counterpart's negative reaction, interaction, or evaluation. By separately interviewing both parties, the goal is to discern and depict a complete version of the lived guimi holiday experience.

As mentioned above, data were collected through separate dyadic interviews. In the descriptive phase, the participants were asked to recall the most recent travel with their best female friend, who was nominated in the pre-interview form. The participants were asked to depict the scene (what, when, and where) and their thoughts and feelings on each of the recalled experiences. Then, in the hermeneutic phase, the researcher and the participants jointly explored this experience and explained what it means to the participant. These interviews were recorded verbatim and translated into English (when) necessary for analysis. Each interview used two levels of analysis (including descriptive and hermeneutic). The final dataset consisted of 112,729 words, covering 187 single-spaced pages in 12-point font size transcribed text in Chinese.

3.6 Data analysis procedures

As aforementioned, the data analysis of this study has two phases. In Phase 1, the data analysis followed the four steps elaborated by Giorgi (2009) (see Table 3.6). The researcher kept the phenomenological spirit of "bracketing" in mind during the data analysis process, which was ensured in three ways. First, the literature review was not consulted again after the confirmation until writing the findings on Research Question 1. Second, the researcher did not take any guimi holidays until finishing writing on the findings of Research Question 1 to bracket herself from any presumptions. Third, the researcher

established a process of self-reflection to bracket her own guimi holiday experiences so as to take a new perspective on the participants' stories.

Further, the researcher noted down her experiences of the phenomenon and clarified her assumptions and bias before starting the fieldwork. The researcher also made notes to document the research process, including how decisions were made with regard to data analysis. These data and notes are available upon request.

Table 3. 5 Descriptive phenomenological data analysis by Giorgi (2009)

Step	Description
1	Read and re-read all the transcripts to get a sense of the whole.
2	Determine the meaning units that contain the description of each phenomenon by returning to each transcript and marking the place where significant shifts of meanings have been identified.
3	Transform all the meaning units into expressions that are psychologically sensitive.
4	Based on all the essential transformed meaning units that are common across all transcripts to write out/graph a general structure of an experience.

Source: Giorgi (2009)

Specifically, the data analysis was conducted in the following ways. First, to obtain a brief idea of the data, the researcher listened to all the audios again to become familiar with the data before the transcription. The researcher transcribed 20 audio recordings by herself. To speed up the data analysis process, a proficient contractor in both Chinese and English was contacted to

help with the remaining transcriptions. Each transcript generated about 2,500 words on average. Second, after finishing all of the transcriptions, the researcher listened to the audio recordings again to check the quality of the transcripts and ensure the consistency between the audio recordings and the transcripts.

In the third step, the researcher reread each transcript to develop a better understanding of the description and make sense of it. Fourth, each transcript was reread again by the researcher with the purpose of determining the meaning units that describe the guimi travel experience. The determination of the meaning units in phenomenology is somewhat different from the traditional forms of coding that have frequently been used in qualitative studies, as the researcher must consider the specific phenomenon of the guimi holiday experience under investigation. Moerer-Urdahl and Creswell (2004) described this process as to extract significant statements.

Initially, the researcher used NVivo to extract the statements and analyzed these materials for all the transcripts. She found NVivo has some merits, but it also produced somewhat mechanistic representations instead of a deeply embodied crafting. This problem was also pointed out by Vagle (2018). Therefore, the researcher also analyzed the materials manually. An Excel spreadsheet was created to make notes of the meaning units arising from each of the transcripts and the significant statements. The meaning units and the significant statements were translated from Chinese into English.

Fifth, the collected meaning units were transformed into phenomenologically sensitive descriptions (Giorgi, 2009). During the transformation process, the researcher checked the similarities and differences among the extracted meaning units in order to identify a certain level of generalizability that is adequate to describe an experience. Giorgi (2009) opined that, at this stage, the researcher should scrutinize the extracted statements to comprehend what was meant by the participants in expressing themselves in this way and then transform those meaning units from first-person to third-person accounts. This process ensures the researcher can derive phenomenological statements in a general and objective way, and can be neutral with all the participants. All the collected meaning units and their associated transformations were grouped in an Excel spreadsheet as the final basis for outlining the essence of the guimi holiday experiences.

Sixth, the variations of the meanings units and the transformations were scrutinized jointly by both the researcher and a service contractor who had transcribed the audio recordings and was familiar with the participants' narratives in this study. The scrutinization is to ensure the salient structure of the experience under investigation. If a salient structure is not achieved, it means that a certain component is unnecessary, thus, it should be eliminated from the essence. However, Giorgi (2009) also mentioned that phenomenologists must recognize that the essence of a phenomenon is always open and can be explored and expanded in further studies. The

grouping of meaning units and the process of transforming significant statements are also based on the intuition of the researcher(s). Thus, researchers should never regard these meaning units as the only possible ones, but as a measure of central tendency in statistics (Giorgi, 2009).

Last but not least, the essential themes were named by the researcher after the determination of the meaning units. This was achieved by insisting on the accurate expressions used by the participants in the interviews, re-reading all the transcripts, and carefully checking synonyms. Moreover, the identified themes were then sent back by WeChat to all the respondents for verification and confirmation. The final used term for the identified themes was established in agreement with a dictionary and the researcher's friend, who is a native English speaker in agreement. Thus, the findings of the lived experience of guimi holidays are presented in Section 4.3. The data analysis also benefited from the researcher's and her friend's language proficiency in Chinese and English. An example of the descriptive phenomenological data analysis of the transcript excerpt is shown in Table 3.6. For other examples, please see Appendices F and G.

Table 3. 6 Example of descriptive phenomenological data analysis of transcript excerpt

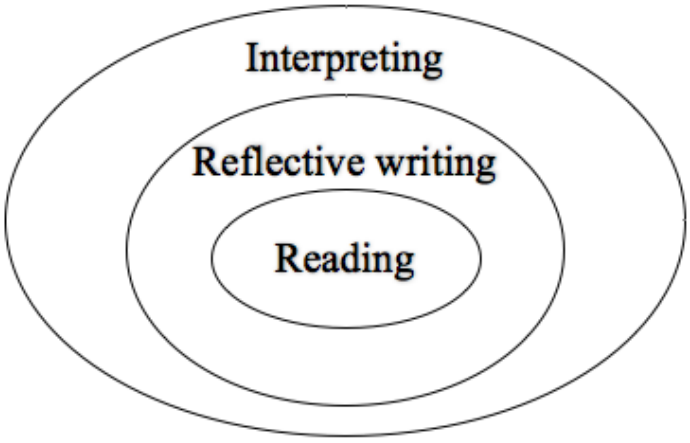
Meaning unit	Transformation	Phenomenologically sensitive expression
When I went out with her, I feel I was flying in the sky. Everything that happens on the earth has nothing to do with me. They were all left behind. And when you are flying "in the	P19-Xing states that she felt a sense of escapism and a feeling of freedom when she left home and took the trip with her guimi.	P19-Xing reports feelings of escapism and freedom when she took the trip with her guimi.

sky," you entered into your world, no one can restrain you.		
It is just like we entered into our little world. No one pays attention to us and looks after us. Ignore boyfriend's opinion, and do not care about our family, just do what we want to do.	P1-Alin states that she entered into a world that can be herself without the disturbance from her boyfriend and family.	P1-Alin reports feelings of freedom and a sense of escaping from family and boyfriend.
A guimi holiday can make me escape from the real-life of work and family. No parents, no boss, and only your guimi who knows you so well stay with you. It is such kind of unrestrained.	P2-Qian states that she can escape from work and family by taking a guimi holiday, and	P2-Qian reports feelings of escaping from real life and a sense of freedom when with her guimi than others.

In the second phase, the data regarding Research Question 2, the meanings of the guimi holiday experiences; and Research Question 3, the group dynamics of interdependence, were analyzed using van Manen's (1997) iterative (whole-part-whole) method. It should be noted that van Manen (1997) only provided guidelines for conducting hermeneutic research, as he stressed that the method of hermeneutic phenomenology is "the theory of unique," which means there is no fixed method. This notion allows researchers to select or develop suitable research methods themselves. Thus, the bias of the researcher cannot be eliminated (Krillova et al., 2014). Nevertheless, if the researcher is loyal to his or her philosophical roots, considers the hermeneutic cycle in mind, and discloses and discusses the potential bias in a reflexive way, then hermeneutic phenomenology is a rigorous research methodology (Pernecky & Jamal, 2010).

The hermeneutic cycle (as illustrated in Figure 3.1) has been widely referred to by researchers when conducting hermeneutic phenomenological data analysis (Pernecky & Jamal, 2010; Sloan & Bowe, 2014; Wassler & Kirillova, 2019). The cycle, which is regarded as a rigorous process, includes reading, reflective writing, and interpretation (Laverty, 2003). Specifically, the hermeneutic cycle involves a series of dynamic research activities that are inseparable (van Manen, 1997), by which Kafle (2011, p. 191) described this as six research activities: "commitment to an abiding concern, oriented stance toward the question, investigating the experience as it is lived, describing the phenomenon through writing and rewriting, and consideration of parts and whole."

Figure 3. 1 Hermeneutic cycle



Source: Kafle (2011)

Considering the above-mentioned hermeneutic cycle and the six research activities, the following data analysis steps were applied in this study. First, the transcripts were holistically read and reread to capture the fundamental meaning

or principal significance of the interview. Second, the researcher employed a selective reading approach to examine the aspects or qualities of the phenomenon, which were written as essential themes. The final result is based on a continuous comparison of the themes. Third, the author reflected on the essential themes and their variations of the themes and finally balanced the writings and the research by considering the parts and the whole.

3.7 Trustworthiness and research evaluation

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2008), the trustworthiness of quantitative studies can be estimated via reliability and validity, while qualitative research should be evaluated by credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Beyond 'bracketing' as required by phenomenological study, the following four criteria were used in this study to ensure the trustworthiness as well as for research evaluation.

Credibility

For qualitative researchers, credibility refers to whether the findings adequately and credibly represent the phenomenological experiences of participants. Credibility can be improved by using various verification techniques, such as "prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, referential analysis, member checks and so on" (Morse, 2015, p. 1212). Among those, triangulation and member checking are the most popular methods that have been widely used to ensure credibility in qualitative studies in general

(Denzin & Lincoln, 2008) and tourism studies in particular (Decrop, 1999). In this study, the researcher gave each participant a copy of the transcript of the interview with a summary of what the researcher has written of the tone and major themes. The researcher let the participants know that accurately expressing their opinions is important for the study so that they can elaborate, clarify, or make corrections in ways they think are appropriate. For this study, the method of dyadic interviews allows for comparisons and cross-checking of the data, which could also be a way for triangulation to increase the trustworthiness.

Transferability

Transferability in qualitative research refers to whether the research findings of a study are generalizable. There is a difference between quantitative generalizations (usual statements about a specific group of people) and qualitative generalization (usually more about the nature of a process) (Maxwell & Chmiel, 2014). Though generally speaking, the transferability of phenomenological study is relatively limited in comparison with other types of research. However, Wassler and Kirillova (2019) argue that it is the lived experiences that could be generalized rather than the number of people. In addition, when focusing on clarifying a process or a certain type of travel experience, rather than making generalizations among a number of people, transferability can be supported by providing rich, descriptive data of the lived experiences of a guimi holiday by the female friendship dyads.

Dependability

Dependability means that researchers should take account of any changes in research related to participants and any modifications to the design in the process of the research (Rallis & Rossman, 2009). Dependability will be partially addressed through member checks. After interviewing participants, they will be given a separate chance to correct or clarify their responses. Lincoln and Guba (1985) posit that establishing credibility is sufficient to establish reliability because if a study is not reliable, it is not dependable as well (as cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

Confirmability

Confirmability means that on the one hand, researchers should demonstrate that findings emerge from the data and not their predispositions, while on the other hand, researchers should fully disclose the data they interpreted, or at least make them available (Rallis & Rossman, 2009). Triangulation has been used in this study to ensure confirmability by recruiting both an external auditor and an internal auditor. The external auditor is an independent researcher who is an English native speaker with fluent Chinese, while the internal auditor is a Chinese native speaker who has a Ph.D. degree with good English language proficiency. Both auditors are experienced, qualitative researchers. Each of them was given transcribed interviews to read and analyze independently, and each provided feedback about the themes. We

compared and contrasted our findings. Both the similarities and differences have been incorporated into the findings.

3.8 Researcher's role

Unlike other research traditions that consider researchers to be sources of dilution or contamination, existential-phenomenological researchers are an essential part of the research they conduct (Pernecky & Jamal, 2010). Phenomenological interviews are designed to elicit meaningful conversations, and the role of researchers is to help guide, support, and encourage meaning-making through an active, "improvisational, yet focused presence" (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p. 77). As a result, the researcher must decide how to use his or her existence and acknowledge the inevitable prejudice, rather than trying to eliminate it completely (Harvey, 2007).

An additional supposition of phenomenology is that participants are the experts on their own experiences (Wassler & Kirillova, 2019). Based on this premise, the author continually sought measures to minimize the hierarchy between the researcher and participants and to empower the view that participants are experts. The author started with an open, curious conversational agenda to foster an exchange to the extent that the researcher could learn the participants' views of their own experiences concerning a guimi holiday. The author explained to the participants that she wants to learn what they thought was important and interesting about this guimi holiday experience.

Again, it should be acknowledged that the researcher of this study is a female Chinese who entered into this field with her assumptions. Therefore, it must be noted that the author approached this topic initially through the lenses of her own experience as a Chinese woman and a guimi to her friends. The author kept a reflective journal and aimed to differentiate her presuppositions from participants' opinions. It is expected that this study could generate rich knowledge and a new understanding of the participants and the broader research community.

CHAPTER 4. RESEARCH FINDINGS, DISCUSSIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter followed the phenomenological principle of giving voice to each individual who participated in the study through the presentation of individual portraits. As the research unit of this study is the friendship dyad, the portraits of their dyadic friendships were presented. The role of female friendship and the guimi travel experiences in facilitating purpose and meaning in their lives have been presented, and key points of commonality have been raised. To synthesize the key findings of the data analysis, key quotes pertinent to the research questions were highlighted from each portrait and all transcripts. On subsequent reviews of the data, these quotes were grouped under common categories and then into common themes. For the conciseness of the thesis, the long quotes were put in the Appendices.

As aforementioned, the overall research aim of the thesis is to understand the guimi holiday experiences of young Chinese women through the interdependence theory. The research aim was achieved by replying to the three research questions. The research questions were answered by the data analysis of the dyadic phenomenological interviews with 50 Chinese women (25 friendship dyads) who were aged between 22 and 40. The following sections provided the demographics of the participants, the phenomenological portraits of the friendships, as well as the answers, discussions, and conclusions to the three research questions.

4.1 Participant demographics

To differentiate individual participants from friendship pairs, this study uses N to represent the number of individual participants while using P to refer to the number of friendship pairs. Thus, the respondents in this study comprised 25 friendship pairs (P=25) of 50 women (N=50). The ages of the participants ranged from 21 to 40, with an average age of 27 years. The length of the relationship ranged from 5 to 22 years, with an average length of the friendship of 11 years. 24 participants were single, 15 were in a relationship, and 11 were married, with three of them having one child. Most participants are the only child in their family (N=43). Five of the participants have one brother. The other two have one sister.

In terms of educational background, all the participants have at least a bachelor's degree. Sixteen of them have a master's degree. Three are postgraduate students, and five of them have a Ph.D. degree. The destinations of the guimi tours are diverse, including both popular domestic places such as Beijing, Yunnan, and Hangzhou, and international destinations such as Japan, Korea, and Europe.

