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TRANSFORMING TO EUDAIMONIA VIA SPARKING JOURNEYS: AN EMBODIED APPROACH

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Transforming to Eudaimonia via Sparking Journeys: An Embodied Approach

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Wenqing Xu

ABSTRACT

Tourism has long been regarded as an avenue for promoting human health and well-being. Millions of people travel across borders annually in search of pleasure and happiness. However, contemporary visitors are no longer satisfied with just enjoying the "beach and sunshine." As a result, transformative tourism, which is highly associated with personal growth, has recently gained much attention. Despite the inherence of individual transformation in eudaimonic well-being, the link between transformative tourism and tourist well-being remains underexplored. A critical review of the literature reveals that only a few scholars have attempted to understand human well-being in the transformative travel context despite the complex and nuanced nature of personal transformation. Specifically, very few studies have investigated transformative tourists as subject individuals or their traveling experiences within an embodied and emplaced framework. Thus, deeper insights into the well-being of tourists during their transformative trips are needed.

This study aims to understand how tourists' well-being is framed by embodied transformative experiences. The key research questions include 1) what is the embodied experience for transformative tourists; 2) how do their experiences change their attitudes or views toward well-being; and 3) how can transformative tourism alter individuals' way of living?

This study employs qualitative research methods to answer the above questions. Specifically, this study adopts interpretative phenomenology analysis (IPA), a multi-method approach that includes verbal (interview), textual (participant fieldnotes), and visual (photos) data. In-depth interviews and participant observations are also conducted to trace the route of changes among individual tourists and gain deep insights into their embodied experience. To ensure that the selected experiences and tourists are indeed transformative, a specific set of selection criteria is developed based on the literature. Aligned with the key tenet of IPA, this study also follows the evaluation guide provided by Smith (2011) to collect, code, and analyze the data.

Transformative travel experiences involve attaining existential authenticity through tangible experiences, bodily sensations, emotional responses, and self-reflection. During their journeys, tourists communicate and interact with their surrounding environment and people, thus enabling them to perceive their outside world and engage in self-reflection.

Through transformative travel, individuals construct their own interpretations of the world and themselves. They reconfigure their attitudes, worldviews, and values and gain a new understanding of well-being. Transformative travel includes achieving life balance, inner peace, a sense of empowerment, and courage, among other aspects. While the pursuit of happiness often incorporates elements of self-realization, Chinese transformative tourists, who are influenced by both traditional Chinese culture and Western values of individual fulfillment, seek to strike a balance between hedonism and eudaimonism. They prioritize tranquility, mental order, and inner strength throughout their transformative journeys.

The contribution of this study extends beyond the context of China by shedding light on the impact of transformative tourism experiences on cognitive aspects, such as values and worldviews, and their positive effects on individual psychological well-being. This study also expands the research on the transformation of tourists' happiness, hence offering valuable insights that can broaden the present understanding of transformative travel experiences.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

The buzzword "well-being" has gained significant attention across various domains of human life and activities. Over the centuries, scholars and ordinary individuals have pondered on the definition of happiness and what constitutes a satisfactory life. Smith and Diekmann (2017) noted that well-being has become one of the most investigated topics in philosophical and sociological discourse since the beginning of time. The understanding of well-being has been examined in a wide range of disciplines, such as psychology, social and medical sciences, and economics. Among the multidimensional understandings of well-being, two distinct conceptions, namely, hedonism and eudaimonism, have been widely discussed. Based on Aristotle's (384–332 BCE) perspective of pleasure versus good life, hedonic well-being refers to momentary and emotional feelings (e.g., pleasure, happiness, and positive feelings), while eudaimonic well-being is related to the actualization and development of human potential. In this regard, the evaluation of well-being involves a wide range of human psychological functions and experiences.

Tourism research has recently contemplated the nature of tourist well-being. As a trigger of memorable and meaningful experiences, tourism has the indisputable potential to promote human well-being. In 2019, nearly 1.5 billion people traveled across international borders to enjoy themselves and experience happiness (UNWTO, 2020). People take leisure vacations for many reasons. However, regardless of their travel purpose, almost all tourists anticipate positive emotions from their travels. According to the UNWTO (2019), the vast majority (83%) of the world's travel and tourism is driven by travelers seeking leisure, recreation, happiness, religion, and health. Tourists also place high value on tourism as a contributor to their well-being according to a survey by the Stanford Research Institute (2012).

Fortunately, tourism experiences always live up to their expectations. As noted by Hobson and Dietrich (1995), "tourism is a mentally and physically healthy pursuit to follow in our leisure time" (p. 23). Meanwhile, Sonnentag and Fritz (2007) commented that taking a holiday can significantly enhance well-being by providing individuals the opportunity to break away from their regular and structured daily environments. By engaging in holiday activities, people can

experience new and refreshing things and indulge in activities of their own choice. Certain types of tourism, such as wellness tourism, social tourism, and medical tourism, have recently become popular among tourists in pursuit of well-being. For example, wellness tourism, as one of the most prominent market drivers, contributed approximately $4.5 trillion to the global economy in 2018 (Global Wellness Institute, 2019). In this sense, well-being has become a product resource that many tourism stakeholders can use as a key strategy to attract international and local tourists. As observed by Voigt and Pforr (2014), tourists are motivated by healthy living and positive changes when selecting destinations. Therefore, well-being is a strong marketing instrument that influences the decisions of tourists about where to go and what to do (Pyke et al., 2016).

Meanwhile, key investors have shifted their marketing strategies from "producers' interests to consumers' wants and needs" in relation to well-being (Pyke et al., 2016, p. 96), which will facilitate future demand (Crane et al., 2011). A survey conducted by Harris Group (2014) found that almost three quarters of millennials (those born between 1980 and 1996) place more value on unique experiences than on material possessions. This finding echoes the traditional experience economy, in which tourism is regarded as a provider of experiences. However, as described by Skift (2018), the largest tourism industry intelligence platform, travelers today "want more than a simple visit to a new destination or days spent relaxing on a beach" (p. 3). Tourists nowadays are not only interested in feeling happy for a short period but also want to experience valuable and worthwhile things during their vacation (Lu, 2010). As revealed by Correia et al. (2013), tourists nowadays are motivated by experiencing something that others have never experienced and by looking for new adventures and knowledge. Similarly, for millennials, a happy life is about creating memorable experiences that "span the spectrum of life's opportunities" (Harris Group, 2014, p. 1). Ballantyne et al. (2017) further explained this idea by describing consumers as "transumers" who are driven by tourism experiences that are "unique, engaging, extraordinary, educational, environmentally appealing and memorable" instead of traditionally fixed offerings (p. 29). The industry also noticed this trend. For instance, in 2018, Booking.com predicted that the coming years would see a rise in people's desires to create authentic moments that bring them "joy and comfort long after the fact" (Booking.com, 2018).

This change marks a shift from hedonic motives and behaviors to meaning making and personal growth from the perspective of tourists (Kirillova et al., 2017a). The current travel market

witnesses the increasing popularity of some tourism types, such as volunteer tourism, backpacking, adventure tourism, independent road trips, and overseas study. Traveling is viewed as a means of personal fulfillment, and travelers tend to add purpose to their trips. For instance, 56% of international tourists scrutinize the value of gaining invaluable life skills and practical learning from their vacations (Booking.com, 2018). Booking.com (2018) also predicted skill- and knowledge-based tours through cultural exchange (68%) as the most welcoming type of trip with a purpose, followed by volunteer trips (54%) and job placements in other countries (52%). In this context, tourism experiences function as a vehicle for tourists to self-explore and find a special meaning besides hedonic pleasure.

In this sense, eudaimonic experiences, conventionally marked as opportunities for travelers to learn and develop, warrant further investigation (Filep & Laing, 2019). While this concept is still in its infancy, eudaimonic experiences in tourism have been reported in a few articles. Such experiences are conducive to self-discovery (Matteucci & Filep, 2017), identity building (Voigt et al., 2010), social connectedness (Li & Chan, 2017), meaning making in life (Laing & Frost, 2017), and knowledge and skills gaining (Hao & Xiao, 2021). This process of growth has also been frequently characterized as a transformation that is highly favored by scholars and practitioners (Pung et al., 2020; Tasci & Godovykh, 2021). Transformation is predicted as the next burst of economic development (Pine & Gilmore, 2013). Tourism, as a strong catalyst of transformation, has attracted increasing attention from both theoretical and practical areas. Grounded in the eudaimonic perspective, transformative tourism experience is "inner- and other-oriented" and focuses on potential transformation, well-being, and happiness (Tasci & Godovykh, 2021, p. 1). From a holistic perspective, transformative tourism experiences are conducive to healthy living, global citizenships, and sustainable development (UNWTO, 2016).

Transformative experiences in tourism create opportunities for tourists to enhance their cross-cultural understanding and thus contribute to responsible travel (UNWTO, 2016). Specifically, transformation through tourism experiences represents "a positive change in attitudes and values among those who participate in the tourist experience" (Christie & Mason, 2003, p. 9; Lean et al., 2014). From the existential perspective, transformative tourism experiences stimulate positive and long-lasting changes in tourists' existential authenticity (Kirillova et al., 2017a) or inspire them to remain true to their beliefs and values (Wang, 1999). Transformation is typically discussed as a greater good of travel in the context of authentic experiences (Brown, 2013).