Among the 50 friendship dyads, 18 of them indicated they schedule their guimi tours almost once a year. One friendship pair mentioned that they travel together three to four times a year. The rest of the friendship pairs travel together at least once a year.

Nine of the interviews occurred in the participants' respective homes. The others were conducted online due to the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions. The names of participants and other identifying information have been changed to protect their identities. Table 4.1 provides a snapshot of the participants' demographics, followed by a brief portrait (description) of the friendship of each pair (see Appendix H).

Table 4. 1 Demographics of participants

Pairs	Pseudonym	Age	Relationship duration	Marital status (No. of children)	No. of siblings	Education	Destinations	Frequency of taking guimi holidays
P1	Qian	26	6	Single	0	Bachelor	Japan	At least once a year
	Alin	27		In relationship	1 brother	Bachelor		
P2	Xiu	28	8	Single	0	Master	Shanghai	Almost once a year
	Xue	28		Married	0	Bachelor		
P3	Huang	28	8	In relationship	0	Master	Japan	Three to four times a year
	Yan	29		Single	0	Bachelor		
P4	Tian	37	6	Married (1)	0	Postgraduate	Japan, Thailand, Singapore, Qiandao Lake, London	Almost once a year
	Lucy	35		Married	0	Master		
P5	Ying	27	20	Married	0	Postgraduate	Eastern Europe (Hungary, Austria, and Germany)	Almost once a year
	Zhu	29		Single	0	Master		
P6	Yu	40	9	Single	1 sister	PhD.	Chengdu	Almost once a year
	Fu	36		Married	1 brother	PhD.		
P7	Yue	40	15	Single	0	PhD.	Nyingchi, Tibet	At least twice a year
	Lu	40		Single	0	PhD.		
P8	Zhou	25	10	In relationship	0	Postgraduate	Yangzhou	Almost once a year
	Jun	24		Single	1 brother	Bachelor		
P 9	May	36	15	Married	1 brother	PhD.	Mount Qingcheng	Almost once a year
	Yi	37		Married (1)	0	Bachelor		
P10	Yang	30	6	Married (1)	1 sister	Bachelor	Yichang	Almost once a year
	Hui	27		Married	0	Bachelor		
P11	Ya	25	5	Single	0	Master	Taiwan	Once a year
	Yin	27		Married	0	Master		
P12	Luqi	26	6	In relationship	0	Master	Yunnan	Almost once a year
	Liu	26		Single	0	Bachelor		
P13	Si	21	12	In relationship	1 brother	Bachelor	Hangzhou	Almost once a year
	Shu	24		In relationship	0	Bachelor		
P14	San	21	6	Single	0	Bachelor		

	Sherry	21		Single	0	Bachelor	Korea, Xiamen, Shanghai, Beijing	Almost once a year
P15	Mei	25	5	In relationship	0	Master	Qingdao	Almost once a year
	Mai	25		In relationship	0	Bachelor		
P16	Ning	24	20	Single	0	Master	Five cities in Eastern China; Beijing; Qingdao	Almost once a year
	Lily	23		In relationship	0	Master		
P17	Ruo	25	22	In relationship	0	Master	Qinghai	Almost once a year
	Rui	25		Single	0	Master		
P18	Xing	22	19	In relationship	0	Bachelor	Weifang	Almost once a year
	Xian	24		Single	0	Master		
P19	Yao	23	18	Single	0	Master	Qingdao	Almost once a year
	You	23		In relationship	0	Bachelor		
P20	Hiro	26	5	Single	0	Bachelor	Malaysia	Twice a year
	Hien	31		Married	0	Bachelor		
P21	Jackie	26	5	In relationship	0	Bachelor	Japan	Almost once a year
	Jian	25		In relationship	0	Bachelor		
P22	Kinoko	24	10	Single	0	Master	Hunan/Xinjiang	Almost once a year
	Kilye	24		In relationship	0	Master		
P23	Zhang	26	15	Single	0	Bachelor	Qingdao	Almost once a year
	Zeng	22		Single	0	Bachelor		
P24	Bai	40	10	Single	0	Bachelor	Yangshuo/Guilin	Almost once a year
	Chu	39		Single	0	Bachelor		
P25	Du	37	12	Single	0	Bachelor	Jiangmen/Foshan	Almost once a year
	Gui	38		Single	0	Bachelor		

4.2 Phenomenological portraits of the friendship

Although Table 4.1 provides rich information about the participants' demographics, it does not present the details of the friendship of the dyads. Thus, this section aims to depict the 25 phenomenological portraits of the friendship pairs. Writing phenomenological portraits is an essential part of the research process when employing phenomenology as methodology. As Willson, McIntosh, and Zahra's (2013, p. 157) stated that phenomenological portrait is a "personal narrative of the individual that seeks to encapsulate their life, who they are and what is important to them, and the personal meaning associated with the main themes under investigation." In this study, the phenomenological friendship portraits were used to illustrate how the friendship dyads began to know each other and maintain their relationships. The details of the phenomenological portraits were put in Appendix H (as suggested by the BoE Chair). All the friendship dyads in this study are heterosexual women who are either married (or in a relationship) or are single as listed in Table 4.1.

4.3 Answering and Discussing Research Question 1

As mentioned in the Section 1.3 in Chapter 1, the first research question is: What is it like to have a guimi holiday and how does it differ from traveling with family members? The lived experience of a guimi holiday was found to be heavily related to feelings of escapism and freedom, relaxation and rejuvenation, and gendered fun/entertainment. The details of the identified

textures that comprise the lived guimi travel experience are presented as follows.

4.3.1 Escapism and freedom

A sense of freedom is achieved by escaping from study, work, family, and the relevant identities of being a student, an employee, a wife, a mother, or a girlfriend. The catharsis is achieved through a temporary escape from those identities and responsibilities and the freedom of being able to be oneself openly. For instance, Alin, who has a male partner, indicated the following:

> *The feeling of guimi travel is that we are free from our boyfriend and family duties. We can do whatever we want. Nobody is going to restrain us during this trip. Drinking some wine, then bullshitting about work and relationships. (27 years old, in relationship, Pair 1)*

For some single women (N=20), an escape by taking a guimi holiday is to get rid of their daily routines, such as cooking, folding quilts, making a bed, cleaning the room, allowing them to indulge occasionally. For example, Xing said the following:

> *I feel I am free, no need to think about what to cook, what to eat, and the cleaning of my room. I can eat and drink whatever I want without worrying about my image and losing weight. It is like self-indulgence. (22 years old, in a relationship, Pair 19)*

For women between 18 and 22 years of age, the sense of freedom was in the independence and autonomy of having their own holiday away from parental authority with flexible travel schedule. For instance, Ning, a 24-year old girl from Pair 17, described her first guimi travel with her best female friend when she was 18 years old. She thought the trip was exciting and memorable without parental supervision and planning. And both of them felt a sense of growing up. The direct quotation of Ning's narratives can be found in Appendix I.

Moreover, almost all of the participants acknowledged the importance of guimi in reaching such kinds of freedom and escapism. As Hui stated:

> *Yes, you can escape and get some freedom by traveling solo, but this freedom is a little bit sour as you will feel lonely after a while. But when you have the companionship of your bestie, you have lots of things to talk about and share. You never feel bored, and you enjoy freedom. (27 years old, in relationship, Pair 10)*

To sum up, almost all the participants in this study mentioned that "The trip is like we are disappearing together," although they used different expressions. However, the situations and people that participants wanted to escape from, and the freedoms they were expecting were quite diverse. For single women, a guimi holiday is to escape from the daily domestic roles and routines for a chance to indulge oneself with the company of friends. For women with male partners (married or in a relationship), a guimi holiday is a

temporarily escape from family responsibilities and the identity of a heterosexual partner. They think that guimi holidays are different from family holidays in terms of freedom because women still have the same identities and take the same responsibilities as when they are at home. The place has been changed but not the role and identity.

4.3.2 Relaxation and rejuvenation

Relaxation primarily refers to emotional easing under the close female friendship (N=40). This relaxation is achieved through various means, for instance, chatting or sharing secrets (see Yu's narratives for an example), sharing happy moments (see Yan's narratives in Appendix I for an example), similar interests or simply shopping (see Huang's narratives in Appendix I for an example).

> *Guimi travel is more relaxed than traveling with family members. It is quite casual; there are no "must-sees." The main function is an emotional release. We can* ***pour out our secrets*** *and enlighten each other, then feel eased pretty much. (Yu, 40 years old, single, Pair 6)*

Most participants (N=30) think that going on vacation together itself is real relaxation. They do not care about the destination but place more emphasis on the person with whom they traveled. For instance, as Yu stated:

> *I do not mind about the destination, but I am picky about the type of friends I travel with. I would not go out with a friend that you feel uncomfortable with. So I have a very* ***stable guimi friendship*** *network,*

and we travel annually. This is my real holiday and relaxation. (40 years old, single, Pair 7)

Likewise, Hui also mentioned the guimi friendship that makes her feel relaxed:

*We are so close. I can be myself without any kind of disguise, no need for any psychological defense at all. We can do many **crazy things** that we would not do with others. (Hui, 27 years old, married, Pair 10)*

Further, Hui explained that the companionship of her guimi not only cheered her up during the trip:

To me, it is a spur-of-moment trip. I was not in a good state at that time. I was unemployed. She felt my frustration. So, she got me out. We just stayed in a small village for a few days, like local peasants. The place is not far away from our home, but it really cured my negative emotions.

To this end, guimi travels are relaxed trips for women to manage their emotions. To conclude, the feelings of relaxation from the guimi holiday were achieved through togetherness and activities, such as chatting, having a cup of bubble tea, sharing moments and similar interests, and shopping, etc. These guimi holidays are friendship travel that brings individual and collective pursuits together. As with other intimate dyads, the two persons are intertwined with shared values, purposes, aims and a shared identity. The chance of sharing togetherness is a relaxation and a 'destination' in itself.

4.3.3 Gendered fun/entertainment

Young Chinese women challenge the traditional gender roles through self-defined gendered fun activities, for instance, going out in guimi dresses and engaging in feminine activities such as dining, chatting, shopping, and taking pictures. Forty-four out of forty-six participants mentioned that shopping is one of the most important activities for guimi travel and the majority of them visited the famous shopping malls at their destinations. For some friendship pairs (P=13), the guimi travel is a trip of to "shop until you stop". Only one friendship pair did not discuss shopping because they traveled to the rural areas with no big shopping centers, but they still visited the local specialty stores, as Zhou shared:

> *You know, a guimi tour is totally different from traveling with my boyfriend. My boyfriend will go shopping with me if I ask him to do so. But you know he does not really enjoy it, just to be with you without sufficient* ***interactions and suggestions*** *on what I should buy and which one is more suitable for me. I think it is the gender difference. I feel much* ***more comfortable*** *when I am doing these things with my guimi. (27 years old, single, Pair 8)*

Most participants shared that they gained much fun from shopping for cosmetics, skincare products, jewelry accessories, and clothing:

> *I think girls share some* ***hobbies in common****. For example, when I go shopping with my guimi, and see some small things, small jewelry*

stores and the like, both of us have a lot of enthusiasm to view those. (Xiu, 29 years old, single, Pair 2)

Likewise, Qian said, *"I went shopping with my ex-boyfriend when traveling, but only to buy some souvenirs for our colleagues. There is not much girly fun and things" (26 years old, single, Pair1).*

Another gendered entertainment is applying makeup, doing hair, matching clothes, and taking nice pictures for each other. Most nonsingle women complain that their partners do not really like/enjoy taking pictures with or for them (N=30). The following statements from participants provide examples:

*Sometimes I feel boring to travel with my boyfriend, and he is super uncooperative when **taking pictures**. If I go out with my guimi, I am not afraid of being **bored**. We have a lot of **gossips** to talk about. (Alin, 27 years old, Pair 1)*

*We can also help each other **tie hair**. I like that little braid very much, she is good at braiding it, and I will let her tie it for me. My boyfriend does not have this skill. (Ying, 27 years old, Pair 5)*

Yao described how a guimi holiday is like returning to the fun of childhood. She shared a story of "stealing fruit" with her friend You in a mountain. Yao's narratives can be found in Appendix I.

To sum up, the gendered fun/entertainment revealed in the present study primarily refers to engaging in women's favorite activities when getting

together, which is similar to the notions of "girly fun" and "gender-specific ways of doing and interacting" (Berdychevsky et al., 2013, p.611). Furthermore, the gendered entertainment reported includes but is not limited to makeup, dressing up, spas, braiding hair, matching clothes, chit-chatting, taking nice pictures for each other, and so on. The gendered fun or entertainment is an aim, as "It is like we were back to 'our girly time'" is a common statement by the participants.

4.3.4 Discussions

The findings of this study indicated that escapism and freedom, relaxation, and gender fun/entertainment are the three components of the lived experience of guimi holidays. Thus, some of the findings of the lived experience concur with the conclusions in previous studies on the experiences of GGAs (Berdychevsky, et al., 2013; Berdychevsky, et al., 2016; Gibson, et al., 2012). However, the present study reveals that there are different stressors and routines that women want to escape from. For married women and women with boyfriends, it is to pursue the freedom from household duties and the role of being a wife or partner (Small, 2005). For young female students between 18 and 22 years old in this study, the sense of freedom of the guimi holiday is to escape "the authority of parents" (Small, 2005, p.440). The difference is the age span, as Small's (2005) conclusion was made based on girls at ages between 12 and 20. For this study, however, the age was extended to 22 years old, as in the Chinese context, parents usually provide financial support until their children graduate from the

university. The average age of graduating from a university is 22 years old. For single women, the escapism and freedom of a guimi holiday are to relieve work-related stress and to reduce the feelings of loneliness.

Moreover, the feelings of relaxation from a guimi holiday are different from a holiday with parents, a husband, a boyfriend or solo travel. The relaxation gained from a guimi holiday primarily refers to emotional easing due to women's close friendship based on trust, intimacy, self-disclosure, and loyalty, and it is achieved through togetherness and activities, such as chatting, having a cup of bubble tea, sharing moments and similar interests, and shopping, etc. The chance of sharing togetherness is a relaxation and a 'destination' in itself. Third, gendered fun or entertainment is an aim. "It is like we were back to 'our girly time'" is a common statement by the participants. Gendered entertainment reported includes but is not limited to makeup, dressing up, spas, braiding hair, matching clothes, chit-chatting, taking nice pictures for each other, and so on.

The escape and freedom is shown to be as much from family members or anyone else. This is a fundamental difference between guimi holidays and traveling with family members. Guimi holiday travels exclude everyone else, in favor of the guimi dyad, this becoming the sole focus. Intentionally, other relationships and other worldly concerns are suspended. In the time and space afforded by this temporary suspension, exemptions from expectations are sought and mutually granted. This also grants freedom to explore and express in conditions of acceptance and safety with a deeply trusted and caring guimi

friend. Indeed, the mutual escape and freedom, exercised through this acceptance and safety enabled from deep friendship, caring and trust, strengthens the bonds of mutual interdependence and value, in ways that simply are not possible within the constraints and expectations of other (family) relations and travels. With the focus on the friendship, considerations of sightseeing and agendas become subordinated, considered only insofar as these can afford comforts or conveniences towards the escape and freedoms that enable the deep sharing of experiences and expressions of the kinds found in this research.

Relieved of expectations to behave or conform according to various roles in family or other relationships, such as would continue during travel with family members or others, each partner in the guimi holiday can emotionally, mentally, spiritually, and physically relax. Each can “let their guard down” and open themselves to greater giving and receiving in honest exchange of those experiences that build interdependence through those processes and structural dimensions enabled in actor and partner effects of coaction and contributions.