Although previous studies on tourist transformation have explored specific types of tourism (e.g., voluntourism, wellness tourism, ecotourism, international study trips, solo travel, and adventure tourism), scholars argue that transformative experiences are created via an integration of various factors rather than by a certain type of tourism (Pung et al., 2020; Robledo & Batle, 2017). "Everyone is transformed by travel to some degree" (Lean, 2012, p. 169). The industry also agrees with the notion that any experience enabling people to make meaningful and enduring changes in their values, attitudes, beliefs, and behavior, should be regarded as transformative travel (Skift, 2018). Transformative experience occurs through "special extraordinary events" derived from destinations, attractions, and tourism activities (Kirillova et al., 2017b, p. 498). This experience is subjective and co-created as a result of interactions among tourists, the staged experience, and experience providers (Pine & Gilmore, 2013; Teoh et al., 2021).

However, experience-related transformative research remains limited (Teoh et al., 2021). With a few exceptions, most studies on transformative tourism experiences focus on transformative changes triggered by specific tourism types. These studies also impose contextual or theoretical constraints in specific tourism experiences (Stone & Duffy, 2015). Furthermore, the limited conceptual endeavors to date have highlighted the triggers, processes, and outcomes of transformative experiences. The conceptual models derived from the existential lens (Kirillova et al., 2017a) and transformation learning theory (Mezirow, 1978) are the two most representative models in tourism research (Pung et al., 2020).

Although existing studies have contributed to different conceptualizations of transformative experiences, they perceive tourists' experiences as a phased involvement consisting of different triggers, processes, and outcomes. Teoh et al (2021) recently argued that these conceptual studies grounded in different theoretical underpinnings placed too much emphasis on consumers' narratives. As a result, they proposed a holistic framework from a co-created perspective involving a series of stakeholders in transformative experiences (Teoh et al., 2021). However, their work lacked empirical grounds and undermined the role of tourists as subjects of tourism activities.

As the interest in the phenomenon increases, digging into the essence and formative mechanism of transformative tourist experience is necessary. According to Kegan (2000), without a deep

understanding of the form, "there is no transformation" (p. 48). In response, Ross (2020) recently revealed in her concept analysis that the ego, mind, and body are the three structures that change form in personal transformation. However, as the emotional and sensuous vessel of humans, the role of the body has been neglected in transformative experience research (Matteucci, 2021). In fact, the human body and senses have received significant attention in tourism research since the 1990s (Song et al., 2020). Scholars suggest that the embodied aspects of experience should be considered when studying tourists (Desmond, 1999). Most of these scholars also acknowledged the view that tourism experiences are embodied, relational, and emotional. As the fundamental characteristic of human subjective experiences, embodiment emphasizes the dynamic interactions among the body, mind, and environment (Zhang & Lu, 2012). Some scholars also argued that embodiment within some specific tourism experiences should be examined in further detail (Song et al., 2020). For instance, Matteucci (2021) and Ross (2020) argued that transformative tourism experiences should be addressed from an embodied, relational perspective to further understand its eudaimonic character.

In light of the above arguments, this study explores the formative mechanism of transformative travel using an embodied approach and delineates the relationships between personal transformation and well-being, especially eudaimonic well-being. In doing so, this study helps both academics and practitioners understand how to develop and increase positive, eudaimonic effects in tourism experiences.

1.2 Problem Statement

Tourist well-being has been widely investigated in extant academic discourse. However, a few scholars have recently noticed the over-estimation of hedonic aspects in tourism research (Nawijin & Filep, 2016). Although hedonic pleasure is crucial in determining tourists' satisfaction and post-travel behaviors (Kim, Ritchie, & Tung, 2010), to equate tourists' well-being with pleasure and overlooking meaningful experiences is inappropriate (Filep, 2012). Besides, scholars found that a combination of hedonic and eudaimonic well-being contributes to the greatest level of life quality (Huta & Ryan, 2010), hence underscoring the necessity of understanding the conceptions of eudaimonia in tourism experiential research. However, eudaimonia has received limited attention tourist experience research and analyses.

Likewise, transformative tourism, as an aggregation of eudaimonic experiences, has surprisingly attracted limited research attention in the well-being domain. Extant studies have fully explored the positive changes of tourists resulting from their transformative experiences, mainly focusing on changes in their physical, psychological, social, and knowledge attributes (Fu et al., 2015; Ourahmoune, 2016; Teoh et al., 2021). Enhanced well-being is frequently marked as a component in each of these four dimensions. Specifically, most studies use a series of fragmented constructs or dimensions to represent the overall well-being of tourists. For example, happiness, positive emotions, and improved health conditions are scrutinized to determine the effects of vacationing on tourists' improved well-being. According to Lu (2010), well-being should cover the whole range of properties that make life worth living. Clearly, existing transformative studies have neglected the integrity of well-being, thereby leading to an incomplete and segmentary tendency. Moreover, a comprehensive and profound knowledge of the interconnectedness between transformative experiences and well-being is lacking (Hartwell et al., 2018; Pope, 2018; Pung & Chiappa, 2020).

Tourist well-being has mostly been viewed as a final state or outcome, especially in transformative travel research. Nevertheless, the mechanisms through which this potential can be realized warrant further research. On the contrary, the essence of transformative experiences in tourism has been figured out. Tourism experiences provide transformative opportunities for consumers to generate new ideas, thus creating a process for attitudinal and behavioral changes (Teoh et al., 2021). It is therefore interesting to ask whether tourist well-being is enhanced through a predictable process and how one undergoes such process instead of simply regarding well-being as a firmly attainable ending.

As discussed above, transformative experience has been widely examined across different types of tourism. However, the frameworks developed or reviewed in previous studies are not applicable to examining transformative experiences in other tourism contexts (Stone & Duffy, 2015). Although extant studies have made significant contributions to the conceptualizations of transformative experience, none of them have clearly examined the homogeneity of transformative tourists from the experiential perspective. Many scholars have reached an agreement on the existential nature of transformative experiences (e.g., Kirilova et al., 2017a; Matteucci, 2021; Ross, 2020). The medium role of tourist body or perceptions has been emphasized in a wide range of transformative studies. The tourist transformation process is widely recognized to be embodiment directed with "emotionally intensive, sensorially

impressive and cognitively stimulating" experiences (Kirillova et al., 2017a). However, very few studies have explored the essence of transformative tourist experience using the embodiment framework.

The mainstream conceptions of well-being mainly employ a strong universalist stance, which means that well-being can be captured using a wide range of stable categories that are independent of time and space (Nordbakke & Schwanen, 2014). However, the contextualist stance suggests that well-being should be understood as a complex resulting from interactions among the heterogeneity of individuals, social context, and temporality. According to Nordbakke and Schwanen (2014, p. 108), well-being is "a social process through which realities are enacted." This definition emphasizes the importance of transitioning from a universalist assumption to a contextualist stance when studying well-being to recognize the significance of specific contexts and their influence on individuals' experiences of well-being. It is therefore interesting to ask whether transformative tourists with similar experiences are distinctive in terms of their personal transformation and well-being and whether these differences vary across situations and attributes.

1.3 Research Objectives

To bridge the aforementioned research gaps, the primary objective of this study is to investigate the dynamic interactions between transformative tourism and well-being. Specifically, this study aims to unravel the underlying mechanisms through which personal transformation in the context of transformative tourism can foster eudaimonic experiences. By delving into these interactions, this study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the relationship between transformative tourism and well-being and shed light on those processes that lead to positive and fulfilling experiences for individuals. In sum, the overall objective of this research can be framed as understanding tourists' eudaimonic well-being in embodied transformative experiences, which include both tourists' embodied engagement with the whole environment and their inner reflections. To illustrate the research objectives, several key items need to be explicated in terms of their connotations in this research.

Although a universal definition of well-being is yet to be proposed (Dodge et al., 2012), the author agrees with the perspectives from positive psychology that individuals are "decision

makers, with choices, preferences, and the possibility of becoming masterful, efficacious" (Seligman, 2002, p. 3). Following this view, how tourists relate to well-being is indeed embodied, emplaced, and relational depending on their personal objective characteristics (e.g., age, education, marital status) and/or subjective factors (e.g., attitudes, preferences, and values).

Personal transformation is a complicated and intangible phenomenon that denotes "a radical internal rearrangement via processes that are not yet understood by science" (Ross, 2020, p. 52). As claimed by a profound scholar in this area, transformation is better understood as a process than an end result (Mezirow, 2008). Inspired by this claim, this study adopts the definition proposed by Holland-Wade (1998, p. 713), who defined personal transformation as "a dynamic, uniquely individualized process of expanding consciousness whereby individuals become critically aware of old and new self-views and choose to integrate these views into a new self-definition."

Transformative tourism is determined by an assemblage of factors rather than by a specific tourism type (Robledo & Batle, 2017). In this regard, transformative tourism can be defined as a journey in which tourists experience an inner transformation process that "is part of the awakening of consciousness, and creates more self-awareness, more self-inquiry into the purpose of life, living by a higher set of values, and making greater contributions to others" (Sheldon, 2020, p.2).

In keeping with the overall purpose of this study, that is, to examine tourists' embodied transformative experiences, the following sub-objectives are proposed:

Objective 1: To identify the role of transformative experience in promoting tourists' eudaimonic well-being, which is based on positive changes in attitudes and values driven by inner transformation.