The choices of activities reported by the guimi friends on holiday can be regarded for their covariation of interests and their capacities to reward both partners within mutual acceptance. Such (gendered) fun and entertainment is most likely to sustain highly corresponding modes of covariation in harmony with one another, such that risks of unexpected or unpredictable reactions to situations are minimized, while good and pleasant emotions, perceptions, and

results from each other are maximized. This correspondence is consistent with objectives of creating and sustaining freedom and relaxation of expectations and psychic defenses. Taken together, an understanding of what a guimi holiday is like emerges, as well as the clear and intentional distinction from the family holiday.

From the broad relational perspective, the guimi holiday provides a social, spatial and temporal construct that employs Chinese dyadic relationship (guanxi) to navigate relational complexities and uncertainties external to the dyad, while setting and sustaining conditions that allow and even encourage sharing of memorable experiences, deep feelings and confidences between the guimi friends on holiday. These relational conditions are facilitated by the same interdependencies arising from the intimacies that the guimi holiday is intended to produce. Greater adaptation and transformation builds greater information certainties. To the extent that guimi can discover and share information freely and quickly, they can deepen trust and confidence, both in their abilities to coordinate actions and rely upon each other, as well as in their own sense of safety and willingness to share memorable experiences, deep feelings and confidences with each other. Further to a relational perspective: some information or topics may be hard to disclose to family members. The guimi holiday provides relational conditions that ease disclosure of sensitive information by extending and supporting the comfort of acceptance and belonging through intimacy that fosters greater interdependence. These

attributes distinguish a guimi holiday from a family holiday (as well as most other holidays).

4.4 Answering and Discussing Research Question 2

The second question asked in this study is: What are the meanings of guimi holidays attributed by each member of the friendship dyads? The research findings to this question have three interconnected elements: time for re-connectedness/sociality, a sense of empowerment, and a buffer to life events. The following sections explain each of these elements with examples.

4.4.1 Time for re-connectedness

All the participants confirmed that a guimi holiday represents a peer time for women to share life stories, secrets, experiences, and cope with stress with their female best friends "besties" who are almost the same age and have similar worldviews and similar values in life. For instance, Tian (from Pair 4), a 37-year-old married woman, said, "a guimi holiday means to enjoy the time with my best friend." Xiu (from Pair 2), a 28-year-old single woman, also commented, *"it is a time that is purely for us, we have not seen each other for a long time, and she is going to get married."*

Married women with young children have fewer opportunities to travel with their female friends than single women and those who have partners. This finding is not surprising because by researchers such as Gibson et al. (2012), Small (2005), and Berdychevsky et al. (2013), have mentioned it. Even so,

all the participants opined that a guimi trip means a real vacation for them. First, solo travel sounds good, but it is boring, insecure, and lonely, allowing no person with whom to share the beautiful sceneries and happy moments. Second, traveling with family is like having the same routines in a different place. A guimi holiday enhances women's sense of self and identity, and it is a chance to know themselves better. For instance, Yang said the following:

> *If I travel with my family, I am usually the one who takes care of our child. It is just to play the same role and take the same responsibility in a new place. Therefore, for me, traveling with my guimi is a* ***real vacation****. (30 years old, married, Pair 10)*

Likewise, Yu is a 40-year-old single woman who described her reconnection as follows,

> *Guimi holiday plays a central role in* ***social connectedness****. As I live alone, the feelings of loneliness are stronger, and I become a workaholic. Such holidays and occasions are really important for me to turn off from work to have a* ***sense of self****. (Pair 7)*

This re-connectedness has two meanings: First, it simply means to be re-connected with one's female friends and to strengthen the sisterhood. Second, it is to reconnect with the inner self. For instance, Yao used the fantasy of girlhood to describe the guimi holiday, she explained:

> *I think it is time for me, myself. That is, during that period of traveling, I neither belong to the society, nor as a member of the family. Being*

*with my guimi is easier to make me return to the **fantasy of girlhood**, so it is a time you don't have to worry about this and that. (23 years old, single, Pair 19)*

Likewise, Mei, a 25-year-old woman from Pair 15 described that a guimi holiday pulled her out of all kinds of responsibilities and traditional identities to re-connect with her inner self. Mei's narratives can be found in Appendix I.

4.4.2 Sense of empowerment

All participants indicated that, compared with traveling solo, they feel more empowered, safe, and autonomous when traveling with their guimi. In fact, 40 participants said they would not choose to travel solo for safety concerns. The remaining six participants opined that they could travel alone but would only go to those popular destinations where they feel safe and familiar. For instance, Alin, a 27-year-old woman, *said:* "I do not dare to go to strange places by myself, because it may not be safe for a girl to go out. Perhaps I am less courageous" (Pair 1). Similarly, Yao commented, *"I do not want to travel alone, I feel insecure. If I want to travel far away, I will still ask her to be with me, I will force her to go with me, lol"* (23 years old, single, Pair 19).

Some participants mentioned the insecurity of going out at night for a woman, but with a guimi, they feel empowered to do so. For example, San described the feeling of insecurity using her own past solo travel experience, she explained:

*There was a time when I arrived alone in Taichung at 7 or 8 o'clock in the evening. It was **dark**. I had to find the hotel by myself. I can only follow the map to find the place. There are no streetlights in the small alleys. I was particularly **scared** at that time because I was the only one there. But if my friend were with me, I would not be so scared. (29 years old, in a relationship, Pair 2)*

Furthermore, participants mentioned that there are certain places that are not suitable for women to travel alone. For instance, Zhou said the following:

*I must be afraid to go and visit that street alone at night, because there are trees on the old street! The shadow of those trees at night is very **hideous**. I would only have the **courage** to go out with Zhu when at night. (25 years old, in a relationship, Pair 8)*

Moreover, some single women choose not to travel at all if they were without the companionship of friends. For example, Ning mentioned the following:

*I am single. If I travel without the companionship of my guimi, I **feel lonely** and bored with very **limited choices** of places and activities due to **safety** considerations. So I will surrender and choose not to go out in the end if no friends are with me. (23 years old, single, Pair 16)*

Beyond the statement of companionship to feel safe, guimi travel also gives each individual the courage to do activities that one would not undertake by oneself alone. Si, a 21-year-old woman, from Pair 13 shared her story of Dronestagram (无人机拍摄) with her friend Shu during their trip in Shanghai

where they were chased by the security guard as it was not allowed to use drone on the Bund. But they still took nice pictures together when the security guard was no paying attention to them. She felt empowered to participate in activities that she would otherwise not do alone by herself. Si's narratives can be found in Appendix J.

Although all the participants expressed a sense of feeling secure when they are with their female friends, this does not guarantee women's actual safety while traveling. This point can be observed from the experience shared by Hiro:

> *We experienced **sexualized gaze** by local men in Malaysia when we were on the street at night. We were catcalled by two men on a motorbike. All that we could do is to run very quickly. (26 years old, single, Pair 20)*

This statement supports Heimtun and Abelsen's (2012) findings indicating that the feeling of empowerment is very symbolic. Given the physical strength of women, female groups are easily overcome when they are attacked. To sum up, the sense of empowerment arises from the companionship of sisterhood friendship based on trust, intimacy, and commitment. Compared to solo travel, young women feel safer and autonomous when they are with their guimi on vacation. The sense of empowerment enables them to travel to some places they would otherwise not do alone and allows them to participate in the activities they would otherwise not to do alone.

4.4.3 Buffer to life events

All of the participants acknowledge that guimi travel is a buffer to the psycho-emotional effect of some life events in women. Life events refer to happenings that result in changes to an individual's life (Holmes & Rache, 1967). Reactions to such events, whether happy or sad, can result in changes or readjustments to people's lives. Some examples of life events include graduation, marriage, illness, divorce, or job change. The guimi relationship is usually based on shared values, similar views on life, and/or shared interests. Thus, guimi travel provides women a relaxed space to buffer these life changes, which benefits women's wellbeing. A typical statement about the buffering effect of guimi travel can be seen from Xing:

> *When I am quarreling with my boyfriend, I would tell her. When some unpleasant things happened in my family. I would also tell her, and then she would take me out somewhere and help me relieve my emotions. (22 years old, in a relationship, Pair 18)*

The data from this study shows that the following three main types of life events are the main factors triggering a guimi holiday: job-related stress/events, academic-related stress/events, and partner or family relationship-related stress/events. The following paragraphs explain each type of the life events with some examples. More detailed quotations related to the three types of life events can be found in the Appendix J.

First, job-related stress/events (N=9) including changing jobs or resignation, and the stress and tension from extended periods of working. For instance, Qian's trip with Alin was conducted after Alin's resignation.

> *My guimi is the first person I think of if some big events happened in my life, but for those events, I **cannot tell my parents**. I will tell my guimi the first time. You know I am the only child in my family. I share with her because I think we are peers and under the same sort of **pressure**. I think guimi travel is a good way to discuss and to release these pressures. (Pair 1)*

Second, academic-related stress/events (N=10) include three types. The first type is the stress and tension caused by studying or an important examination. For example, for Pair 23, Zhang's guimi travel was a break after taking an examination that will determine her future career. The second type is the stress and tension from pursuing a higher degree in another city or country, for example, for Pair 5, Ying's travel with Zhu. The third type is to celebrate a graduation, for instance, for Pair 12, Lu's travel to Yunan with Liu and for Pair 13, Shu's trip with Si to Hangzhou.

Third, partner or family relationship-related stress/events (N=4) included getting married, divorced, and issues related to a parent-child relationships. For instance, for Pair 9, the guimi travel was undertaken when Yi was separated from her husband, whereas, for Pair 14, Si's trip with Sherry was due to the tight parental control and the feeling of a lack of freedom. Similarly,

for Pair 10, Hui broke up with her boyfriend and resigned from her job, so she took the guimi trip with Yang.

More importantly, Pair 4 provided the most typical example, as Tian and Lucy experienced all three types of life events, and they conducted three guimi trips accordingly. Their first guimi trip to Qiandao Lake happened because of Lucy's resignation and that her plan to pursue her Ph.D. degree. The second trip was to Japan when Lucy got divorced. When Lucy remarried, they conducted the third trip, which was to London. Lucy stated:

> *Because she and I do not get together face-to-face very often, there are some gap times, though we often have contact with each other online. So I usually take the opportunity of a guimi holiday to* ***share some experiences*** *and talk about some emotional issues and some plans for life! This is a rare time to get together! Regarding the events that occurred in each other's lives, we will* ***encourage each other****. I think she and I are a very good pair of best friends. (35 years old, married, Pair 4)*

Additionally, guimi holidays also play a role in buffering the stress of growing up for young women. For instance, Ning, a 24-year-old single woman, recalled her first guimi holiday experience, which occurred when she was 18 years old. As that was the first time she traveled far away from home, she viewed the trip as a coming-of-age ceremony. She explained:

> *I think it is that the guimi trip made me **grow up** and become independent from my parents. You know, that was the first time I traveled far **away from home** without the company of my parents. Though there was an **interdependence** between my guimi and I, we still have to make all the decisions and take care of everything by ourselves. We are at the same age and face similar problems of growing up. (Pair 16)*

After the coming-of-age ceremony trip, Ning and Lily have had more guimi holidays together. They traveled to many places in China, such as Beijing, Shanghai, Suzhou, Hangzhou, and Wuxi. The triggers of these guimi trips were primarily due to the pains and stress of growing up. To conclude, guimi holidays provide women with various types of support ranging from the instrumental to the emotional in buffering the effects of life events, such as the pains and stress of growing up, marriage, divorce, and changing jobs.

4.4.4 Discussions

This study found that the meanings of guimi holidays are diverse and complex, as also indicated by Berdychevsky et al. (2016), who examined the meanings of the GGAs of American and Canadian women. In general, time for re-connectedness, a sense of empowerment, and a buffer to life events are the three primary meanings described in this study. First, the finding of time for re-connectedness mirrors the findings by Berdychevsky et al. (2013) and Gibson et al. (2012), who described it as "woman-to-woman time." In

contrast, the researcher of this study also used the term “guimi style of bonding” (Chen, Mak, & Calder, 2020, p.10) in the early phase results of this project to depict the re-connectedness among women that are specifically based on the guimi friendship.

Second, guimi holidays increase the sense of empowerment that enables young women to step out of their comfort zone to explore the world. Similar findings have been illustrated in Berdychevsky et al.’s (2013) and Gibson et al.’s (2012) studies about GGAs. They described the representations of empowerment as follows: being outside the comfort zone, feeling in charge, broadening the self, and becoming a mature traveler. However, in this study, it was found that the sense of feeling empowered included safety, autonomy, and the courage to do things that one would not do alone. However, the sense of feeling secure when women are with their female friends cannot guarantee women’s actual safety, as they are easily attacked. This point was mentioned by one of the participants.

Third, guimi holidays may work as a buffer to life events. This finding mirrors Green’s (1998) notion, arguing that “long-term friendships with other women in groups or as individuals can provide stability and a linking thread through personal and situational change” (p. 182). As relational conditions are created and sustained for (re)connection during the guimi holiday, the influences of each partner’s behaviors and thoughts regarding the actions and thoughts of the other begin to emerge. These influences are at the core of

interdependence and directly lead to a unique self-awareness and sensitivity to the interactions between the friends, as traits are activated and realized. Then perspectives are adapted, and growth can occur. This is experienced as assuring and empowering to those involved and included in the findings.

Clearly, the ability and experience of reconnecting with oneself and the other was deeply meaningful to the guimi friends. Almost all of the guimi dyads confirmed that best friends do not have to contact with each other every day and the disconnection does not impact their relationship too much because they are so familiar with each other's personality. Actually, the past disconnections can be discovered and healed, refreshing self-awareness as well as deepening understanding of the friend and the friendship in the guimi holiday context, which might bring new meanings to both previous and present life experiences, also, can aid in recovering from difficult or traumatic situations (as reported) while building confidence and resilience for anticipated or future challenges.

Each member attributes meaning in the guimi holiday experience both during the holiday itself, and in recollection of those experiences. During the holiday itself, the aforementioned (re)connections and sensitivities support greater coordination and a stabilizing dependency basis. This nurtures perspectives that become longer term, continuing even after the holiday itself, as described in the accounts of the research participants. Such longer-term perspectives build that temporal structure of interdependence to support future needs, such

as survival, exploration and belongingness, and commensurately deepen the meaningfulness attributed to the guimi holiday by each member.

4.5 Answering and Discussing Research Question 3

The third question asked in this study is: *How does the central idea of friendship dyads, namely, interdependence, shape the holiday experience of the Chinese guimi holiday?* This question was designed to explore the group dynamics of the guimi holiday. Compared to traveling with parents or a male partner, guimi holidays are based on the friendship characteristics of mutuality, equality, and reciprocity, of which voluntary interdependence is the basis (Claes, 1992). This study found that several dimensions from the interdependence theory (power relations, mutual dependence, conflicts, coordination, and compromise) shape the group dynamics of the guimi holiday experience. Each dimension was explained and presented below with examples.