Objective 2: To dig into the embodied structures that change in form during the personal transformation process and highlight the interactions among the body, mind, and tourism scenarios.

Objective 3: To delineate the formation pathways of individuals' well-being, which involves discovering the underlying essence and mechanisms of well-being experiences through transformative tourism from the experiential perspective.

Objective 4: To trace the routes of tourists' personal transformation and uncover the mechanisms underlying the relationship between transformative tourism experiences and inner changes in the attitudes, values, or life views of tourists, how the transformation outcomes influence people's perceptions of well-being.

1.4 Research Significance

Although well-being has enjoyed a discussion boom, research on tourism well-being is somewhat limited to the hedonic impacts of travel experiences (Smith & Diekmann, 2017). The primary purpose of this study is to make a valuable contribution to the tourism and well-being literature by exploring the eudaimonic effects of meaningful experiences. Extant studies have predominantly examined the health and wellness benefits of travel experiences in relation to tourist well-being. The conflicts between instant hedonic pleasure and delayed positive effects from tourism experiences lead to a puzzling understanding of eudaimonic well-being. This study probes into the eudaimonic nature of transformative tourism experiences, through which tourists' bodily perceptions and mental reflections are explored. Existing research on the eudaimonia effects of transformative tourism experiences has predominantly concentrated on distinct forms of transformative tourism, such as volunteer tourism, solo tourism, and study tours in abroad. However, the attributes anticipated from transformative tourists might not be entirely guaranteed in certain specific tourism contexts. In contrast, this study endeavors to delve into a genuine transformative context, unraveling the core and progression of inner transformation facilitated by tourism. To achieve this, a set of criteria for identifying transformative tourists is formulated, thereby surpassing the approach of solely selecting respondents based on specific tourism forms. In doing so, this study contributes to the inquiry into eudaimonic experiences in tourism.

This study is one of the few attempts to uncover the mechanism through which transformative travel experiences contribute to tourist eudaimonic well-being. Compared with other types of tourism, transformative travel has a distinct capacity to foster profound eudaimonic

significance. This study bridges transformative experiences and eudaimonic well-being in the context of tourism. While transformative vacations facilitate tourists' eudaimonic well-being, well-being also contributes to a deeper understanding of transformative tourism as a phenomenon, particularly in terms of motivation for and engagement in more meaningful experiences. Prior research on the mechanisms that lead to eudaimonic well-being has predominantly concentrated on the examination of specific tourism activities (e.g., Huang et al., 2023). In contrast, this study takes a novel approach by investigating these mechanisms through the lens of the tourist experience. Specifically, it employs an embodied approach to scrutinize the feelings and emotions of tourists in their actual context, exploring how these emotional and cognitive responses contribute to their transformative encounters. Moreover, distinguishing itself from existing studies that primarily dissect the sequential stages of the overall transformative process, this study endeavors to delve into how the experience at each individual step influences the tourists' well-being. Ultimately, it seeks to comprehend the intricate relationship between the outcomes of the transformative journey and the tourists' overall well-being.

This study also calls for a new focus on transformative tourism and well-being research, namely, the embodiment focus. Extant research mostly conceptualizes transformative experiences using existentialism and transformative learning theory (Pung et al., 2020). Meanwhile, the embodiment lens emphasizes the dynamic bodily and mental reactions of consumers. Transformative tourism is not only a meaningful experience, a gathering of extraordinary moments, and a critical reflection process but also a form of immersion and extraction. This study takes a holistic approach to examine the multisensory and multidimensional nature of tourist embodied experiences within the context of transformative tourism. By doing so, this study seeks to contribute to the understanding of transformative tourism from a dynamic and systematic viewpoint that moves beyond a simplistic "stimuli-react" perspective. As the first attempt to explore eudaimonic experiences using embodiment theory, this study theoretically extends the transformation framework.

This study also challenges the universalist thinking of well-being as a single variable or a group of measurable variables. Specifically, this study sheds light on a relational, situated understanding of individual tourists' well-being by conceptualizing the linkages between transformative tourism and eudaimonic effects as embodied and dynamic, which are heavily reliant on human variance in values, beliefs, and attitudes regarding their life meanings and

well-being. By doing so, this study adds to the existing tourism and well-being literature by contextualizing the subtle changes in individuals' inner performance as a result of their transformative tourism experiences.

Research on positive psychology in tourism can also benefit from this study. This study complements Filep and Laing (2019) by investigating the tourist well-being attained from eudaimonic experiences. By using positive psychology to explain how tourism contributes to well-being, this study further explores the mechanisms by which certain tourism experiences foster the changing adaptation of well-being within individuals. In other words, this study seeks to explore how these mechanisms facilitate and maintain changes in well-being. In doing so, this work contributes to the body of knowledge on positive psychology by zooming in on the routes of tourists' inner changes in relation to their well-being.

Practically speaking, this study offers insights into the rationale behind individual tourists' evolving needs, quests, and cravings and their fluid and relational perceptions toward travel and well-being. By identifying the underlying interaction process and transformational potential of tourism, which ranges from emotional delights to eudaimonic pursuits, this study offers a dynamic perspective to destination managers and tourism practitioners and generates valuable insights into the complex travel behaviors, value systems, and attitude changes exhibited by transformative tourists. By understanding these dynamics, destination managers and practitioners can develop tailored products, services, and marketing strategies that align with the needs and desires of transformative tourists.

This study also emphasizes the importance of recognizing the evolving nature of transformative tourism experiences and the diverse range of motivations and expectations held by transformative tourists. By considering the multifaceted dimensions of transformative tourism, destination managers and practitioners can design experiences that not only provide emotional satisfaction but also facilitate personal growth, self-reflection, and a sense of fulfillment. This deeper understanding of transformative tourists' needs allows for the creation of meaningful and authentic experiences that resonate with their aspirations. Furthermore, this study provides insights into the significance of tourism for individuals with mental disorders. Given its potential contributions to tourists' inner transcendence, transformative tourism provides alternative approaches for digging into therapeutic processes. Exploring the embodied transformative experience of individual tourists may advance the current understanding of

people's mental and psychological changes during their process of transformation, which is also expected to go beyond the tourism context. This study also contributes to the areas of psychology and counseling by investigating the processes and mechanisms that lead to inner transformation. In doing so, this study sheds light on how individuals recover and transform themselves outside a counselor's office.

1.5 Structure of the Thesis

This study comprises eight chapters. Chapter One briefly describes the research background and the problem statement, specifies and justifies the research questions and objectives, and discusses the significance of this study.

Chapters Two to Four review the related literature. Specifically, Chapters Two and Three delve into the historical roots, fundamental concepts, emerging trends, and theoretical underpinnings of the key subjects. The main topics in these chapters include the conceptions and applications of well-being in tourism, transformative experience, and personal transformation in tourism. Meanwhile, Chapter Four builds the theoretical constructs by incorporating embodiment theory. The overall theoretical framework is presented through the combined theoretical lens.

Chapter Five discusses the research methodology and introduces the methodological framework. The research design includes the research paradigm, research approach, detailed techniques, sampling strategies, researcher's reflexivity, and research trustworthiness.

Chapter Six presents the key themes emerging from the analysis of the participants' narratives. The discussion revolves around the main themes of transformative antecedents, triggers and agents, transformative process, and outcomes.

Chapter Seven builds on the findings presented in the previous chapter and further examines, interprets, and reflects on the participants' experiences. This chapter also offers a nuanced and in-depth exploration of the participants' narratives to achieve a deeper understanding of the psychological and emotional dimensions of their transformative journey.

Chapter Eight concludes the thesis by summarizing its key findings, discussing their implications, and providing a comprehensive reflection. This chapter also synthesizes the insights from the themes and reflections in the interpretative phenomenology analysis (IPA) and highlights the significance of the findings in the context of tourism research.

CHAPTER 2 WELL-BEING AND TOURISM

Over the past decade, well-being has emerged as a prominent topic within academic circles, encompassing psychological, philosophical, and sociological discussions pertaining to various aspects of human daily life and activities (Alexandrova, 2012). Philosophers continuously explore the meaning and constructs of "happiness" and "good life" throughout history (Smith & Diekmann, 2017). However, defining well-being remains a challenge that can be traced to as far back as Ryff (1989), who found that the "essential features of psychological well-being" were particularly neglected (p. 1069). Voigt (2017) believed that the lack of a universal definition of well-being is due to the huge differences in how this term is defined across disciplines, such as philosophy, theology, sociology, and economics. Given the multiplicity of theory, the definition of well-being remains blurred and overly broad (Jayawickreme, Forgeard, & Seligman, 2012).

Tourism studies have also started to focus on well-being in the past few decades. A wide range of terms stemming from psychology and philosophy, such as "quality of life (QOL)," "life satisfaction," "happiness," and "wellness," were introduced by tourism scholars based on past efforts in philosophy and psychology (e.g., de Bloom et al., 2011; Gilbert & Abdullah; Neal et al., 1999; Sirgy, 2010; Uysal et al., 2016). However, the question of how well-being should be defined and used in relation to tourism remains unsolved (Dodge et al., 2012; Smith & Diekmann, 2017).