4.5.1 Power relations

Power over

Power over refers to "A getting B to do something that B would otherwise not do" (Dahl, 1957, p.203). The suppression of personal preferences and following friends' likes and dislikes were the most common phenomena of power over among the female friendship pairs. A common statement was, "I can accompany her to do whatever she wants." More specific narratives were presented below from both parties of the dyads. For instance, in Pair 10, Hui said the following:

I took the trip with her in May last year, because I ***resigned*** *from my job and also separated from my boyfriend at that time. I was not in a good state at the time. Then I asked her to go to a mountain with me, and that mountain had no mobile phone signal at all. The trip in May was more like a* ***travel therapy*** *to me, as she put down all the things around her, then went straight with me. She* ***accompanied*** *me and* ***enlightened*** *me during the trip. In fact, at the beginning of the whole tour, I was very depressed, so it was mainly that she accompanied me to do what I wanted to do. I did not even ask about her preferences at all. (27 years old, married)*

Hui described that the trip was primarily for her to recover from the bad feelings of losing her job and partner, so she initially she did not even think from the 'we' perspective and simply took it as a 'my holiday.' Yang's narratives reinforced Hui's point:

I went for the trip because my friend Hui was ***not in a good state****. At the beginning of the trip, she was very quiet, so I did not talk much either, as I understood that she might need some quiet and peaceful time to digest all that stuff. So most of the time, I talked when she wanted to talk. It was to* ***take care of her emotions****. But in the end, she was better, and we enjoyed our trip very much. (30 years old, Pair 10)*

Yang described how she took care of Hui's emotions by staying properly silent and meeting her friend's needs and wants instead of thinking of her

own travel preferences. Her presence on the trip provided Hui with companionship and alleviated her the negative emotions. Likewise, in Pair 6, Yu mentioned the following:

> *Where she wanted to go, I actually followed her. I did not strongly request where we must go, because she is my best friend. I only wanted to enjoy the time with her, and then mainly to* ***go where she wanted to go****. For example, there was a time when we were in Japan; she visited many places related to cartoons. But for me, I do not much like this kind of stuff, but because* ***she likes it****, then* ***I would go with her****. (40 years old, single)*

In this case, Tian described how she is willing to travel anywhere with Lucy. Though she was not interested in these places, she enjoyed the time being with her friend. Her friend Lucy confirmed these points and said, "we have similar worldviews and values to life, but we have different interests and hobbies. This does not impact our travel experience. I think this trip was fantastic" (35 years old, married). Similar expressions were also found in other friendship pairs. All the participants indicated that one party of each dyad plays a dominant role in designing and organizing the trip.

Power to

Power to, is also called as "power as love" by Tillich (as cited by Florczak, 2016). The participants in this study indicated different aspects of power to. For example, Ning described the following:

> *I fainted the first time I took the plane, and then vomited at the airport when I got off the plane. I was impressed because I have a physique that is prone to motion sickness. Except for the high-speed rail, I will faint on all the other transportation. My motion sickness was brought to the extreme during this trip. Even if I took a taxi or a subway, I would feel faint. What I had often said to her during the whole trip was: I was so uncomfortable, I felt very sick, and I feel like I'm going to throw up, etc. So basically, the whole trip became* ***her efforts to take care of my motion sickness****. (24 years old, single, Pair 16)*

Ning depicted her motion sickness during the trip, and her guimi Lily took care of her throughout the whole journey without complaining. Her guimi Lily confirmed Ning's narratives:

> *This is the first time we were out without the company of our parents. The trip was far away. I did not know that she would faint on all those transportations. I must* ***take care of her*** *because she is my best friend, and she had nobody else to rely on when we were outside." (23 years old, in a relationship, Pair 16)*

In addition to the narratives of caring as "power to," other forms of power to were also found in the narratives of the female friendship dyads, for instance, sharing materials, such as clothes, jewelry accessories, food, cosmetics, and beds. The following quotes are an illustration of mutual sharing as power to:

I gave her my backpack. This bag is a new one. I think the color matches her clothes better. When she was cold, I wrapped my scarf around her because her clothes were too thin. She didn't consider that Korea would be so cold, and she brought very few clothes with her. (Qian, 26 years old, single, Pair 1)

Qian mentioned she shared her bags and clothes with her guimi Alin as caring. Aileen acknowledged Qian's sharing of her scarf, clothes, and bags when she was interviewed. She added, *"We had also shared food, beds, cosmetics, secrets, and many other things while on holiday.*" Thus, beyond sharing materials, sharing emotions and life experiences was also manifested as power to. Ying illustrates this in the following quote:

Talking about sharing food, this is not just about cutting the food in half for my friend; this is quite general. The more interesting part is how we talked and ***shared our feelings, emotions, and comments*** *about the food we eat together. Do you understand that? When we went shopping, we shared our feelings, too. Without sharing, I think I couldn't continue the trip. (Ying, 27 years old, married, Pair 5)*

Ying's friend, Zhu, confirmed the points of sharing emotions by Ying and added:

We also shared the unhappy experiences and relationships in each other's lives while on holiday. Sometimes, I feel we were both each other's senior sister because we ***shared our opinions*** *and gave*

suggestions about the life events that occurred. (29 years old, single, Pair 5).

To sum up, the data analysis of this study indicated that, in a guimi friendship, one of the dyads expressed power over by restraining her own travel preferences for the benefits of the other, while power to was manifested as a deep love and concern for the welfare of the other party. In the context of the guimi relationship of this research, both power over and power to were derived from deep trust, sharing, reciprocity, and mutual dependence, which are essential to the dyadic friendships. Moreover, this is the first study to evaluate and examine the power relations by using the narratives from both sides of the female friendship dyads, which offers more evidence to support Pansardi's (2012) notion that power to and power over are a unified concept that denotes the positive social interactions among the female friendship pairs. Moreover, the expertise and personality of the members of the friendship dyads also determine the power relations, which include expert power and the power of personality, but both are in constructive ways by taking up responsibilities to create memorable joint travel experiences.

4.5.2 Mutual dependence

The core dimension of the interdependence theory is mutual dependence (Gerpott et al., 2017; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). The interviews with the 46 participants demonstrated that mutual dependence exists. Moreover, a majority of them (N=25) mentioned that mutual dependence is more obvious

and typical when facing difficulties and when taking outbound travel. For instance, Kinoko described the following:

> *Compared with outbound travel, domestic travel is in a more familiar environment. When traveling abroad, even if a trivial thing happens, you will find it very hard to handle, and you will think it is a major event, and then we* ***depend on each other for survival****. A strong feeling of mutual dependence arose. (24 years old, single, Pair 22)*

Based on the interviews, this study categorized mutual dependence into different types: psychological dependence, knowledge dependence, and skill dependence. The following paragraphs illustrated each type of dependence with examples. This study considered these types of dependence to be mutual because each party of the dyad relies on the other for their expertise. For example, Qian mentioned the following:

> *Both of us were in charge of the trip based on our skills and knowledge. I booked hotels and designed the itinerary. She took care of the meals at the destination and controlled our travel expenditure since she works in a bank. (26 years old, single, Pair 2)*

First, there is psychological dependence. Psychological dependence refers to the sense of psychological security and comfort when traveling with one's guimi. Every participant mentioned psychological dependence. For instance, Lu mentioned the following:

With her, I feel very relaxed. There is someone next to me, so I don't have to ***worry about getting lost*** *or* ***worry about safety****. If I go out alone, I have to think about everything by myself, and this may cause a lot of worries. Going out with a guimi has this advantage because I can rely on her. (40 years old, single, Pair 7)*

Similar narratives were also mentioned by Lu's guimi, Yu (from Pair 7). She stated, *"without Lu's company, I would stay at home. I would not take this trip alone at all, because I feel it is not safe to take such a long haul trip alone."* Both parties of the dyad acknowledged that the company of each other's company makes them feel safer to travel to faraway places. Moreover, as mentioned, mutual dependence is more obvious in outbound travel. Similarly, the feeling of psychological dependence was stronger on overseas trips than domestic ones. Kinoko, a 24-year-old woman from Pair 22 described her trip with Kilye in Malaysia. Kinoko's narratives can be found in Appendix M.

We had an occasion when we were visiting a local night market in Malaysia. We ***were sexually gazed*** *upon by local people because we look different from them. And the appearance of my guimi is very attractive. I feel this is* ***scary*** *at that time. Our first reaction was to leave as quickly as we can. But afterward, I thought it was a bit exciting, too, because with the company of my friend, it is not that*

***dangerous**, and we give comfort to each other, too. (24 years old, single, Pair 22)*

Second, there is skill dependence. The narratives of participants indicated that the guimi dyads have different skills. The skills range from dressing up and taking pictures to applying makeup and speaking a foreign language, etc. For instance, Si described using a drone to take pictures, she said:

*I bought this drone for quite a long time, but I did not really know how to make use of it, until my trip with Sherry, my guimi, I brought the drone with us during the trip. I know she is **good at photography**, so I thought maybe we could use the drone to take nice photos. I did not expect that she was really good at using the drone. She is amazing, and we got **very nice pictures**. (21 years old, in relationship, Pair 15)*

Sherry confirmed her love of taking pictures and appraised Si's bargaining and negotiation skills. She described the following:

*I think each of us made contributions to this wonderful trip. I like **photographing**, so I am in charge of taking pictures of us. My friend Si is good at **communication and negotiation**. She booked those hotels that are cheap but with good quality, so we had a great value journey because of **her bargaining skills**. (21 years old, single, Pair 15)*

Likewise, Ying, a 27-year-old married woman from Pair 5, described her guimi Zhu's skills of "tying" hair and dressing up. Ying did not have many skills, but she carried the luggage for Zhu because she felt that she was

stronger than her (See Appendix K for the detailed narratives of Ying). During the interview with Zhu, she confirmed the points of matching clothes and braiding hair for Ying and also mentioned Ying's skills at finding ways out because she easily becomes lost.

Third, knowledge dependence was also demonstrated by the participants. Knowledge dependence in this study refers to the interactive processes in which both parties of the dyad learn about each other's expertise and strengths of each other. Knowledge dependence was demonstrated in numerous ways in this research. For example, one member of the friendship dyad had studied, lived, worked, or traveled in many places, so she is familiar with those places, which could be a knowledge advantage for the trip. Tian described her trip with her guimi Lucy to the UK:

> *Lucy had previously lived in the UK for two years when she studied for her master's degree. So I did not need to make plans for this trip, just follow her. I trust that she will bring me to those places with good food and beautiful scenery. She had* ***more knowledge*** *about traveling in the UK. (37 years old, married, Pair 4)*

Similarly, Ying mentioned an incident of spraining an ankle, and it was her friend's knowledge of finding a pharmacy to buy medicine for her that was instrumental. She described:

> *Because there are many bus stations in Germany, we were in a rush to take the last bus. My left* ***ankle was sprained*** *in such a hurry. So when*

we went to the Neuschwanstein Castle, we took the cable car the whole trip. She and I don't speak German, and I don't even know where to buy medicine. Fortunately, she had ***studied in Europe*** *before, though not in Germany, but she knew which stores to buy medicine, so she ran to buy me ice cubes and the spray that can reduce swelling. (27 years old, married, Pair 5)*

Giving suggestions on currency exchange was also viewed as a type of knowledge dependence. For instance, Alin talk about her travel to Korea with Qian:

I work in a bank. I know where to exchange Korean won that is more cost-effective. So I suggested to Qian to make the ***currency exchange*** *before arriving in Seoul, as she would not get a good deal in Korea based on my professional knowledge. (27 years old, in relationship, Pair 1)*

Other types of knowledge dependence include knowledge of first aid and knowledge of the local culture and food. For example, Jackie described her guimi Jian's sense of direction. She said:

My friend Jian not only had a very good sense of direction, but also had lots of ***first aid knowledge****. Wherever she went, the first thing she would check is the nearest toilet. If we were in a building, she would also check the location of the fire escape. (26 years old, single, Pair 21)*

Hiro mentioned the trip with her guimi Hien to Thailand and Malaysia. She described Hien's knowledge about seasonal local food with an example: *"both of us like to eat durians. But she knows better the best seasons to buy and eat durians in Thailand and Malaysia. She took me there to find fresh durians."(26 years old, single, Pair 20)*

There were no limits regarding the knowledge dependence among the guimi dyads. The above-mentioned quotes were the most typical ones chosen from the transcripts.

4.5.3 Conflicts, coordination, and compromise

Conflict can be defined as awareness, by the parties involved, of differences, or discrepancies, incompatible wishes, or of irreconcilable desires (Boulding, 1962). This study found that most participants (N=37) denied holiday conflicts while admitting the existence of some small discrepancies when making choices. Some of the common statements are listed here. "We had traveled together many times. We matched very well. That is why we have an annual travel plan" (Zhu, 25 years old, single, Pair 8). "*No conflicts. If there are conflicts, why travel together then? Having a guimi holiday is to be with the person who makes you feel happy*" (Ruo, 25 years old, in a relationship, Pair 18). *"Being guimi means that we are very intimate and know each other's personalities very well. Of course, there are no conflicts*" (May, 36 years old, married, Pair 9). "*Traveling with her has become my habit. There will definitely be no frictions or quarrels*" (Huang, 28 years old, in a

relationship, Pair 3). "*Conflicts are a type of caring. There are no conflicts between us. If there are conflicts, it is because of love and caring*" (Qian, 26 years old, single, Pair 1).

There are two possible reasons for this. First, the interviewees avoid using the term "conflicts" (矛盾，冲突 in Chinese) to describe their close friendships. Thus, no relationship-related conflicts were reported in this study. This finding is not surprising because Chen, Mak and Kankhuni (2020) also argued that interviews are sometimes inefficient in revealing negative tourism experiences, especially those caused by personal relationships, compared to written materials by tourists such as travel blogs. Similarly, de Oliveira and Figueira (2018) noted that researchers should be cautious when interviewing Chinese participants because it is a typical Chinese cultural practice to overstate the positive aspects and hide the negative emotions. Another possible reason is that the guimi dyads selected in this study have frequent travel experiences together. They have adapted to each other, and thus they did not have many conflicts. Despite this, cooperation and compromise were frequently mentioned by the participants. The following paragraphs presented task-related conflicts, process-related conflicts, cooperation and compromise.

Task-related conflicts

Task-related conflicts refer to the misunderstandings of the tasks within the group (Heimtun & Jordan, 2011). Task-related conflicts have been widely

explored in the workplace (Simons & Peterson, 2000). This study found that in the tourism context, task-related conflicts are related to the use of time and money, hotel and food choices, and arrangements of travel activities, and these types of conflicts usually lead to positive effects of the joint travel experience. For instance, Si stated the following:

> *There are two airports in Beijing, but my friend did not know that. She promised to book a hotel near the airport, but in the end, we flew to the other airport, which is very far away. I think she did not check those very carefully when she made the travel itineraries. I just felt a little bit* ***tired but not angry****, since we got to know more about Beijing through this mistake. (21 years old, in relationship, Pair 15).*

Thus, the misunderstanding regarding the existence of two different airports was considered to be a chance to know more about the city, which adds to the joint travel experience.

Process-related conflicts

Process-related conflicts refer to discrepancies in the methods or procedures used of the group members to achieve goals or complete tasks (Decrop, Pecheux & Bauvin, 2004). Process-related conflicts have often been examined in organizations. The findings of this study reveal that process-related conflicts are not limited to the process of choosing destinations but also apply to the process of selecting hotels, meals, and other tasks during travel. For instance, Alin complained about the process of currency exchange:

*When I travel abroad, I usually exchange money before going out. So I told her to **exchange money** in China before setting off. But she did not follow my suggestions. She changed money when she arrived in Korea, and I saw that the exchange rate was not good there. We lost some money, and I felt she was a little **unhappy** at that time because she seemed to blame herself for not doing the task well. (27 years old, in a relationship, Pair 1)*

Coordination and compromise

Coordination typically refers to the orderly arrangement of actions to achieve a common objective. The concept has been widely investigated in organizations. In the context of this study, coordination refers to the suitable arrangement of travel activities and schedules to reach optimal travel experiences for both parties in the dyad. An example of coordination within a friendship dyad was given by Pair 11:

Yin has a friend in Beijing at that time and asked her to go skating in Beihai. Then she told me that she wanted to go, so I said yes, you go skating, and I will visit the Jingshan Park tomorrow afternoon. I think this arrangement is good for both of us, so that in the end, both of us could have a wonderful travel experience. (Ya, 25 years old, single)

Ya's narratives were confirmed by Yin, who stated the following:

Ya prefers visiting historical places of interest, so when we were in Beijing, we visited museums and the Forbidden City. But personally, I

am not interested in these things, and I prefer taking more participatory activities. I remember we were supposed to visit Jingshan Park according to her schedule, but I told her that I do not want to go because we had visited very similar attractions for many days. I said, let us coordinate like this, so you go and visit Jingshan Park, and I go skating with my friends. After that, we will meet and have dinner together at 7:00 pm. Both of us were satisfied with this arrangement. We can ***coordinate*** *our* ***interests*** *and* ***adapt*** *to each other to make the best use of our time during our travel. It is an* ***adaptation process****. We are also planning our next trip. (Yin, 24 years old, in a relationship, Pair 11)*

This coordination, which was agreed upon by both parties in the guimi dyads to incorporate personal interests, served the function of balancing the "I" (my) time and "we" (our) time on holiday, which was acknowledged and appreciated by some of the participants.

Additionally, compromise emerged as the most explicitly mentioned dimension of the friendship dyads in terms of sacrificing personal needs and wants to cater for the other party in the dyad. Due to the high level of intimacy, a guimi is sometimes viewed as an extended family member of a woman. Some of the participants also extended the "ethic of care" to their female friends. For instance, Tian, a 37-year-old woman from Pair 4 mentioned that she would travel to anywhere as long as it is with her friend Lucy, and there

is a compromise when discussing the travel schedule. Tian's narratives can be found in Appendix K.

Similarly, Zhou described, *"Both of us will compromise for each other, that is, we will make a decision based on whose idea is much better. Then we discuss and make a final choice*" (25 years old, in a relationship, Pair 8).

To conclude, power relations, mutual dependence, conflicts, coordination and compromise brought out the internal group dynamics of balancing different travel interests within the guimi dyads.

4.5.4 Discussions

As mentioned in the literature review section, few studies about group dynamics in tourism research (Cai et al., 2019). This lack is despite the examination of the group dynamics of family holidays (Gram, 2005; Schänzel et al., 2005), couple dynamics on holiday (Mottiar & Quinn, 2004), and the group dynamics of backpackers (Cai et al., 2019). Few studies had examined the group dynamics of guimi holidays. This research is likely to be the first comprehensive study on the group dynamics of the guimi holidays of Chinese women that employed dyadic interviews as the data collection method, which gathered the insights from both sides of the dyads.

As aforementioned, this study revealed that the power relations of guimi holidays were revealed as power to and power over, which can be exchanged for a unified understanding of social power. In addition, this study found

different types of mutual dependence: skill dependence, knowledge dependence, and psychological dependence. Moreover, the findings of this study suggested that mutual dependence is more typical in outbound guimi travel, and the feeling of psychological dependence was stronger at night or when encountering difficulties.

In terms of holiday conflicts, process-related and cognitive-related conflicts were reported to be common by the interviewees. However, relationship-related conflict was not found in this study. There are two possible reasons for this result. First, participants think that a guimi is a very close female friend with high relationship quality and common interests. After traveling together for a while, they would know whether the person is suitable as a travel partner again or not. Because most participants expressed that they travel together almost once a year, and the latest travel is either the fourth or fifth time of traveling together, it is unlikely for them to have relationship-related conflict.

Second, there is a possibility that participants might avoid discussing the negative aspects of a vacation with an unfamiliar person because China is an acquaintance society. This point has also been mentioned by other researchers in saying that Chinese participants usually discuss positive aspects when they are interviewed (Chen, Mak & Kankhuni, 2020). Furthermore, in this study, coordination and compromise were found to be the most common ways for female friendship dyads to deal with these

conflicts. This finding added two additional dimensions to the group dynamics of guimi holidays, which, in turn, advanced the interdependence theory.

4.6 Conclusions

This section summarizes the findings and discussions of the study to address the research objectives. The summary table is outlined in Table 4.2. The aim of the study is to understand the essence of the guimi holiday experiences of young Chinese women traveling in same-sex friendship pairs. In order to achieve such aim, the study needs to answer the main research question, *what are the experiences, meanings, and travel dynamics of the guimi holidays for young Chinese women?* The question can be answered when the sub-questions are solved. As shown in Table 4.2, to solve the sub-questions, this study utilized a qualitative phenomenological approach and included both descriptive and hermeneutic phenomenological data analysis to reveal the experience, meanings, and travel dynamics of young Chinese women's guimi holidays. Data were derived from dyadic interviews with 25 female friendship dyads (50 Chinese women) aged between 22 and 40 years old.

To achieve the first research objective of investigating young female Chinese tourists' lived experience of the guimi holiday (Research Objective 1) and to answer the first research question (RQ1), descriptive phenomenological data analysis was utilised. Specifically, Giorgi's (2009) four steps were followed (see

Chapter 3 for more details). The guimi holiday experiences from 46 Chinese women were summarised and described as escapism and freedom, relaxation and rejuvenation, and gendered fun/entertainment. Although various types of holidays were depicted as escaping from daily life, relaxation, and freedom, there are different things people want to escape from. For women in this study, a guimi holiday is to escape from their home roles and responsibilities of mother, wife and homemaker. Under such circumstances, they experienced gendered fun which they named as "real leisure", "back to girly time", "new image", "sheer pleasure". Therefore, it is within the intimacy of guimi friendship and the guimi holiday context in which the process of 'making oneself is a girl' reached at its most intense.

In an attempt to achieve the second research objective on the meanings of guimi holidays and answer RQ2, a hermeneutic phenomenological data analysis was utilised. Specifically, van Manen's (1997) iterative (whole-part-whole) method was used (see Chapter 3 for more details). A total of 46 Chinese women's opinions regarding the meanings of guimi holidays were summarised. The most frequently mentioned meanings associated with guimi holidays are: re-connected with guimi friends, sense of empowerment, and buffer to life events.

Although social connectedness has been well documented as one of the travel motivations, the theory fails to value the totality of women's guimi holiday experience. As for women in this study, their guimi friends did not just enrich

the travel experience; they were the travel experience. The research findings of this study found that time for re-connectedness has two meanings. First, a guimi holiday is a peer time for young women to re-connect with their female friends and share their experiences, stories, and secrets. Second, it provides a time and a place to reconnect with the inner self and, thus, an opportunity to perform as their authentic selves. As a result, being together is the essence of the guimi holiday. One of the respondents' quotations can be used as the conclusion, as she said, *"the meaning lies not in the travel activity itself ... but in the context of the guimi relationship and the responsibility*" (Tian, 37-year-old, P4). Additionally, the guimi friendship and the women-only activities served as sites of empowerment and autonomy to travel to more unreachable places than alone, and resistance to gender stereotyped roles and images. Moreover, for some women, the guimi friendships and the holiday with guimi friends also provided some sort of stability and social support when going through life events (e.g., resignation, divorce, and remarriage).

As to further analyze the research findings and to better achieve the last research objective and answer RQ3 (which is also a hermeneutic phenomenological research question), van Manen's (1997) iterative (whole-part-whole) method was applied to analyze paired data as the travel dynamics of interdependence require both parties' voice to be heard. As shown by the participants' reports, interdependence shapes the guimi holiday universally and essentially. Within this dyadic guimi friendship, individual and collective pursuits are brought

together through increasingly coordinated coactions based on shared values, purposes, and identity. Thorough familiarity and knowledge about each other's temperaments and life experiences builds and sustains strong emotional attachments and intimacy, making the dyad ever more comprehensive. Actor and partner effects become more considered and pronounced in behavioral choices modified for the sake of the other and the relationship. This is the two interdependence processes at work. Serial rules are adopted and amended during interactions according to strategies that seek to maximize beneficial outcomes or avoid detrimental outcomes. These transformative serial rules moderate the development of response tendencies through their experiences during the guimi holiday.

The mutuality of dependence is also moderated in the relative (in)equality of dependence versus independence (or high actor control). The transformation process might see one guimi seek opportunities to either increase their own independence (at the expense of the relationship) or increase the dependence of their relatively independent partner. Increasing the other partner's dependence can be achieved by some combination of increasing their (mutual) co-dependencies or increasing a unidirectional dependency in frequency or value. As the guimi lower risks or increase rewards (or both) through increasing (co-)dependencies, each is motivated to trust and invest in their shared relationship and each other directly. These opportunities and

entrusting investments can build dependence to levels and depths equal to any other intimate relationship.

Each guimi seeks opportunities to contribute. The findings have shown this to be especially true when both friends recognize that one partner has a useful advantage or competence that the other lacks. That partner is more motivated to contribute their competency when the other partner is approving or at least neutral. Conversely, one friend will concede a contribution they would have otherwise preferred to make themselves, for the sake of the other friend and harmony in their relationship. A negating possibility is when both guimi may be averse to a situation or condition and search for options that do not require that contribution.

Furthermore, each guimi seeks to establish their own dependability and trustworthiness. To any extent that doing so builds their own self-esteem, being (seen as) dependable and trustworthy is intrinsically as well as extrinsically rewarding. Intrinsic rewards from dependability and trust can also come when a friend feels they are more dependent or otherwise feels less secure in the relationship, experienced as a sense of belonging and worthiness that compensates and relieves such insecurities. Empathy and deep caring also begets sincere expressions of appreciation and affirmation between the guimi in intimate moments during the guimi holiday.

To conclude, the guimi travel of Chinese women is a sub-segment of GGAs, which are based on close friendship ties, rather than general all-female travel.

The guimi relationship was sanctioned in the Confucian relational perspective of relationship (guanxi) as mentioned in the literature review section. In ancient times, the high reliance on close female friends arose from social constraints, whereas such high reliance arises today from the legacy of the one-child policy (Peterman, 2017). Throughout the Chinese history, across its vast social changes and the emancipation of Chinese women, with the expansion of their travel spaces from home and garden to domestic and international travel and their liberation from any need for permission, the guimi relationship has been conserved, adapted, and cherished.

To sum up, although Chinese women are now independent, they perform different sorts of interdependence during their guimi holidays including power relations of power over and power to, mutual dependence, conflicts, coordination, and compromise. Guimi holidays provide Chinese women emotional and spiritual freedoms, safety and security, reconnection, and recreation. The guimi relationship, as a unifying continuity, has evolved into a highly refined, intimately interdependent, and intrinsically Chinese social entity that manifests most clearly in guimi holidays. Guimi holidays remain deeply embedded in Chinese society and culture, having found new contexts in modern China. These new and modern contexts distinguish the transient, expedient, or role-based identities of modern society from the harmonious, authentic, and constant guimi identity, which the guimi relationship has always been.

Table 4. 2 Summary of key findings addressing research objectives and research questions

Aim of study: to approach the essence of the guimi holiday experience performed of Chinese women traveling in same-sex friendship pairs.			
Research objectives	Research questions	Data analysis	Key findings
RO1: To investigate female Chinese tourists' lived experience of the guimi holiday	RQ1:What is it like to have a guimi holiday and how does it differ from traveling with family members?	Giorgi's (2009) four steps of doing descriptive phenomenological data analysis	The lived experience of a guimi holiday was found to be heavily related to feelings of escapism and freedom, and real relaxation, and gendered fun/entertainment.
RO2: To examine female Chinese tourists' subjective perspectives of the meanings of guimi holidays	RQ2: What are the meanings of guimi holidays as attributed by each member of the friendship dyad?	van Manen's (1997) iterative (whole-part-whole) method of doing Hermeneutic phenomenological data analysis	Three meanings were revealed in this study: time for re-connectedness, sense of empowerment, and buffer to life events.
RO3: To explore the characteristics of dyads, namely, interdependence, and their effects on the guimi holiday experience	RQ3:How does the central idea of the friendship dyad, namely, interdependence, shape the experience of the Chinese guimi holiday?	van Manen's (1997) iterative (whole-part-whole) method of doing Hermeneutic phenomenological data analysis	Several sub-dimensions from the interdependence theory were found to shape the guimi holiday experiences: 1. Power relations of power over and power to 2. Mutual dependence 3. Conflicts, coordination, and compromise

CHAPTER 5. CONTRIBUTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This chapter is organized as follows. Section 5.1 highlights the theoretical and methodological contributions to the study. Then in Section 5.2 it addresses the relevant practical implications for the guimi holiday-related marketing and management to enable women to benefit from their holiday experiences. Section 5.3 describes the limitations of the thesis and future research opportunities. In Section 5.4, the chapter finishes with some concluding comments on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the study.

5.1 Contributions

This study made theoretical and methodological contributions to the literature on understanding the guimi holiday experience of Chinese women, particularly those who were born under the one-child policy. It addressed the unexplored niche of GGAs that are based on women's close friendship and highlighted the experiences, meanings, and the interdependent nature of the joint travel experiences of the female friendship dyads.

Specifically, this study has the following theoretical contributions. First, it contributes to the literature on dyads and interdependence from the tourism perspective, given that most studies of dyads focus on couple and couple dynamics. This study expands this line of literature into the study of

friendship dyads' travel experiences. Second, it enhances our understanding of the essence of Chinese women's guimi holiday experiences. Although guimi holidays have been widely advertised and discussed on social media, academic studies have not offered a holistic view of this travel phenomenon. This research bridges the gap between women's guimi travel and the lack of relevant research. Third, this study conceptualizes the travel dynamics of female friendship dyads in terms of the power relations, mutual dependence, conflicts, coordination and compromise. Fourth, it contributes to women's studies in tourism from a relational perspective. Specifically, it extends women's friendship to the tourism studies. Fifth, this study also reconstructs and contextualizes the understanding of the essence of guimi holidays in the context of China because most of the existing studies on female travelers mainly focus on Western women. More specifically, a voice is provided to young Chinese women from the dyadic sisterhood friendship perspective, which is relatively neglected in the tourism studies (Figueroa-Domecq, Pritchard, Segovia-Pérez, Morgan & Villacé-Molinero, 2015).

The application of the interdependence theory to examine the travel experience of female friendship dyads introduces new research objects and theoretical contributions and contributes to enriching the research methods applied in this area. The dyadic, separate interviews used in this study challenge the dominance of individual-centered methods, such as quantitative standard statistical methods and the qualitative method of individual

interviews, given that sometimes one-sided views sometimes cannot capture those phenomena involving two sides, for example, the travel of friendship dyads in this study. Thus, this study echoes the appeal by Chen and Mak (2020) and Chen, Mak, and Calder (2020) to use dyadic data collection and analysis to add more promise, vigor, and trustworthiness to the examination of the group dynamics of the interdependence of women in guimi holidays and other types of travel that are in small groups.

In addition, this study distinguished between the thinking and acting as an individual, namely, the "I" or individual perspective, and as a member of a friendship dyad, the "we" or collective perspective, as reflected in the methodology. In this way, it provides some additional evidence concerning the core idea proposed by Tuomela (2007), which is, compared with the I-mode, the we-mode is regarded as the primary mode, as in the 112,729 words of transcripts, the plural pronoun "we" ("我们" in Chinese) and she and I ("我和她" in Chinese) were used about three times more (75%) than the singular pronoun 'I' ("我" in Chinese) (25%). As a result, guimi holidays are not only about individual pursuits of women, but also their collective experiences with the emphasis on sociality. Furthermore, several tourism studies are governed by individual pursuits in Western societies, whereas collective pursuits guide most family research. However, this study argues that friendship travel, such as the guimi holiday, can bring individual pursuits and collective pursuits together. Thus, other useful methods that can be used for examining group experiences

are needed. To summarize, the key contribution of this study is to develop an area in the sociology of holiday friendship that attempts to understand the dynamics, porosity and variability of these friendships and considers the personal and social factors that influence their role, identity, meaning, and experience during the travel process.