Given the difficulty in defining and measuring well-being, Brey (2012) argued that apart from the exact definition itself, the definite statement of what constitutes well-being should also be illustrated. However, a unanimously acknowledged definition of well-being remains absent in the discourse (Dodge et al., 2012). Christopher (1999) and Brey (2012) drew attention to a problem within the research on well-being in the transformative travel context. Specifically, researchers have predominantly focused on the various dimensions and descriptions of well-being instead of offering explicit and precise definitions of the concept. Moreover, the contemporary theories and approaches of well-being are predominantly western centric (Joshanloo, 2014; Smith & Diekmann, 2017). Some scholars have recognized the need to approach well-being from an eastern perspective given that culture plays a vital role in shaping

the impact of vacation experiences on well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Walker & Kavedzija, 2015).

Given its multifaceted nature, well-being encompasses a wide range of perspectives and approaches. This section aims to understand well-being by 1) conducting a critical overview of two traditionally theoretical views, 2) focusing on the positive psychological understandings of well-being in tourism, 3) reviewing the topics in well-being and tourism studies, and 4) summarizing the gaps in tourism well-being research. Instead of clarifying the different meanings of well-being across popular disciplines (e.g., philosophy, psychology, and economics) as many studies have done, this research focuses on the evolution of related concepts and theories and the application of well-being models and practices to form an adequate theoretical construct.

2.1 Two Traditions in Well-Being

Well-being is considered a holistic concept that concerns "optimal psychological functioning and experience" (Ryan & Deci, 2001, p. 142). Many disciplines, such as philosophy, psychology, sociology, economics, and geography, have a broad interest in the science of well-being. Despite its complexity and heterogeneity, well-being, which is a traditional topic in philosophical research, has recently been studied in psychology (Brey, 2012).

2.1.1 Hedonic view

Well-being has been studied since the time of Aristotle. The hedonic approach originates from 4th-century Greek philosophy, which posits that one's goal in life is to experience the maximum amount of pleasure and happiness (Carlisle et al., 2009). This view was adopted by many utilitarian philosophers and hedonic and positive psychologists. In the 18th and 19th centuries, the utilitarian philosophers Bentham and Mill took the center of hedonism theory. In response to ancient Greek philosophy, Bentham (1789) proposed a view called simple hedonism or quantitative hedonism, which posits that the value of pleasure is only determined by its quantity parameters, such as duration and intensity. This view was later criticized for overemphasizing the quantity of pleasure and later neglecting the type of pleasure. Mill (1863) thus argued that pleasure cannot be quantified because certain forms of pleasure are more

desirable or worthwhile in nature than others. An intriguing aspect of well-being is the recognition that the pleasures derived from intellectual, moral, and aesthetic experiences often hold greater value than purely bodily pleasures. Although such views have been rejected for decades, debates about whether certain types of pleasure are of greater value than others are always present (Smith & Diekmann, 2017).

Corresponding with the hedonist theories in philosophy, hedonic psychology defines well-being with a focus on the broad pleasures of humans (Kubovy, 1999). Specifically, well-being in hedonic psychology refers to subjective happiness concerning physical pleasures and happiness resulting from one's attainment of goals (Ryan & Deci, 2001). From this view, well-being is essentially equivalent to hedonism (Kahneman et al., 1999). Kahneman, Diener, and Schwarz (1999) exemplified hedonic psychology as "the study of what makes experiences and life pleasant or unpleasant and concerns itself with feelings of pleasure and pain, of interest and boredom, of joy and sorrow, and of satisfaction and dissatisfaction" (p. ix). Therefore, hedonic psychology focuses on the positive and negative feelings in life. In other words, hedonic psychology defines well-being by distinguishing pleasure and pain in human experience. However, equating hedonic pleasure with well-being in research remains controversial (Filep, 2012).

The hedonic view received much attention from psychologists in the 1980s when Diener (1984) proposed the term "subjective well-being" (SWB) and its measurement. Since then, an increasing number of psychologists have used the measurement of SWB to evaluate the pleasure and pain continuum of their participants (e.g., Eurofound, 2013). This new hedonic psychology has significantly contributed to well-being research. For instance, most scholars evaluated the hedonic pleasures of individuals by using SWB. According to Diener's tripartite model, SWB consists of three components, namely, life satisfaction, high positive feelings, and low negative feelings (Diener, 1984). Life satisfaction refers to individuals' overall judgment of life, whereas positive and negative feelings refer to their positive and negative affective experiences. As identified by Busseri and Sadava (2011), these components of SWB can be delineated in many ways. In fact, the measures of SWB in well-being research have also attracted much debate. Particularly, the validity of SWB as an index of well-being has been questioned given that the representation of SWB as the definition of hedonism or well-being remains unclear (Ryan & Deci, 2001).

Newman, Tay, and Diener (2014) recently proposed the DRAMMA model based on a bottom-up approach that links leisure to SWB. This model consists of five core psychological mechanisms, namely, detachment-recovery, autonomy, mastery, meaning, and affiliation, and provides a clear conceptual understanding of how leisure enhances SWB from a psychological perspective. *Detachment and recovery* refers to release from work or life pressures, *autonomy* is viewed as a necessary requisite to SWB in leisure activities from both the engagement and motivational perspectives, *mastery* is related to self-accomplishment and self-development in challenging activities and experiences, *meaning making* through certain activities, such as running, dancing, and volunteering, adds value and purpose to individuals' lives and subsequently leads to SWB, and *affiliation* refers to the impact of social activities on one's affiliative needs that are linked to well-being. The DRAMMA model has inspired a wide range of theories, models, and frameworks relating to the psychological mechanisms underpinning SWB. Filep et al. (2022) have introduced a novel model termed DREAMA, which presents an alternative perspective by amalgamating the convergent aspects of the PERMA and DRAMMA models. In accordance with the DREAMA model, the construct of tourist well-being is proposed to be a synthesis of hedonic dimensions, particularly detachment-recovery (DR), encompassing positive emotions. Furthermore, the model underscores the role of eudaimonic dimensions, comprising engagement (E) that encapsulates autonomy, affiliation (A) which pertains to relationships, meaning (M), and achievement (A) that involves mastery.

Methodologically, SWB research evaluates people's positive and negative feelings and life satisfaction mainly through self-reported surveys. Certain questions, such as "How happy are you" and "How satisfied are you in your life," are often included in questionnaires and rated on a sliding scale. Some scales for measuring SWB, such as the Positive and Negative Affect Scale (Watson et al., 1988), the Swedish Core Affect Scale (Vastfjall et al., 2002), and the Scale of Positive and Negative Experience (Diener et al., 2010), have also been proposed. Hedonism theories are popular in Western cultures (Joshanloo, 2014), and hedonic psychologists have recognized the idiosyncrasy and cultural specificity of well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2001). However, related research in Asian or Eastern cultures remains in its infancy (Joshanloo, 2014; Smith & Diekmann, 2017).

2.1.2 Eudaimonic view

From the eudaimonic view, subjective happiness cannot be equated with well-being. The term *eudaimonia* was introduced by Aristotle, who criticized hedonic happiness as a vulgar ideal focusing on instant pleasure. By contrast, true happiness is about doing things that are worth doing. Fromm (1981) further explained this definition based on Aristotle's view as follows:

> *Vivere bene* (optimal well-being) requires distinguishing between those needs (desires) that are only subjectively felt and whose satisfaction leads to momentary pleasure, and those needs that are rooted in human nature and whose realization is conducive to human growth and produces eudaimonia, i.e., "well-being." In other words... the distinction between purely subjectively felt needs and objectively valid needs - part of the former being harmful to human growth and the latter being in accordance with the requirements of human nature (p. xxvi).

Eudaimonia posits that not all desires need to be valued and achieved. Those desires related to the actualization of human potential, that is, "to have a happy, true spirit," are essential to human well-being (Boniwell, 2016). The eudaimonic view assigns a distinct value to true happiness. The most valuable statement of eudaimonia was proposed by Ryan and Deci (2001), who argued that some purely subjective pleasures are not good for people's well-being and that the eudaimonic approach helps identify those objectively valid needs that can facilitate human growth. Therefore, the delayed positive effects of eudaimonia potentially result from "unpleasant activities at the time" (Smith & Diekmann, 2017, p. 3).

Bradburn (1969) made an early attempt to link psychological well-being (PWB) to eudaimonia. By investigating how individuals cope with difficulties in their daily lives, he concluded that PWB (or happiness) is something that "stands out as being of primary importance" (p. 6). Ryff (1989) later developed a lifespan theory of human well-being that refers to "the striving for perfection that represents the realization of one's true potential" (Ryff & Keyes, 1995, p. 100). The PWB developed from the eudaimonic view is essentially distinct from the SWB underpinning the hedonic view.

Eudaimonic living is represented by PWB. Ryff and Keyes (1995) proposed six constructs associated with human actualization to define well-being. Their theoretical model encompasses autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance (Ryff and Keyes, 1995). Evidenced by Ryff and Singer (1998), this

model shows that the PWB representing eudaimonic living can facilitate human life through specific physiological functions relating to immune function and health. Ryff and Singer (1998) also criticized the SWB model as an incomplete picture of well-being and an insufficient indicator of human health.