5.2 Implications

The guimi holiday market deserves more attention from hospitality and tourism planners, developers, and practitioners, as well as destination marketing and management organizations. The dyadic friendship-based holiday is a popular small group travel practice that young Chinese women enjoy, but it is usually overlooked under the shadow of mass tourism. Accordingly, the findings of this thesis grant insights not only for female tourists themselves, but also for destinations marketing organizations, and tourism and hospitality practitioners who target on this valuable market. These insights also support understandings of wellness sustained through guimi relationships and shared holiday experiences, with implications for counsellors who provide services to women's health and well-being.

5.2.1 Implications for female tourists

Guimi holidays provide women relaxation and a sense of freedom by being away from their job, children, and male partners while reconnecting with their female friends, from which they derive enjoyment from the expression of deep feelings and the sense of shared communal experiences. The women in this

study were born under the one-child policy and most of them were the only child in their family. As a result, they usually attach higher intrinsic value to the relationship and interaction processes with their guimi. Nevertheless, participants also reported the gendered and familial constraints to take part in such a kind of holiday, as it is the social expectation for women to sacrifice such personal pursuits, especially for mothers (Green et al. 1990, p.120). This legitimates a bid for social change and recommendations for female tourists of different marital statuses who value the guimi friendship identity to pursue intrinsic pleasure and personal travel interests.

Moreover, the present study shows that female friendship groups play an important role in encouraging and empowering women's participation in diversified travel activities including doing things that are usually regarded as 'silly' but with fun. This implies that women should enjoy all of the benefits that one can get from guimi holidays that are unavailable from a family holiday or solo travel. In summary, women may find this study to be a positive force in enabling them to examine their own styles of traveling and social interactions as well as friendship expectations that will assist them in maintaining and utilizing the support of friendships while on a guimi travel.

5.2.2 Implications for destination marketing organizations

The lived guimi holiday experiences reported in this study have managerial implications for destination marketing organizations (DMOs) regarding designing and promoting guimi tour-related products. In general, marketing

activities centered on rekindling childhood or lifelong friendships may trigger a desire for increased travel with one's friends. Specifically, DMOs can use the favored themes (e.g., the gendered fun and entertainment of guimi dressing up, guimi meals, and guimi picture-taking services that include makeup, clothes selection for dressing up, photo shooting and editing, and so on) from women's narratives of guimi holiday experiences as a basis to create effective marketing communications. These narratives suggest a range of guimi-related products and services that can have broad appeal and cross-promotion to and from related segments, suggesting much potential leverage and extension.

The guimi holiday preferences for quality time together can inform activities designed for them. Leisurely shopping, private dining, interesting photography settings, suggest tours to such local venues by knowledgeable, professional, and well-connected guides who understand and support guimi friends on holiday (e.g. taking pictures of them, dealing with locals, etc.). Accommodations that cater to guimi can contract such guimi-friendly holiday tours, touting the assurance of reputable services associated with the brand, thereby capturing more of the available trade in an expanded guimi holiday value network. Because guimi friends mostly value quality time together, such guimi holiday tours need not be expensive or lavish. One can imagine such tours in chartered taxis or small buses, or even on boats, bicycles or

horses. Slow travel is highly compatible with guimi holidays during which high quality shared experiences are prized above all.

Targeting the guimi holiday segment, for instance, DMOs can promote their destinations as not only safe for women but indeed as female-friendly places where women can relax and enjoy their freedom, rejuvenate with their friends, and have gendered fun/entertainment. To use some examples from the interviewees discussed in section 4.3.3, these would include providing good infrastructures, facilities, and services for shopping, spa, and photo shooting, as well as creating an atmosphere of 'girly time'. DMOs can also promote their destinations as places where women can escape from the commotion of everyday life as a daughter, wife, and/or mother and embrace the identity of a guimi. To use some examples from the interviewees discussed in sections 4.3.1, 4.3.2, and 4.3.3, this would include providing good quality of bubble tea and space for chatting to re-connect with their female friends, enjoying a simple and relaxed lifestyle. However, to better manage women's guimi tourism experience, DMOs should beware of excessive advertising on these themes. Also, a balance needs to be found in terms of integrating these themes related to guimi holiday experience into the details of a destination, while providing the opportunities for creating their own unique guimi holiday experiences, since each woman deserves her distinct, autonomous voice, likewise, in friendship pairs.

5.2.3 Implications for tourism and hospitality practitioners

As mentioned in the earlier sections of this project, family and couple travel have been widely considered by tourism and hospitality practitioners, whilst the guimi travel groups have been largely overlooked. Tourism and hospitality practitioners could use images with the attributes that evoke the feelings of escapism, freedom, and relaxation, and togetherness in marketing campaigns for guimi holiday travelers.

Moreover, given that guimi holidays are usually taken in groups of two, with friendship dyads as the most prominent group size, tourism activities and facilities should be organized and positioned to facilitate dyadic interactions and small group engagement. For instance, the size and design of hotel rooms and restaurants, with the availability of spas, hair salons, and manicure salons, and bubble tea shops in the late evening, as places where a woman can stay and spend time with one's best friends, were all mentioned by participants as being important to their guimi holiday experiences. Enjoying special desserts or treats, discovering new items while shopping, being guided to interesting photo opportunities, these are examples of instances that can support the processes of interdependence, eliciting responses that are predictable and delightful. Such shared experiences deepen the bonds of interdependence. These findings indicate how one of the representations of mutual dependence among guimis arises through various types of sharing. The popularity of sharing information (e.g., product/mall discounts, new restaurants, and bubble tea shops), materials (e.g., cosmetics, clothes, and skin or health care

products), and emotions among the sisterhood friendship networks of women could be used as acquaintance endorsements for tourism and hospitality practitioners to market related products and services (i.e., the promotion, provision, and saling of tourism products aimed at attracting female friendship pairs). For instance, hotels could provide twin rooms and food that is specifically designed for two female friends and also design activities or make exclusive souvenirs for two female friends.

5.2.4 Implications for counsellors

The guimi holiday experiences, especially the themes, what the author of this study has framed as the chance to be "back to girl's time" or "a buffer to life events" or "have therapy talk" have implications for the counselling professions to include guimi trips in their treatment plans for its functions of relaxation, rejuvenation, freedom, gendered fun and entertainment, etc. Specifically, health counsellors or therapeutic recreation specialists could suggest to their female clients who are facing stress or depression caused by significant life events that they include their close female friends in their treatment and support system. To use an example from one of the female friendship dyads (Pair4) mentioned in section 4.4.3, the guimi tours of Tian and Lucy helped Lucy go through the life events of resignation, divorce, and remarriage. Such trips provided Lucy with multiple forms and instances of support in helping her transition among her different but yet important life events. Similarly, the relaxation and rejuvenation value of a guimi holiday should be acknowledged and practiced in daily life, as

demonstrated in the examples in section 4.3.2. From these aspects, guimi holidays could be incorporated into the treatment plans with the agreement of the female friendship dyads.

5.3 Limitations and recommendations

As always, this research is subject to the general limitations associated with qualitative study, including the lack of generalizability, replicability, and the perceived subjectivity. Because the social actions based on friendship are highly context-dependent and consequently subjective, according to Guba and Lincoln (1981), the researcher is unlikely to investigate general laws, such as the traditional studies that are guided by hypotheses deduced from theories. As such, the promotion of "context-bound extrapolations rather than generalizations" (Patton, 1990, p.491) is considered to be more meaningful to this study.

First, the issue of bracketing in phenomenological research is widely contested, and its effectiveness has been questioned (Vagle, 2018). Although Giorgi's (2009) method of descriptive phenomenology has been rigorously followed and attempts have been made to minimize bias based on the steps proposed by Wassler and Kirillova (2019), complete neutrality and objectivity cannot be claimed.

Second, while the small sample size is considered appropriate in phenomenological studies, this does not enable the generalization of the

results. However, generalization was not the objective of the present study. The aim was to gain an in-depth understanding of the guimi holiday experiences via phenomenology. Alternative methods with larger sample sizes could shed more light on the group patterns and variations across the travel experiences of guimi holidays.

Third, some of the findings might be impaired by participants' negation of negative memories, social desirability, and memory loss. Some participants avoided sharing any unpleasant experiences with their female friends, which is quite common when interviewing Chinese individuals. As Chen, et al. (2020) noted that Chinese participants usually convey the positive aspects of an incident. However, to overcome these avoidances, the researcher tried her best to create a friendly, relaxed, and enjoyable context during these interviews. It is hoped that these effects were minimized as much as possible. Future studies could employ participant observations to get more data for more insights.

Fourth, this study only covered the age group of those born under the one-child policy, although some interviewees have siblings. Future studies could examine other age groups of Chinese women. Moreover, the participants are from big cities in Mainland China. Thus, their experiences may not mirror those of other geographic areas. Therefore, one could suggest the exploration of women's experiences from other regions of China who also engegaged in guimi holidays to examine the potential influence of geographical locations

on such type of travel. Additionally, future studies may also consider studying the travel experiences and group dynamics of male best friends and LGBT best friends. Furthermore, comparative studies among different gender groups could also be of potential research area. Beyond these limitations and recommendations, however, the value of this study is providing a conceptual foundation for understanding the experiences and the group dynamics of guimi travel of young Chinese women.

5.4 The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on this study

The COVID-19 pandemic has imposed both negative and positive effects on this study. On the negative side, because most of the data collection of this study was conducted during the outbreak of the coronavirus, many participants indicated that they had canceled all of their travel plans. The researcher did her best to build rapport and help them to recall their past travel experience to reduce memory decay. Moreover, most of the data collection of this study was conducted under the lockdown policy due to the coronavirus. This situation limited the researcher's face-to-face interactions with the participants, which might affect the quality of the collected data. On the positive side, some participants tended to be more active and willing to share their past travel experiences with the researcher as the lockdown left them with more time than usual. Some participants even expressed that they enjoyed the interviews, because the interviews made them recall the good days when they were free to travel with friends. One participant even told the

researcher that she finally completed her travel stories and posted them online after the interview.

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Appendix A: Information sheet

INFORMATION SHEET

This study aims to understand the young Mainland Chinese female tourist guimi holiday experience. The study will involve two parts: the filling of a consent form, a pre-interview screening form, and an in-depth interview of about two hours.

Before the interview proceeds, you will be given ten days in advance to think about your traveling experience with your guimi and select the experiences that you think it is best to present a guimi holiday. A short background form will be used to collect your personal information and also for screening purposes. Your interview will be videotaped, transcribed, and analyzed with data mining software. All information related to you will remain confidential and identifiable by codes only known to the researcher. You have every right to withdraw from the study before or during the measurement without penalty of any kind. You will receive a supermarket voucher of RMB 100 for your participation.

If you would like to get more information about this study, please contact Ms. Xiaolian Chen on Tel. +852 3400 2283 or Dr. Barry Mak on Tel. +852 3400 2269; mailing address: The School of Hotel and Tourism Management, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Kowloon; and email address: xiaolian.chen@.

If you have any complaints about the conduct of this research, please do not hesitate to contact Ms. Kath Lui, Secretary of the Human Subjects Ethics Sub-Committee of The Hong Kong Polytechnic University in writing (c/o Research Office of the University) stating clearly the responsible person and department of this study.

Thank you for your interest in participating in this study.

Ms. Xiaolian Chen

Ph.D. student

School of Hotel and Tourism Management

Appendix B: Consent form

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Research Project Tittle: Understanding guimi holiday of girlfriend getaways: An interdependence perspective

I _____ hereby consent to participate in the captioned research conducted by _____.

I understand that information obtained from this research may be used in future research and published. However, my right to privacy will be retained; i.e., my personal details will not be revealed.

The procedure as set out in the attached information sheet has been fully explained. I understand the benefit and risks involved. My participation in the project is voluntary.

I acknowledge that I have the right to question any part of the procedure and can withdraw at any time without penalty of any kind.

Name of participant _____

Signature of participant _____

Name of Parent or Guardian (if applicable) _____

Signature of Parent or Guardian (if applicable) _____

Name of researcher _____

Signature of researcher _____

Date_____

Appendix C: Pre-interview screening form

Dear participants,

The purpose of the following form is to ask you some preliminary questions to help me in selecting suitable participants who meet the criteria of my thesis project titled "Understanding guimi holiday of girlfriend getaways: An interdependence perspective" for a further interview. It may take you two to five minutes to finish the form.

Please nominate one of your most important **same-sex friends (guimi)** with whom you had traveled. You may select someone who is your most important same-sex friend now, or who was your most important same-sex friend earlier. **Do not choose your sibling.**

Best Same-Sex Friend's First Name _____

Her contact means_____

How long is/was the friendship? _____ years _____ months *(please fill in numbers)*

Are you close friends now?

A. Yes **B.** Friends, but not as close as before **C.** No

Please indicate your relationship quality with the person you nominated by ticking in the following table.

Items	Little or None				The most or Always
	1	2	3	4	5
1.How often do you share secrets and private feelings with this person?					
2.How often do you tell this person things that you don't want others to know?					

3.How often do you depend on this person to cheer things up when you are feeling down or upset?
4.How much do you turn to this person when you are worried about something?
5.How much does this person help you when you need to get something done?
6.How happy are you with the way things are between you and this person?
7.How sure are you that your relationship will continue in the years to come?
8.Overall, how good is your relationship with this person?

Participant Demographics Form

Your full name

Your contact means

How old are you?

What is your highest educational qualification?

Are you currently employed?

If so, what is/are your current occupation(s)?

How would you describe your relationship status? (please tick)

□Single □ Partnered □ Married □ Separated □ Divorced □ Other _____

Are you a mother? Yes □ No □

Are you a single child in your family? Yes □ No □_____

Thank you very much for your participation. If you have any questions, please contact Ms. Xiaolian Chen.

Appendix D: Interview guidelines

Interview Protocol

Step1: Based on the information of the pre-interview screening form, I will ask some general questions at the beginning of the interview in order to build rapport with my participants.

How do you know each other? How long have you known each other?

How frequently do you contact with each other? Do you live in the same city?

How often do you travel with each other?

When is your last holiday together? Where did you travel?

What are the main activities and sub-activities associated with this holiday?

Step 2: I will ask probing questions throughout the interview in order to elicit more detailed responses from the interviewees like:

How do you understand that? Can you give me some examples? How do you feel about that?

Interview guidelines for research question 1

- What is it like to have such a holiday with your best female friend? Can you describe your experience?
- Was it different from traveling with other people, e.g., your parents, boyfriend, or husband? How would you describe the differences?
- What do you like and dislike about this holiday?
- Was it a memorable experience? Would you like to travel with her again in the future?
- Is there anything you would like to add that would help me to understand

your holiday experience with your guimi?

- Do you have any suggestions for other females who would like to take such a holiday?

Interview guidelines for research question 2

- What are your main reasons for choosing to travel with your best female friend?
- How do such experiences make you feel about yourself, your friendship, and women's roles in China society in general?
- What does a guimi holiday mean to you, and other Chinese women from your opinion?
- Are the meanings different to women who are at different ages (young, middle-aged, old)? Who are single, married, divorced? Who are with or without children? What are the differences? And how is it different?
- Do you think that such kind of experience plays a significant role in women's wellbeing or life satisfaction? How and why?

Interview guidelines for research question 3

- Who makes the travel plan as well as most of the travel decisions?
- What are the main activities and sub-activities associated with your holiday with your guimi? Among those, which are the most enjoyable activities for both of you?
- Are there any conflicts? How do you deal with those conflicts? Please give some detailed accounts and examples of the conflicts and your solutions.
- Are there any occasions you think you need cooperation with each other while on holiday? Please give some detailed accounts and examples of the

cooperation and your negotiations.

- Can you give an example of mutual dependence while on holiday with your guimi?
- How do you describe your interactions with your guimi while on holiday?
- Do you think you can have the same sort of experience by traveling alone?

Closing questions

- Is there anything else you would like to add?
- Any questions about the research?

Appendix E: Detailed summary of selected research on female tourist

Authors	Research topics and major findings	Theoretical framework	Research methods	Sample characteristics
FEMINIST EMPIRICISM PERSPECTIVE				
Travel constraints				
Doran, Schofield, and Low (2018)	The study confirmed the three dimensions of constraints: 'the intra-personal,' 'the inter-personal,' and 'the structural' constraints in previous studies and added the fourth dimension 'the family' constraints which were previously tacit but not emphasized in leisure studies according to the author.		Survey, CFA	307 UK female mountaineers
Souvenir buying attentions				
Kim & Littrell (2001)	This study presents the factors (e.g., previous travel experience and attitude toward souvenirs, etc.) that influence female tourists' purchase intentions of the three categories of Mexican textile products. But there are limited influences of these factors on the situational variable of buying for oneself vs. for others. Also, there are no reported differences in ethnicity and recreational or business purposes of tourists.		Survey, factor analysis; regression analysis;	277 respondents, with 83% were Caucasian.
Health, benefits, wellbeing, and satisfaction				
Drewery, Jiang, Hilbrecht, Mitas, & Jakubowitz (2016)	This study uses a positive psychological framework to examine the relationship between holiday experience, subjective well-being, and the role of emotions in-between. The results show that holiday experiences have impacts on girls' subjective wellbeing, and emotions play an important role during such a holiday experience.	Positive psychology	Diary-based questionnaire for 21 consecutive days (before, during, and after their holiday); Conditional process analysis;	74 German girls aged between 12 and 17 years old

Pennington-Gray and Kerstetter (2001)	This study outlined nine benefit dimensions and three types of female travelers: relaxation searchers, family/social bonding pursuers, and exciting activity seekers, based on a survey of university-educated women.	Principal components analysis, cluster analysis.	Survey/485/
Accommodation preference; motivations			
Khoo-Lattimore and Prayag (2018)	Motivations and accommodation preferences are various based on nationalities and ethnicities.	Survey; ANOVA analysis, correlation and factor analysis; invitation-only online panel recruitment/ Qualtrics-third-party research company	749 females from Malaysians, Americans, British, Singaporeans, Australians, and New Zealanders
Khoo-Lattimore and Prayag (2016)	Women's actual self-image influences accommodation preferences, satisfaction with hotel experience, and loyalty. There is a significant relationship between overall satisfaction and loyalty of female guests.	SEM; membership of resort; by mail to guests	540 survey ： Malaysian (54.7%); Singaporean; Indian; Chinese; Thai; Indonesian
Khoo-Lattimore, Prayag and Disegna (2018)	Three segments of girlfriend getaways are differentiated: socializers, enjoyers, and rejoicers.	Clustering algorithm; Fuzzy C-Medoids clustering for fuzzy data (FCM-FD); Qualtrics	749 women
Khoo-Lattimore and Prayag (2015)	GGA market is heterogeneous in its accommodation and service preferences but homogeneous in its demographic characteristics. GGAs are food & beverage driven, safety and amenity driven, safety and activities driven, social and emotional safety-driven.	Non-hierarchical K-means clustering; membership of resort; by mail to guests	540 women
Mirehie, Gibson, Khoo-Lattimore, and Prayag (2018)	The motivations of GGA include: Bonding with friends/relatives, getting rid of daily routine, celebrating a special occasion mainly at the seaside, or in urban locations. Cleanliness and safety are requirements for accommodation.	Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with varimax rotation, and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA); Online survey by Amazon Mechanical Turk	328 women
Song (2017)	Sightseeing, sports, relaxation, and entertainment are the four preferred tourism activities.	Descriptive statistics, factor analysis, and cluster analysis; convenience sampling	177 women

Perception of airline service				
Westwood, Pritchard, and Morgan (2000)	The results show that airline companies have almost no awareness about businesswomen's wants and needs, while businesswomen perceive that airline services and facilities are male-oriented.		Interpretative	15 interviews with airlines and 10 depth interviews and focus groups with business travelers.
Solo travel				
Chiang and Jogaratnam (2006)	Experience, escape, relax, social, and self-esteem are the main motivations for women to travel solo. Differences of motivations can be found based on the demographic and trip characteristics of the respondents.		Factor analysis	Online survey with 194 women
McNamara and Prideaux (2010)	Based on a survey, the findings of this study show that the main motivations of solo independent female travelers are: self-challenging, self-empowerment, self-extending, meeting new people, stepping out of one's comfort zones, sense of autonomous and independent. The solo female travelers can be categorized into two types: active adventure seekers and passive risk-averse travelers based their involvement in activities.		Survey; descriptive analysis	228 women mainly from Australia
STANDPOINT FEMINISM PERSPECTIVE				
Sexual-risks taking				
Berdychevsky and Gibson (2015)	There are multi-dimensions of risks related to women's sexual behavior on holiday: physical health, social, emotional, mental/self-perceptional, and cultural dimensions. While the physical and cultural dimensions relate to the geography of fear and sexual terrorism, but social risks were diminished by participants due to the anonymous characteristics and environment of a holiday.	Life-course	Interviews; phenomenology;	15 individual interviews with 13 participants from a South-eastern US university

Spencer and Bean (2017)	Hotel workers and female tourists have different perceptions about women's sex tourism on holiday. Hotel workers hold a view that men usually search for sex while women look for romance. But female tourists' perceptions are that there are no obvious differences with the things men and women are seeking on holiday.	A Caribbean feminist theoretical framework	Interview and survey; Mixed-methods;	Interview: eight female tourists (in the 25–50 years' age range) and twenty- six hotel workers (12 men and 14 women in the 26–40 age range). Survey: 159 female tourist respondents and 103 hotel staff respondents
Fendt & Wilson (2012)	Women negotiate constraints in three ways: taking a positive attitude to surf tourism, making plans and preparations, and being passionate about surf travel; The desire for challenging oneself and stepping out of one's' comfort zone is identified.		Interviews; content analysis	20 female surfers from Australia
Weichselbaumer (2012)	Using the concept of carnivalesque, the author examined the Western female travelers' desire for love, romance, sex, and companionship by involving the poor, uneducated, black Caribbean men. The findings show that carnivalesque lead to a temporary transgression and inversion of hierarchies.	Concept of carnivalesque	Thematic analysis	22 interviews with Western women
The influence of demographical profiles				
Stone and Nichol (1999)	The results of this study show that the old, single holiday market segment is increasing, but there is a lack of specific products and services that could meet their specific requirements.		Interviews	Ten females (divorced, separated, widowed, or never married, currently without partners) aged between 30 and 55 who were experienced single travelers.
Davidson (1996)	This study challenges the work/leisure dichotomy in leisure theory, as for some women, a holiday is a real holiday only when they have no family obligations; for others, holiday means relative rest as well as the opportunity to enjoy meaningful and valuable quality time as a mother or partner.		Phenomenology	24 semi-structured interviews

Berdychevsky, Gibson, & Bell (2013)	The well-being of girlfriend getaways can be divided into four domains: "Escapism; different gender dynamics: existential authenticity; empowerment; and being free from social structures and gendered expectations" (p.602).		Interviews Grounded theory; Snowball and theoretical sampling;	11 focus group; 15 individual interviews; 83 American and Canadian women
Gibson, Berdychevsky, & Bell (2012)	Stress and routine, bonding with female friends, and managing life transitions and events are the main themes of GGA. GGA could fulfill women's various psychological requirements at the different phases of life.	Life-course theory	Interviews; Constructivist grounded theory	9 focus group; 15 interviews; 79 in total
Therkelsen, Blichfeldt, Chor, and Ballegaard (2013)	Lesbian tourists share more common things with alternative heterosexual feminine tourists than with gay male tourists; In addition, lesbian holidays are usually driven by cultural, nature-based as well as hedonistic experiences whereas the labeled lesbian bars and communities are just supplements.		Interviews; thematic analysis	21 lesbian tourists
Small (2003)	The research results show that old women are quite positive about their holiday experience, and they value life's simplicity and try to explore the essence of everyday life and to reconnect with it, and social connectedness is another theme that continued through all life stages of women.		memory-work	17 urban (Sydney residents), middle-class, white Australian women;
Small (2008)	This study uses memory-work as the research method to examine Australian women's and girls' memories of childhood holidays. The results show that positive memories of childhood holidays across generations are shared, fun, physical activities. Meanwhile, memories of women's social norms for responsible behaviors restricted their freedom.		Three-phase of memory work includes individual writing and group discussion of memories;	A total of 86 women and girls participated, and they are white, Anglo-Australian, middle-class girls and women resident in Sydney;
Outdoor activity				

McDermott (2004)	Meeting and being with other women, the 'equality' of a single-gender setting, and learning and performing physical skills, and issues of support are the main reasons why women prefer the all-female space in the context of canoeing;	In-depth interviewing and participant observation; thematic analysis	Seven women in a group
Interpersonal conflicts			
Heimtun and Jordan (2011) '	The study examines the influences of holiday conflicts on women's travel experiences and friendship, and further the coping strategies taken by women.	Interviews	Two midlife female tourists from Norway (focus group and solicited diaries) and 39 British women who self-identified as midlife solo travelers but not all single.
Constraints of solo travel			
Seow & Brown (2018)	This study examines Asian solo female tourists' travel constraints, motivations, and experiences. Resistance, specifically, resisting sociocultural expectations for Asian women, is found to be an important motivation to travel solo. And unwanted sexualized male gaze and harassment are found to be the important constraints that limit women's use of leisure space at a destination. And the identity of being an Asian female makes them feel more vulnerable.	Thematic analysis	10 in-depth interviews with Asian women;
Gao & Kerstetter (2016)	Eight types of constraints impact old Chinese female tourists travel behaviour: "limited knowledge of tourism," "health and safety concerns," "culture shock," "lack of travel partners," "low quality service facilities," "limited availability of information," "negative reputation of tour guide," and "few employer-paid vacations.	Interviews	16 old Chinese females age between 50 and 59 years old
Wantono & McKercher (2020)	Asian female solo travellers have two groups: voluntary solo travellers and compelled solo travellers. The physical, culture-induced difficulties	Interviews and focus group	16 interviews with women from 6 Asian countries; focus group with three students

	and social/psychological risks and worries are identified in the study.			
POSTSTRUCTURAL FEMINISM				
Solo travel and dining				
Heimtun (2010)	The author of this study concludes that solo dining makes women feel socially excluded and lonely, and women's emotional reactions to dining places are mobile and that social capital in situ could be a temporal-spatial asset.	Emotional geographies and tourism mobilities	Focus group pre- and post-trip interviews and solicited on-trip diaries; constructivist grounded theory	32 Norwegian single women aged 35–55 years
Jordan (2008)	The study finds that travel alone for both female business travelers and female leisure travelers are quite challenging, and the problematic encounters or performances of employees and other tourists, especially the dominant heterosexual couple travelers largely marginalized solo travelers and leads them to avoid an encounter with couple travelers to seek other alternative practices.		Thematic analysis	Interview with 39 solo female tourists from the UK
Thomas & Mura (2019)	Although India is perceived as a risky country for women, however, some solo female travelers have internalized the 'normality of unsafety.'		Thematic analysis	21 travel blogs
GGA				
Khoo-Lattimore and Gibson (2018)	This study shows that feminine comforts, safety, facilitating friendship, shopping, and the discount promotions of GGA are the main themes for girlfriend getaways by taking action research approach with a combination of in-depth interviews, focus groups, and secondary data analysis.		In-depth interviews; focus groups, and secondary data analysis.	12 participants age between 22 and 42 years old.
Berdychevsky, Gibson, and Bell (2016)	"Girlfriend getaway", "is a phrase with contested and various meanings. While some women found it to be adequate, accurate, cute, and reflective of their all-female tourist experiences, others described it as stereotypical, narrow/claustrophobic,		Focus group; interviews; discourse analysis	11 focus group; 15 individual interviews; 83 American and Canadian women

Appendix F: Examples of meaning units related to relaxation

Meaning unit	Transformation	Phenomenologically sensitive expression
It is a feeling of complete relaxation. Let go of the burdens in my heart, without guard. I went out with her in May last year, because my personal emotional state was not very good. Then I took her to a mountain where there was no mobile phone signal at all. The main purpose was with her accompany to make me relax. I felt that I was able to **put everything down** and nothing could get me involved when we are together in the mountain. We just left when we want.	P10-Hui states that the trip with her guimi in a mountain makes her feel relaxed and get rid of bad emotions that accumulated previously.	P10-Hui reports feelings of relaxation when traveling with her guimi in a mountain.
Traveling with my husband is not as relaxed and free as going out with my guimi. With my guimi, I can basically say whatever I want, and do whatever I want. But with my husband, our likes and dislikes are totally different. For example, he doesn't like to go shopping, and then when I found something interesting and drowsy somewhere, he likes to urge me, as he prefers to follow a travel plan. But when I am with my guimi, our style is to go wherever we go and stop wherever we want, there are no must-sees.	P4-Tian states that traveling with her guimi is more relaxed than with her husband because they are more flexible and follow their own travel style.	P4-Tian reports feelings of more relaxations when traveling with her guimi than with her husband.
Traveling with guimi is more casual and relaxed, you can change the itinerary at any time, and wake up naturally without getting up early. You can also chat, chatting about life, encouraging each other and soothing the mood.	P7-Yu states that having a guimi holiday is really relaxing, as they can change travel schedule and can chat and encourage each other.	P7-Yu reports the feelings of relaxations of the guimi holidays due to the flexible schedule and chatting with each other.

Appendix G: Examples of meaning units related to gendered fun/entertainment

Meaning unit	Transformation	Phenomenologically sensitive expression
For a boyfriend... Ah, I don't know think he knows much about women, especially the happiness of girls. For example, the joy of shopping. Boys get tired easily, but if girls go out with their female friends, they won't feel tired. They have lots of fun and enjoy themselves from going shopping.	P15-Si states that boys can not understand girls' fun from going shopping.	P15-Si reports the fun of going shopping with guimi.
If I travel with my guimi, I took more photos and the photos are very nice. My boyfriend does not like taking photos at all and he always took me ugly when he took pictures. And sometimes he just could not understand why girls like taking so many photos	P19-Xing states that she takes more photos when traveling with her guimi than with her boyfriend.	P19-Xing reports taking photos is an important part for a guimi holiday.
When traveling with guimi, we talk more girls' topics. For example, uh…, underwear…, menstrual pain and headaches, etc. You know, when you talk these with your female friends, they can understand you from their own bodily experiences. And you feel you shared the common sense with her. It is the same like my boyfriend will not discuss with me about the problem of a keyboard and a mouse.	P18-Rui states the gender differences in terms of chatting topics.	P18-Rui reports chatting about girly topics is a part of the guimi holiday and this makes the holiday different from traveling with a boyfriend.

Appendix H: Phenomenological portraits of the friendship

Pair 1: Qian and Alin

Qian works in a hotel. She was in a relationship but separated prior to the interview. Alin works in a travel agency. She has a boyfriend and a younger brother. Qian and Alin became friends seven years ago when they were classmates at university. They took the same class and worked on course assignments together. Alin mentioned that whenever she was sick at university, Qian always accompanied her to the hospital. They took their first trip together to Japan to celebrate their graduation. Although they had been classmates for four years, they did not think that they had known each other very well during that time. It was during their guimi trip to Japan that they discovered how well they matched. Since then, they have created more chances to contact each other and have become best friends. They manage to travel together almost once a year.