Another widely accepted model for assessing eudaimonic well-being is self-determination theory (SDT), which specifies both definitional and operational dimensions of eudaimonia and highlights three basic psychological needs, namely, autonomy, competence, and relatedness, whose fulfillment can contribute to psychological health, self-congruence, and life satisfaction (Ryan & Frederick, 1997; Sheldon & Elliot, 1999). The SDT model has both important parallels with and differences from Ryff and Singer's eudaimonic approach. Ryan and Deci (2001) argued that well-being cannot be equated with simply satisfying desires but must be understood as being fully functioning. However, they largely supported Ryff and Singer's argument on what constitutes eudaimonia. In contrast to the PWB approach that uses constructs to define well-being, SDT theory advocates these contents as the primary factors promoting well-being. Ryan and Deci (2001) added that the fulfillment of basic psychological needs fosters individuals' SWB. However, the situations that enhance SWB may not necessarily promote eudaimonic well-being. As such, the measures of SWB can be used to supplement SDT research in well-being.

Table 2.1 Theories originated from hedonic and eudaimonic views

View	Theory	Work
Eudaimonia	Broaden-and-Build Theory of Positive Emotions	Fredrickson (2001)
	SDT	Ryan and Deci (2000)
	Theory of Positive Mental Health	Keyes (1998)
	PWB model	Ryff and Keyes (1995)
	Eudaimonistic Identity Theory	Waterman (1993, 2005)
	Human Flourishing Theory	Ryff (1989)
	Meaning and Purpose in Life Theory	Frankl (1963)
	Need Hierarchy Theory	Maslow (1954, 1970)
Hedonia	Objective happiness	Kahneman (1999)
	SWB	Diener & Emmons (1984)

Source: the author.

Eudaimonia therefore refers to positive functioning, personal growth, self-fulfillment, self-development, self-realization, and performing meaningful behavior (Cloninger, 2004; Smith & Diekmann, 2017). To achieve self-transcendence, humans should endeavor beyond their boundaries (Huta & Ryan, 2010). Typical behaviors include planning individual blueprints

(Huta, 2016), helping others (Ryff & Singer, 2008), facing challenges, and enduring pain to achieve valued goals (Ryan & Deci, 2001). In this sense, compared with instant pleasure from hedonia, eudaimonia involves unpleasant experiences and negative feelings but results in delayed positive rewards (Knobloch et al., 2016). These rewards include not only positive feelings, such as self-accomplishment, authenticity, and being energetic (Huta & Waterman, 2014; Ryan & Deci, 2001), but also long-term outcomes, such as knowledge and skill development, novel insights, and morality and maturity achievement (Knobloch et al., 2016; Ryff & Singer, 2008).

While hedonic and eudaimonic theorists continue with their debates about the meaning of human well-being, this research will not focus on resolving such dispute. Instead, this study highlights these two approaches because of their significant theoretical and practical applications from diverse disciplines. These two dimensions are both overlapping and distinct (Rahmani et al., 2018). As such, well-being, as a multidimensional phenomenon, should be examined based on the similarities and differences between the hedonic and eudaimonic approaches simultaneously (Ryan & Deci, 2001).

Some scholars (e.g., Compton et al., 1996; King & Napa, 1998) attempted to identify the indicators of well-being, including both subjective and psychological factors. However, an increasing number of well-being studies in tourism have focused on the divergence of hedonia and eudaimonia, whose applications will be explained in the following section. Nevertheless, these two distinct yet overlapping perspectives of well-being have attracted considerable attention both theoretically and practically.

2.1.3 Applying the two viewpoints in tourism

Given the extensively positive impacts of tourism on well-being, scholars have explored the various ways through which vacation experiences can explain tourists' well-being. As a result, an increasing number of researchers have attempted to conceptualize well-being based on mainstream theories to fully understand the ways through which vacation experiences contribute to the well-being of tourists. However, scholars continue to debate on which theoretical framework is the most adequate for tourism research (Smith & Diekmann, 2017).

This section evaluates the hedonic and eudaimonic well-being conceptions in previous tourism research to identify the links between them and to explore potential gaps.

Well-being and tourist experiences are relatively new research topics. Extant hedonic well-being studies focus on social tourism, destination–tourist relations, family (couple) tourism, transformative tourism, and virtual reality tourism. Recently, SWB theory has dominated the research on individuals' well-being while traveling. As mentioned above, SWB is generated from the hedonic approach. Tourism experiences are dominated by hedonic perceptions of well-being (Schwanen & Wang, 2014). The representatively hedonic outcomes in tourism include typically positive emotions (e.g., happiness, satisfaction, and delight) (Ma et al., 2017), fun and enjoyment (Tasci & Ko, 2016), and uniqueness and immersion (Mossberg, 2008). Empirical studies have also shown that tourists' hedonic well-being is momentary (de Bloom et al., 2013).

One major concern in the literature is that some types of tourism, such as retreat tourism, volunteer tourism, and slum tourism, are supposed to offer eudaimonic benefits to tourists. According to Nawijin (2016), tourists can obtain meaningful experiences from tourism activities. Thus, Filep (2016) suggested that tourism scholars should expect the emergence of more eudaimonic approaches instead of solely focusing on the hedonic benefits of tourism. He also noted the difficulties and shortcomings in using SWB to explain happiness emanating from holiday experiences (Filep, 2014). Following Filep (2014), scholars have recently turned to explore tourists' eudaimonic well-being across different settings, such as diaspora tourism, adventure tourism, female tourism, residential tourism, and general tourism. Typical eudaimonic awards include self-actualization, self-discovery (Filep et al., 2017), hope, trust (Weaver, 2015), sense of meaning, and goal achievement (Jo, 2015). An eudaimonia trip is also often associated with some unexpected challenges and hardships that generate memorable and meaningful experiences (Matteucci & Filep, 2017).

Studies on both hedonic and eudaimonic paradigms can be grounded on SDT. While SWB is most often used in exploring hedonic tourist experiences, eudaimonia experiences are often examined using other theories, such as DRAMMA and Ryff's PWB model. Recent works from Hao and Xiao (2020) and Xu and Zhang (2020) also offered important implications on the underlying theories and applicable methods in tourism well-being research. Given the multi-

dimensional feature of well-being and the broadness of tourism settings, studies on well-being and tourist experience have started to burgeon in various forms. As suggested by Sirgy and Uysal (2016), the concepts and theories of well-being "are not necessarily mutually exclusive but they are rather complementary in nature depending on research settings and context" (p. 492). In the future, more interrelated theories should be proposed to explain hedonic and eudaimonic well-being as experienced through travel and tourism activities across different settings.

A limited number of studies have explored both the hedonic and eudaimonic well-being generated from tourism experiences. Meaningful and memorable tourism experiences contribute to both the short- and long-term well-being of tourists (McCabe & Johnson, 2013; Smith & Diekmann, 2017). For example, vacation experiences promote hedonic happiness (Nawijin, 2011) that support improvements in tourists' self-actualization and self-esteem (Matteucci & Filep, 2017) and identity development (Dolnicar et al., 2012). Therefore, both the hedonic and eudaimonic approaches should be considered in tourism research (Nawijin & Filep, 2016; Sirgy & Uysal, 2016; Smith & Diekmann, 2017). Nevertheless, how much well-being tourists can gain from their travel and how long their state of well-being will last remain debated. Chen et al. (2013) found that most tourists experience a boost in happiness after a vacation. However, other studies suggest that in most cases, tourists' post-trip happiness is less than their pre-trip happiness (Corvo, 2011; Kirillova & Lehto, 2015).

Both quantitative and qualitative approaches have been adopted in the literature. The most common quantitative approach is using SEM to examine the relationships among different variables in relation to well-being and tourism experience. Kim and Hall (2019) investigated the effect of consumers' hedonic behaviors on flow state and SWB in the context of virtual reality tourism and found that tourists' perceived easiness, enjoyment, and usefulness positively impact their flow state and level of SWB. By contrast, apart from face-to-face interviews, qualitative studies collect their data from different sources, such as online travel blogs and written novels. These studies generally conduct their analyses through different forms of thematizing and interpretating. One exception is Hao and Xiao (2021), who employed the novel "value-adding" qualitative approach to explore the eudaimonic well-being of residential tourists. Meanwhile, the phenomenology approach has been widely adopted in psychological studies to explore individuals' lived experiences.

Table 2.2 A review of hedonic and eudaimonic paradigms in studies of tourist experiences

Paradigms	Study	Context	Theory	Method
Hedonic	Vento et al. (2020)	Social tourism	SWB	SEM
	Chen et al. (2020)	Tourists and residents	SDT, Social exchange theory	SEM
	Cai et al. (2020)	Chinese couple's travel	SWB	Thematic analysis
	Kim et al. (2019)	Virtual reality (VR) tourism	Integrated hedonic motivation system adoption model (HMSAM)	SEM
Eudaimonic	Li and Chan (2017)	Diaspora tourism	SDT	Content analysis
	Matteucci and Filep (2017)	Flamenco participants	Theories of well-being	Grounded theory
	Knobloch et al. (2017)	Adventure tourism	N/A	Thematic analysis
	Laing and Frost (2017)	Female travel	DRAMMA	Thematic analysis, hermeneutic interpretation
	Rahmani et al. (2019)	General tourism	SDT	Text mining, SEM
	Lengieza et al. (2019)	General tourism	N/A	Churchill approach scale development
	Vada et al. (2019)	General tourism	Theories of well-being	SEM
	Lee and Jeong (2019)	General tourism	Theories of happiness	Necessary condition analysis
	Ahn et al. (2019)	Wellness resorts	SDT	Partial least squares path modelling
	Mirehiea & Gibson (2020)	Women's snow-sport tourism	Positive psychology	Interview, CFA
	Xu & Zhang (2020)	Chinese women's travel blogs	Dramaturgy	Thematic analysis
	Hao & Xiao (2021)	Residential tourism	Ryff's PWB model	Value-adding method
Hedonic and edudaimonic	Zhao et al. (2019)	Mobility	Theories of well-being	Interview
	Farkić et al. (2020)	Slow adventure tourism	Positive psychology	Phenomenological approach

In general, previous studies imply that either the hedonistic or eudaimonic dimension, as the "underlying mechanism," can explain individuals' well-being gained from their holiday experiences (Mirehiea & Gibson, 2020, p. 3). Tourists go on holidays in search of happiness and pleasure and to escape from their daily life pressures, which agrees with the understanding of hedonia (Smith & Diekmann, 2017). Indeed, tourist well-being has long been examined using hedonic approaches and theories, including SWB. However, an increasing number of tourists are starting to expect more from their vacations, such as self-development, personal growth, and meaningful life (Filep & Deery, 2010). Accordingly, scholars have realized that tourism have hedonic and eudaimonic effects on tourists (Nawijn & Filep, 2016). As such, tourist well-being scholars have started to focus on eudaimonia (Filep & Laing, 2019). Future

studies in tourism should then explore the continuum of hedonia and eudaimonia, which involves both momentarily happy experiences and relatively long-life satisfaction, from various theoretical perspectives.

Extant studies that adopt the hedonic or eudaimonic view to explore the relationships between tourist experience and well-being usually focus on the dimensions or components of well-being. Tourist perceptions or well-being-related experiences are categorized into several keywords. For example, Laing and Frost (2017) used eudaimonic theory as their framework and summarized their findings into the six dimensions of DRAMMA. Many studies also re-examined the previous conceptualization effort of well-being yet failed to dig into the essence of well-being in tourism. Demeter et al. (2023) have introduced a significant contribution to the field of tourism research by presenting a conceptual framework that distinctly defines eight variations of eudaimonia and hedonia. Their research reveals that the experience and motivation related to hedonic aspects are notably elevated during vacation compared to being at home. Moreover, they found that well-being state experience and motivation are notably higher during holidays, although not to the same extent as the hedonic factors. While the variance in hedonic experience wasn't unexpected, the noteworthy increase in eudaimonia levels was the most remarkable finding. This suggests that eudaimonia holds potential as a fresh and promising focal point for interventions aiming to bring about behavioral changes.

The relationships between hedonism and eudaimonism in the tourism context remain unknown. As aforementioned, hedonia and eudaimonia are both overlapping and distinct (Rahmani et al., 2018). The few tourism studies that combine these views have validated the interrelation between these concepts. However, little is known about how tourist hedonism and eudaimonism are generated and interrelated given the limited number of tourist well-being research that adopts the eudaimonic view (Li & Chan, 2017; Su et al., 2020). Therefore, both hedonia and eudaimonia are used in this paper to understand how tourist well-being is affected by vacations.

2.2 Positive Psychology and Tourism

2.2.1 Positive psychological theories of well-being

The movement led by Seligman in the 1990s brought the term "positive psychology" to the forefront, and since then, this concept has become the most frequently used theoretical lens in psychological studies on happiness and well-being. Rooted in humanistic psychology, positive psychology changed the traditional (pre-World War II) views of psychology, particularly in pathology that attempted to repair the bad things. Positive psychology focuses on "nurturing what is best" than "just fixing what is broken" (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 7). In other words, positive psychology aims to identify and nurture human strengths and virtues. From this perspective, individuals are no longer passive objects responding to stimuli but rather active decision makers with options, preferences, and the potential to become masterful or despairing in malignant conditions (Seligman, 1992). With the aim of enhancing human well-being, positive psychology can be defined as developing positive experiences and living a fulfilling life (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

According to Seligman (2013, p. 2), "positive psychology is the scientific study of the strengths, characteristics, and actions that enable individuals and communities to thrive."

Thus, the field of positive psychology is broadly labelled at the subjective, individual, and group levels (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). At the subjective level, positive psychology refers to valued subjective experiences that are evaluated in three life stages, namely, the past, present, and future. Positive psychology is about "well-being, contentment, and satisfaction" in the past, "flow and happiness" in the present, and "hope and optimism" in the future (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 5). At the individual level, positive psychology focuses on the following positive individual traits:

> the capacity for love and vocation, courage, interpersonal skill, aesthetic sensibility, perseverance, forgiveness, originality, future mindedness, spirituality, high talent, and wisdom.

At the group level, positive psychology concerns civic virtues that encourage individuals to become better citizens. These virtues include "responsibility, nurturance, altruism, civility, moderation, tolerance, and work ethic" (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 5). Positive psychology emphasizes the significance of positive experiences, personal strengths, and institutions in fostering human well-being and happiness. Although aimed toward addressing

a broader scope of people's positive functioning, positive psychology has been applied more often in the context of well-being.

Positive psychology was later renamed by Seligman (2002) as "authentic happiness." Authentic happiness is a very influential eudaimonic model (Seligman, 2002) that posits that a good life should be pleasant, engaged, and meaningful. Pleasant life refers to positive feelings about the present, past, and future. Engaged life is attained by engagement and involvement in work, relations, and leisure. A person with a meaningful life pursues something that s/he perceives to be bigger than himself/herself. Engaged and meaningful lives require an individual to use his/her "signature strengths" in his/her activities. A number of positive personal qualities, including kindness, wisdom, patience, and perseverance, can also contribute to a good life according to Seligman's supplements in his theory (Brey, 2012).

Another term related to positive psychology and well-being is "flourishing," which was originally presented as a philosophical idea (e.g., Griffin, 1986; Nussbaum, 2000). In Gable and Haidt (2005), positive psychology refers to "the study of the conditions and processes that contribute to the flourishing or optimal functioning of people, groups, and institutions" (p. 104). Seligman (2012) recently used the term "flourishing" to extend his theory of positive psychology by claiming that well-being should be measured by flourish than by happiness. He further explored a series of elements that constitute a flourishing life, including positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment (PERMA). Positive emotion is linked to happiness and life satisfaction, engagement refers to deep involvement in activities, relationships refer to having good social relations with others, meaning can be related to one's pursuit of something that is beyond oneself, and accomplishment is connected to achieving self in life. These components of PERMA share similarities and connections with the dimensions of the DRAMMA model, PWB, and SDT. As such, positive psychology can be described as a combination of hedonic and eudaimonic paradigms involving both momentary, instant pleasure and lasting effects of self-realization.

Many theoretical lenses have been adopted to explore the dimensions or constructs of well-being. This study initially presents an overview of these dimensions to understand clearly how well-being is described and delineated in these theories, models, and frameworks. *Affiliation*, *relationships*, and *relatedness* refer to the same outcome, as do *mastery* and *engagement*, *accomplishment,* and *personal growth* (Laing & Frost, 2017; Newman et al., 2014). Some

elements, such as *engagement, relationships, autonomy,* and *meaning,* within each model are acknowledged as the components of well-being. Moreover, *positive emotions,* which is only present in PERMA, might be a common thread that links all dimensions inherent in the four listed frameworks. For instance, *affiliation* in the DRAMMA model from leisure activities is regarded as a stimulant of *positive emotions* that can ultimately improve life satisfaction (Newman et al., 2014). Given its complex and multidimensional nature, conceptualizing well-being is a challenging work for all disciplines. Future studies should employ a highly comprehensive approach to help individuals achieve "optimum well-being" across different social and cultural contexts (Dodge et al., 2012; Smith & Diekmann, 2017, p. 10).

Table 2.3 Different theoretical model basis for positive psychology

Dimensions of well-being	PERMA	PWB	SDT	DRAMMA
Autonomy		√	√	√
Positive emotion	√			
Engagement/mastery	√	√	√	√
Relationships	√	√	√	√
Meaning	√	√		√
Accomplishment	√	√		
Self-acceptance		√		
Detachment-recovery				√

Source: the author.

Positive psychology covers both the hedonic and eudaimonic paths to human flourishing. The former focuses on the pursuit of enjoyment and pleasure, whereas the latter focuses on the cultivation of virtues that contribute to a good life. Tourism within positive psychology has also embraced the broad path.

2.2.2 Positive tourism, well-being, and personal transformation

Tourism and positive psychology have been studied as a holistic topic over the past decade and documented as positive tourism (Filep et al., 2016). The authentic happiness model proposed by Seligman (2012) can accurately identify the complex relationship between well-being and tourism. This theory suggests that a good life should be pleasant, engaged, and meaningful. In the tourism context, a satisfying holiday experience can be seen as more than just hedonic enjoyment; such experience also encompasses elements that go beyond mere pleasure and incorporates personal meaning and significance.

According to Nawijn and Filep (2016), positive psychology offers a valuable framework for understanding and enhancing tourism experience. Indeed, positive psychology has gained much attention from tourism scholars (Smith & Diekmann, 2017). Although some scholars argued that most tourism experiences may only offer episodic happiness to tourists (Feldman, 2008; Nawijn, 2010), commentators frequently emphasized the importance of focusing on both the hedonic and eudaimonic aspects of tourism (Helliwell & Putnam, 2004; Nawijn & Filep, 2016; Smith & Diekmann, 2017). Some psychological outcomes from specific tourism types, such as dark tourism, volunteer tourism, and backpacking tourism, also cannot be fully interpreted by hedonic conceptions (Nawijn, 2016). According to Filep (2016, p. 1), "a tourist experiences positive emotions (such as love, interest, joy, contentment), a sense of engagement in an activity (like flow or mindfulness) and derives meaning from tourist activities (or a sense of greater purpose)."