Pair 2: Xiu and Xue

Xiu had just broken up with her boyfriend and was unemployed at the time of the interview. Xue is a married mother with one child and works in a bank. Both Xiu and Xue are the only children in their families. They became acquainted nine years ago as university students. Their first trip together was to Shanghai. Since then, they have kept their friendship because they feel they share many similarities, and their personalities match very well. Though Xiu and Xue live far away from each other, they manage to travel together almost once a year.

Pair 3: Huang and Yan

Huang works in a university. She is involved in a long-term romantic relationship. Her guimi, Yan, is not presently in a relationship but plans to marry in the future. Yan earned a bachelor's degree in Finance and currently works in a bank. Huang and Yan became acquainted eight years ago when they were university students. They did not talk much in the beginning. Their graduation trip to Singapore provided the opportunity for them to know each other better and become best friends.

They travel together three to four times each year. Besides, as they live in the same city, they also dine out together two to three times each month.

Pair 4: Tian and Lucy

Tian is a university lecturer and a married mother with a child. She has no brother or sister. Her guimi, Lucy, was a lecturer in the same university as her, but in a different department. Three years ago, she resigned to pursue her Ph.D. in the UK. She has since remarried and seeks a new job. Lucy is the only child in her family and has no children.

Six years ago, their acquaintance came by chance when they were assigned as roommates in a hotel at Qindao Lake, where activities were organized between their university departments. The first few years of their friendship revolved around shopping. After that, they had more trips together to Japan, Thailand and Singapore. When Lucy decided to quit her job, they organized a farewell trip. They travel together almost once a year. Their most recent trip together was while Lucy was divorced when they traveled in the UK.

Pair 5: Ying and Zhu

Ying is a postgraduate student in engineering. She is married but has no children. Her guimi, Zhu, is studying for her master's degree in art and design. She was single when she was interviewed. Ying and Zhu are like sisters because they have known each other since they were seven years old. They attended the same middle school and the same university. Each views the other as her best friend. Ying and Zhu live in different cities and contact each other daily. This pair maintains their friendship through regular shared activities, including travel.

Pair 6: Yu and Fu

Yu has two sisters. She is not involved in a romantic relationship and is not overly concerned about starting such a relationship. Yu is a professor at a university. Fu is a married woman without children. She is a lecturer in the English language at another university. Yu and Fu began their friendship nine years ago when they were assigned as roommates at the university hostel where

they were both teaching. Since then, they have become best friends. In 2018, Fu married and left the city where Yu continues to live and work. They have traveled together often. Although they no longer live in the same city anymore, they still manage to travel together almost every year.

Pair 7: Yue and Lu

Yue holds a Ph.D. degree in traditional Chinese medicine. Like Lu, she has no siblings in her family. Lu identifies as a heterosexual woman who is single and uninvolved in any romantic relationship. She holds a doctoral degree and works as an administrative staff member in a hospital. Lu and Yue started their friendship 15 years ago when Yue was a freshman. They studied their master's and doctoral degrees under the supervision of the same professor at the university while Lu was a senior student. Lu offered many suggestions for Yue's research project. Since their graduations, they have lived in different cities. They travel together at least twice each year. Yue mentioned that because they are both over 40 and single, they need such occasions for emotional catharsis and spiritual growth.

Pair 8: Zhou and Zhu

Zhou is a heterosexual woman in a romantic relationship. Zhou has no siblings in her family. Zhou is a postgraduate student in civil engineering, in her first year studying far away from home. Zhu is single and she has a younger brother. Zhu works as an accountant for a company in her hometown. Zhou and Zhu have been friends for ten years. They studied in the same middle school and university. This pair feels that, although they live far from each other now, their friendship will last forever. They manage to take a guimi trip almost once a year.

Pair 9: May and Yi

May is a married woman without children. She has a Ph.D. degree in psychology and lectures at a university. May has a younger brother. Yi is a mother with one child and was separated from her husband at the time of her interview. She has a bachelor's degree and works in a travel agency. May and Yi have been friends for 15 years. They studied the same major at their university. After

graduation, May continued to complete her master's degree. They have witnessed much in each other's lives: being single, getting married, changing jobs, and giving birth. They travel together almost once a year.

Pair 10: Yang and Hui

Hui is a married woman without children. She has no siblings in her family. She has a bachelor's degree and works in a bank. Yang is a married woman with a five-year-old child. She has a sister who is three years older. Yang has a bachelor's degree and teaches in a middle school. Five years ago, Hue and Yang were introduced to each other by a colleague of Yang. They have become very close friends because they have shared interests and values in life. When they were in the same city, they met almost three times a week. They are in different cities, so they have video calls two to three times each week.

Pair 11: Ya and Yin

Ya is a single heterosexual woman without children. She holds a master's degree but was unemployed at the time of the interview. She has no siblings.

Yin is married but has no children. Yin has a master's degree, but she is also unemployed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Ya and Yin became acquainted in 2008 as classmates in their junior school. They attended different high schools and universities. Because Yin took a gap year after graduation, Ya arrived in Hong Kong one year prior to Yin. When Ya graduated in 2019, Yin registered at the same university. When they were both in Hong Kong, Ya and Yin would meet two or three times each week. Then, Ya changed her job and returned to the Mainland. For months, COVID-19 prevented them from meeting. They stayed in touch via WeChat. Their friendship has lasted for 12 years at the time of the interview.

Pair 12: Luqi and Liu

Luqi is the only child in her family. At the time of her interview, she had a boyfriend, but was unemployed. Liu is a single woman who has no siblings. Liu works in the bank she joined after

graduating with her bachelor's degree. Luqi and Liu became close friends when they were classmates at their university. While completing their many assignments, Luqi and Liu found they matched very well with each other. Since then, they have visited many Chinese cities together. Luqi stated that Liu was the first person that came to her mind when she was asked, "Who is your guimi and who do you want to travel with?"

Pair 13: Shu and Si

Shu and Si have boyfriends. Shu has a bachelor's degree but was unemployed at the time of the interview. Si is a university student with a bachelor's degree.

Shu and Si have known each other for 16 years because their mothers are very close friends. Neither of them has any sisters (Si has one brother), so they are like siblings. Shu and Si are in the same city within a 20-minute drive of each other's homes. Therefore, they have very frequent communications with each other.

Pair 14: San and Sherry

San is a 21-year-old single woman who works as a salesperson in a company. She has a younger brother. Sherry is single, too. She has a bachelor's degree but was unemployed when her interview occurred. San and Sherry have been friends for six years, since being classmates in senior school. They attended different universities but stayed connected. Their parents live in the same city. San and Sherry view each other as family members and say the relationship is very close. They manage to travel together almost once a year. They have traveled to the Chinese cities of Beijing, Shanghai, Hangzhou, Xiamen and others.

Pair 15: Mei and Mai

Mei is a heterosexual woman in a relationship at present. She has a bachelor's degree and works as a secretary in a company. Mai has a boyfriend. She holds a master's degree and works as an accountant. Mei and Mai have been friends for five years, since they were university roommates. They had six roommates, but the two became closer than the other four because their personalities

and values matched very well. One year ago, Mai introduced Mei to Mei's boyfriend. They have visited many places together. They had planned their next trip and bought guimi dresses, but the COVID-19 pandemic prevented their travel.

Pair 16: Ning and Lily

Ning is a single heterosexual woman. She has no siblings. Ning just received her master's degree and was searching for a job at the time of the interview. Lily has a boyfriend. She is the only child in her family. Lily is pursuing her master's degree. Lily and Ning first met at a very young age nineteen years ago. They attended the same elementary school during Year 1 and Year 2. Lily went to another school in Year 3. Because their two families lived nearby (20 minutes by car), they met each other every year. They attended the same high school but different classes. They stopped studying together but met every year during vacations. Sometimes they spend the night outside or stayed in each other's homes.

Pair 17: Ruo and Rui

Ruo is a heterosexual woman in a relationship. She is the only child in her family. Ruo just obtained her master's degree and was searching for a job when interviewed. Rui is a single heterosexual woman with no siblings, has a master's degree and works in a foreign company. Ruo and Rui have been friends for more than 20 years. They attended the same junior school and then the same high school. Ruo and Rui have traveled together to many places and had travel plans for this year as well. Were it not for the COVID-19 pandemic, they would have traveled together again.

Pair 18: Xing and Xian

Xing has a boyfriend. She is the only child in her family. Xing is studying for her bachelor's degree. Xian is a single heterosexual woman without siblings in her family. Xian is pursuing her master's degree in Japan. Xian and Xing began their friendship 10 years ago when they were in

junior school. Xing views Xian as her older sister. Although they live far away from each other, Xian and Xing communicate online almost every day. They travel together almost once a year.

Pair 19: Yao and You

Yao is a single heterosexual woman without siblings. She had just earned her master's degree and intends to study her Ph.D. degree soon. You is single and the only child in her family, too. She holds a bachelor's degree and works in a local company. Yao and You met 15 years ago during their third year of primary school. They attended separate high schools and universities. Yao and You travel together every winter and summer vacation.

Pair 20: Hiro and Hien

Hiro is single and is the only child in her family. She also has a bachelor's degree amd works in the hotel industry. Hien is married with no children and no siblings. She has a bachelor's degree and works in hotel industry, too. Hien and Hiro first met when Hiro joined the company where Hien works.. Hien and Hiro feel that they have many things to discuss and share with each other. They have become close friends and traveled to many overseas destinations together.

Pair 21: Jackie and Jian

Jackie is a heterosexual woman in a relationship. She is the only child in her family. Jackie has a bachelor's degree and works in a bank. Jian also is the only child in her family. Jian has a boyfriend and she is also the only child in her family, too. Jian holds a bachelor's degree and is an administrative staff in a university. Five years ago, Jackie's classmate introduced her to Jian. From several encounters they discovered the fun they have together and the many topics they can share. They became close friends. They have traveled together to many places such as Japan, Korea. and Thailand.

Pair 22: Kinoko and Kylie

Kinoko is a single heterosexual woman and the only child in her family. She had just finished her master's degree in the UK when she was interviewed. Kylie has a boyfriend and a sister who is five

years older than her. She has a master's degree and was searching for a job when she was interviewed. Kinoko and Kylie became acquainted when they were classmates in the same junior school. They attended different high schools and universities. During vacations, they would meet and travel together. Kinoko said that almost all of her domestic travel has been with Kylie.

Pair 23: Zhang and Zeng

Zhang is a single woman who is the only child in her family. Zhang has a bachelor's degree and works as a middle school teacher. Zeng is single and without siblings. She is a university student with a bachelor's degree. Zhang and Zeng became acquainted when Zeng was a first-year student in the same university as Zhang. Zhang helped Zeng adapt to university life. This began their friendship. During university, they met in the library, joined the students' association, and traveled together. After Zhang graduated, they stayed connected. They have been close friends for five years. When they have spare time, they will manage to travel together.

Pair 24: Bai and Chu

Bai is a single heterosexual woman without children. She holds a bachelor's degree but was unemployed at the time of the interview. She has no siblings.

Chu is single, too. Chu has a bachelor's degree, but she is also unemployed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Bai and Chu became acquainted in 2010 when they joined the same company at the same time. They live in the same city for 10 years now. Their friendship has lasted for 10 years at the time of the interview.

Pair 25: Du and Gui

Gui had just broken up with her boyfriend and was unemployed at the time of the interview. Du is single at the time of the interview. She has a child who live with her ex-husband. Both Gui and Du are the only children in their families. They became acquainted nineteen years ago as university students. Their first trip together was to Yangzhou. Since then, they have kept their friendship

because they feel they share many similarities, and their personalities match very well. In 2008, Gui moved to the city where Du lives. They start to travel frequently when both of them have time.

Appendix I: Relevant quotations to Section 4.3

Quotations	**Participant demographics**	**Sections in the thesis**
I remember that year I was 18 years old, and it was the first time I traveled far away without my parents. Though I was with my best friend, we are of the same age and facing the situations of growing up. I feel free and excited that I can make my own travel plans and manage that large amount of money by myself.	Ning, 24 years old, single, Pair 17	4.3.1 Escapism and freedom
The main feeling is relaxation. Another thing is if you find some natural, cultural sceneries or activities that make you feel enjoyable when you share them with your besties, your happiness is doubled.	Yan, 25 years old, single, Pair 3	4.3.2 Relaxation and rejuvenation
We feel very relaxed. Basically, our trip means eating and shopping at a slow pace. We arranged at the time when my guimi Yan needs to relax, so we will not arrange a tight itinerary. Basically, we woke up naturally and then considered where to go! And since both of us like Japanese cartoons, we will also go to some cartoon exhibition.	Huang, 25 years old, in a relationship, Pair 3	4.3.2 Relaxation and rejuvenation
We saw trees with peaches over the mountain, so I said, let us pick some and eat! I think there will be no charge for it. It is probably not delicious as no one picks it. So, I climbed up the tree and picked it. She was less courageous. I asked her to watch out for me. Then, suddenly, an aunt walked out, holding her basin as if she wanted to splash water, but it also looked like she was here to catch us. Then my friend ran away by herself and left me alone in the tree! I joked with her by saying that after growing up, she cannot share the joys and sorrows with me!	Yao, 23 years old, single, Pair 19	4.3.3 Gendered fun/entertainment

Appendix J: Relevant quotations to Section 4.4

Quotations	Participant demographics	Section in the thesis
I think that apart from working, women spent the rest of their time on the family. After a long time, it will fall into an endless loop, and it is easy for a woman to gradually lose her sense of self. A guimi holiday can pull her out of this circle, and then she can have the feeling of her authentic self. A very important function of guimi friendship is to enhance the self-cognition. When you enter the workplace, you play the role of an employee. In addition, you play a wife or daughter-in-law at home, but only when you are with your girlfriends, I am myself, while my guimi is my sister. We can go out together and do whatever we want what to do without any restraints.	Mei, 25 years old, in relationship, from Pair 15	4.4.1 Time for re-connectedness
When we were in Shanghai, we wanted to use a drone to take pictures on the Bund, but we were driven away by the security guard. He said that it was not allowed to use a drone there. But we really wanted to take pictures with the drone. Then we walked one kilometer away and felt that we were no longer under the inspection of the security guard, so we filmed it secretly. We got nice pictures. Actually, I think there are no regulations there. If there is, our drone cannot fly up to the sky at all due to air traffic control. The security guard just wanted to scare us. But if I were alone, I would leave and stop doing that. So we would not have those nice pictures.	Si, 21 years old, in a relationship, from Pair 15	4.4.2 Sense of empowerment

Appendix K**: Relevant quotations to Section 4.5**

Quotations	Participant demographics	**Section in the thesis**
My guimi is pretty good at makeup. I don't know how to do makeup. During the evening, when both of us had time, she would show me a lot of her skincare products and cosmetics. I think this is very interesting. She also gave suggestions on matching clothes and arranged what kind of clothes to wear for both us so that when we took photos, both of us could look pretty. Actually, I didn't bring many clothes. She brought a lot, and I carried the luggage for her when we changed our hotels. And we can also help each other tie the hair. I like that little braid very much. Her skills are very good, so I will let her tie it for me.	Ying, 27 years old, married, Pair 5	4.5.2 Mutual dependence
Where she wants to go, I will follow her. I don't have a strong request for where I must go. I think this is a compromise between her and me because she is my best friend. What I only want is to be with her, and also enjoy the time with her, so any places, any activities are fine with me. I would not choose to split up because the places we want to go are different".	Tian, 37 years old, married, Pair 4	4.5.3 Conflicts, coordination, and compromise

THE END