Some studies have recently adopted the PERMA model, which includes both hedonic and eudaimonic elements, to explore tourist well-being. For example, Laing and Frost (2017) employed the PERMA model in their two studies to investigate the experiences of exhibition tourists and female tourists in Italy. Given the complexity of individual tourist benefits, the PERMA model may not perfectly match these benefits in all aspects (Filep & Pearce, 2013). Nevertheless, scholars have revealed the following overlaps between individual tourist well-being and the PERMA model: a) positive emotions stand for increased pleasure and happiness; b) engagement predicts tourist knowledge and skill development resulting from deep involvement; c) relationships represent the established positive relatedness with others; d) meaning refers to a sense of fulfillment; and e) achievement can explain personal growth and development through tourism (Vada et al., 2020). However, as highlighted by Nawijn and Filep (2016), measuring eudaimonic well-being remains a challenge in empirical research. The causal links between tourist experiences and greater personal growth are also difficult to confirm, hence making the research on tourist eudaimonic benefits highly correlative in essence (Nawijn & Filep, 2016).

According to Filep and Laing (2019), several studies in tourism and positive psychology have recently focused on tourists' transformative experiences in the reflective phase. Long-walking experience is a popular topic in studying transformation through tourism. Saunders (2013) found that bodily challenges in long-walking experiences allow tourists to experience a sense

of self-achievement, goal fulfillment, increased self-commitment, identity formation, and self-directed changes. Laing and Frost (2017) used the PERMA model to explore the tourist transformation process. Specifically, they categorized the transformation of female travelers in Italy into five dimensions. While transformation has been studied only as a single well-being benefit from an individual's tourism experience, both self-transformation and well-being are confirmed as positive outcomes of tourism experiences. Nevertheless, how these two elements of significant personal changes are interrelated with each other in the tourism context remains relatively unknown. Largely unexplored until recently, a recent study conducted by Wang et al. (2023) seems to address this knowledge gap by providing complementary insights. Their research delves into how distinct sets of activities within the context of transformative tourism (such as backpacker tourism, volunteer tourism, and study tours) contribute to both hedonic and eudaimonic well-being of travelers. This investigation adopts psychological needs as integral processes in the realization of well-being, constructing an encompassing "activities–needs–well-being" conceptual framework. This framework effectively illustrates the manner in which transformative tourism contributes to enhancing both hedonic and eudaimonic well-being for travelers. The study's findings notably reveal that activities falling outside the realm of mere hedonism (for instance, activities that are challenging or prosocial in nature) can significantly enhance eudaimonic well-being. Travelers engaging in these activities are able to experience self-reflection, self-transcendence, and self-discovery, which in turn have profound transformative effects on their well-being, extending well beyond the confines of the travel experience itself (Decrop et al., 2018).

While current research on transformative tourism and well-being underscores the hedonic and eudaimonic advantages of such experiences, there seems to be an oversight in how these experiences potentially reshape individuals' perceptions of well-being. Values play a pivotal role in determining what individuals deem significant and worthwhile (Schwartz, 2012). They shape intentional behaviors, motivating individuals to pursue endeavors aligned with their values and avoid those conflicting with them (Feather, 1996). Consequently, values exert a direct impact on people's conduct. The intricate interplay between values and well-being can be either direct or indirect (Sortheix & Schwartz, 2017). Each value is associated with specific attitudes and worldviews, which can directly influence well-being (e.g., valuing benevolence is linked to perceiving people as friendly and tolerant, thus enhancing well-being). Indirectly, values can shape well-being by guiding individuals toward activities corresponding to their values (e.g., indulging in pleasure-seeking for those valuing hedonism). An illustrative study

conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic revealed that well-being and individual values are adaptable systems that respond to varying circumstances (Bojanowska et al., 2021).

Considering this, given that transformative tourism experiences have the potential to induce shifts in human values, attitudes, and perspectives, it's plausible that these changes could extend to altering perceptions of well-being as well.

2.3 Contextualist Stance of Well-Being

The term well-being has been used in a broad sense to understand the general population but has also been applied in a narrow sense when it comes to an individual's positive functioning. Nordbakke and Schwanen (2014) identified two main stances related to a broader worldview of understanding well-being, namely, the "universalist" and "contextualist" stances. As discussed above, the current understanding of well-being mainly views this concept as a singular and stable thing independent of time and place (i.e., a strong universalist stance). Regardless of constructs or measurement scales, the universalist assumption believes that a minimum number of common conditions can be valuable to all humans regardless of time and place (Rapley, 2003). However, this view has been criticized for defining well-being as "conceptually muddy" (Morrow & Mayall, 2009, p. 221). Forgeard et al. (2011) also noticed some scholars equating well-being with one term (such as life satisfaction and quality of life) or a single construct of well-being. As a result, these studies fail to unveil the whole important aspects of well-being and generate an "all-embracing definition" (Dodge et al., 2012, p. 224).

Universalist theory of well-being mostly adopts an objectively measured approach. According to the leading scholars in this tradition, the hedonic perspective takes scientific measurement for granted when dealing with the field of happiness science (Ryan et al., 2013). As a complex concept, well-being is analyzed in a rush through "a rather static and compartmentalised inventory of well-being, driven by what can be objectively measured" (Scott et al., 2016, n.p). Using a set of items or questions to measure individuals' happiness state is simplistic given the complexity of well-being. Using statistical survey data to evaluate the degree of individuals' well-being sets a standard criterion yet ignores the richness of people's lives. This self-reported survey is more of a "passive, objective standard imposed on" respondents, without considering

their "positive and active features, their creativity, dynamic behaviour and the complexity of their well-being accompanying their life process" (Xu & Zhang, 2021, p. 3).

In contrast to the universalist stance, contextualism argues that well-being is not a single or a group of variables that represent the parts of one's experience (Nordbakke & Schwanen, 2014). According to some scholars, well-being is "not presently observable or objectively measurable but is assumed to exist" (Reber, 1995, p. 157). Adhering to a strongly contextualist perspective, well-being should not be viewed in isolation from its temporal, spatial, and cultural contexts. Instead, well-being should be defined as "a social process through which realities are enacted" (Nordbakke & Schwanen, 2014, p. 108). Scholars adopting this stance argue that the heterogeneity of individuals, the geographical context, and temporality should be valued in understanding well-being. This perspective suggests that well-being research is an active process of co-creation, wherein the understanding and portrayal of well-being are influenced by the specific context in which they are studied. Well-being is not a fixed and transferable entity that remains unchanged across different contexts; rather, its interpretation and implications can significantly vary depending on the unique factors at play in each time and place. The definitions and constitutions of well-being are continuously changing in social interactions.

Using the universalized and decontextualized approach to estimate large-scale statistics is understandable, but the impact of contextual and personal factors, such as place, space, activity, and individual heterogeneity, should not be ignored, especially for studies in the tourism context. The contextualist approach suggests a transformative way of understanding the "complex taking place of well-being, rather than reducing it to pre-defined categories" (Smith & Reid, 2018, p. 808). As such, instead of viewing tourists as a homogeneous group with similar notions of what constitutes a good life, this study views them as a diverse group of individuals with different well-being perceptions and whose subjective experiences are influenced by personal, social, and cultural particularities (Hartwell et al., 2018; Uysal et al., 2015). To conceptualize the processing mechanism of well-being, this study adopts the contextualist stance that views well-being as an enduring process in which situations, interpersonal interactions, and personal reflections jointly matter during or after the journey.

2.4 Research Topics in Tourism and Well-Being

2.4.1 Overview

Tourism is positively linked to human well-being. Despite spanning a wide range of disciplines, the term "well-being" is used sparsely in relation to tourism (Pyke et al., 2016). Smith and Diekmann (2017) acknowledged the ongoing debate surrounding the specific ways through which tourism contributes to the positive functioning of both individual tourists and local residents. Instead of reviewing the multiple unclear conceptualizations of well-being in the extant tourism discourse (Uysal et al., 2016), this section highlights the various areas of tourism well-being that have been explored in the literature.

First, well-being in tourism can be evaluated at the individual, community, and destination levels. From a community perspective, residents' perceived impact of tourism on their well-being has been extensively explored (e.g., Andereck & Nyaupane, 2011; Kim et al., 2013). Meanwhile, research at the destination level mainly focuses on sustainable development and marketing strategies by expanding well-being as a tourism product resource (Pyke et al., 2016; Wiseman & Brasher, 2008). In other words, tourism concerns the well-being of both tourists and residents, and involving well-being in touristic experiences contributes to communities and destinations. According to Uysal et al. (2012, 2016), tourism activities and their consequences should be examined from a systematic perspective, wherein the well-being of both visitors and residents are affected in tourism destinations. Indeed, the impact of tourism on the well-being of local residents has received increasing attention in tourism research. Since its introduction in the 1960s, the concept of the "host–guest" relationship in the field of tourism garnered significant research attention, with Sharpley (2014) mentioning that such relationship has become one of the most extensively studied topics in the tourism field. A growing number of studies have also explored the concepts of the "host gaze" and "happy hosts" in the tourism context (Ivlevs, 2017). These concepts delve into the relationship between perceived tourism impacts and the well-being of residents in tourism destinations. Accordingly, topics in sustainable tourism, which aims to enhance the well-being of communities and their residents, have also been explored extensively (e.g., Hartwell et al., 2018; Smith & Ram, 2016; Suess et al., 2018).

The role of tourism in promoting the mental and physical well-being of tourists has also attracted increasing research attention. Scholars have recognized tourism as a valuable resource for enhancing individuals' overall well-being, and this topic has attracted much attention in the tourism field (e.g., Dolnicar et al., 2012; Filep, 2012; Filep & Deery, 2010; Oppermann & Cooper, 1999). For instance, Pyke et al. (2016) interviewed a group of key stakeholders to understand the potential of well-being in relation to tourism investments. They highlighted the potential contribution of well-being for tourism destinations in the field of public health and acknowledged that well-being is a strong marketing instrument affecting tourism decisions (Pyke et al., 2016) because well-being is desired by tourists while engaging in tourism (Voigt & Pforr, 2014). As such, the positive well-being benefits from a holiday experience are recognized by policy makers and practitioners as business opportunities for boosting the visitor economy.

As a result, certain forms of tourism, such as wellness tourism, social tourism, and medical tourism, have received more extensive research attention than others. This focus can be attributed to concerns surrounding physical, mental, and social well-being (Hartwell et al., 2013). For instance, the term "wellness" has emerged from the combination of "well-being" and "fitness" (Dunn, 1959). Accordingly, wellness tourism has been defined as a comprehensive approach to travel that aims to preserve or enhance health through engagement with the community, nature, or related activities (Bushell & Sheldon, 2009). Another type of tourism that has received much attention from marketers and organizers is social tourism. Specific target groups, such as children in low-income families (Quinn et al., 2008), disabled people (Bergier et al., 2010), and seniors (Kim et al., 2015), are investigated in terms of the changes in their well-being while spending their holidays.

Well-being has been engaged into a broad range of research topics in the tourism field. However, instead of being exhaustive, this paper aims to explore individual tourists' well-being through a narrow focus on certain tourism activities and experiences. Thus, this section does not incorporate research from management and marketing sciences, which have extensively explored the benefits of travel for destinations and communities. The following section presents an overview of topics and practices concerning well-being and individual tourists with a special focus on the antecedents and outcomes of well-being in tourism.

2.4.2 Impacting factors of tourist well-being

Apart from the broad use of definitions and components, scholars have also frequently noticed the various understandings of individual tourists regarding the notion of well-being, which lead to different perceived vacation outcomes. As explained by Uysal et al. (2015), tourists' perceived impacts of holiday experiences on SWB are predicted by many factors, such as their gender, age, income level, marital status, and life stage. Therefore, although the positive effects of tourism have been observed across almost all types of tourists (Hartwell et al., 2018), the differences in these tourists' understanding of well-being should be emphasized. For this reason, this study discusses the antecedent conditions that are likely to influence well-being.

2.4.2.1 Personal attributes

According to Uysal et al. (2016), the effect of trips on well-being highly depends on the differences among tourists in terms of their gender, age, income level, marital status, life stage, and other factors. For example, some studies focusing on the well-being of senior travelers revealed that vacation experience fails to improve their PWB (Milman, 1998). In sports tourism, Rueseski et al. (2014) revealed a U-shaped relationship between tourists' age and perceived happiness. The association between gender and well-being was also studied in many occasions. Although women report more happiness than men during their trips (Downward & Dawson, 2016; Huang & Humphreys, 2012), their happiness disappears faster after a vacation than that of men (Nawijn et al., 2013). Scholars also found that women are more likely to feel anxious than men (Ke, 2016), thus explaining their higher needs for retreat and wellness tourism (Kelly & Smith, 2016). As will be discussed in the following section, some recent studies specifically focused on female tourists' travel experiences and well-being.

Individuals also show varying needs across different periods or circumstances, thereby resulting in different levels of perceived importance of tourism (Smith & Diekmann, 2017). Many studies show that tourism is not critical to everyone (e.g., de Bloom et al., 2011; Dolniar et al., 2012). As such, the impact of tourism experience on well-being largely depends on the importance of tourism for individuals (Smith & Diekmann, 2017; Uysal et al., 2016). In response to this view, Uysal et al. (2016) suggested that the importance of vacation experience should be identified by population group and context in order to understand the contribution of tourism to participants' well-being.

Other personal socio-economic and demographic variables, such as income level, marital status, and educational background, are also examined in relation to individual tourists' well-being. For example, Huang and Humphreys (2012) revealed a positive relationship between individual income and self-reported happiness using a national-based data in the US. These findings are consistent with the economic literature review of Clark et al. (2008), who stated that relative income level affects life satisfaction. In their study, the level of self-reported well-being of married couples are higher than that of single individuals.

2.4.2.2 Situational characteristics

Shmotikin (2005) revealed the impacts of different situations on SWB. In this study, SWB is viewed "as a dynamic process of pursuing happiness rather than a merely static attribute of being happy or unhappy" (Shmotikin, 2005, p. 315). SWB functions in four different modules (experiential, declarative, differential, and narrative) from four different contexts of psychological activities (individual, public, synchronic, and diachronic). Specifically, experiential SWB refers to an individual's introspective thoughts and feelings in relation to his/her self-consciousness of SWB experiences. Declarative SWB refers to individuals' self-reported SWB to the audience in the context of public communications. In other words, declarative SWB refers to the expected effect that the declarant has on the audience or himself/herself through the audience. Differential SWB refers to self-representation in the synchronic context, meaning that one's self-organization determines the types of SWB dimensions. In other words, the sense of well-being greatly depends on the situation (Xu & Zhang, 2021).

The level of participation in the vacation activities also affects tourists' sense of well-being. According to Wei and Milliman (2002), more benefits can be gained when tourists actively engage in tourism activities. The impact of length of stay for one trip on life satisfaction has also been examined given the acknowledged effects of memorable vacation experiences on happiness. Although Mitas et al. (2016) argued that the length and frequency of travel do not affect the well-being of tourists following their trip, leisure research confirmed that tourists with longer stays are more satisfied with their overall lives (Neal et al., 2007).

2.4.2.3 Cultural background

Another concern in well-being research is that life satisfaction is largely affected by individuals' cultural background (Christopher, 1999). Smith and Diekmann (2017) found that the difficulties in understanding individual's perceptions toward well-being depend on determining what is "good" and "not good" for a person (p. 3). Humans think that pursuing their beliefs will provide them the greatest amount of happiness and the least amount of suffering. Culture influences individuals' perceived importance of specific activities, which in turn affects their level of happiness. For example, some tourism types, such as backpacking, dark tourism, or road trips, may not be attractive and "socially acceptable" in some cultures (Smith & Diekmann, 2017, p. 3).

The approaches adopted in well-being research are very western centric (Uysal et al., 2016; Walker & Kavedzija, 2015). Smith and Diekmann (2017) noticed that many studies in wellness tourism involve western tourists yet are rooted in eastern holistic (body, mind, emotion, and spirit) experiences (e.g., Kelly, 2012; Reisinger, 2013). As such, further research on the well-being of travelers from Asia should be conducted to incorporate additional perspectives and approaches. Furthermore, research on well-being in tourism should be contextualized to reflect the uniqueness of the setting where tourism activities take place.

2.4.3 Effect of vacation on tourist well-being

The various ways through which tourists derive well-being benefits from their travel experiences have been extensively investigated. In their overview of tourism and well-being research, Hartwell et al. (2018) revealed that tourism affects multiple dimensions (e.g., emotional, psychological, cognitive, and spiritual) of tourists' well-being. The benefits to health, including physical and psychological health, have also been emphasized when considering the impacts of trip experiences on well-being. In general, both the physical and mental well-being of tourists can be enhanced by their vacation experiences.

A growing body of research shows that tourism can positively affect individuals with health problems. For instance, in their longitudinal study, Gump and Matthews (2000) investigated the association between the frequency of annual vacations and the risk of mortality among

middle-aged men who are at high risk for coronary heart disease. They found that traveling helps reduce the risk of death during the nine-year post-trial period. Trip experiences also benefit the mental health of individuals with psychiatric problems. Pols and Kroon (2007) revealed that vacations help people with chronic mental health problems to rehabilitate and maintain balance by establishing positive social relations, developing new skills, and promoting identity formation. Moreover, tourism can contribute to the physical improvement of individuals with chronic health problems by providing benefits to their PWB, such as relaxation, pleasure, and happiness (Hunter-Jones & Blackburn, 2007).

Apart from people with health problems, the health benefits of tourism for general tourists have also been empirically proven. In their comparative study of holiday-taking and non-holiday-taking groups, Gilbert and Abdullah (2004) found that leisure travel significantly contributes to increased sense of well-being. Accordingly, several studies examining the association between tourism and perceived health have adopted a comparative pre-post-test design (Chen & Petrick, 2013). Employees are among the most widely used populations for investigating the after-effects of vacations. Scholars suggest that taking a vacation from work contributes to stress relief, relaxation, detachment, and pleasure, thus effectively improving the health and well-being of employees.

Even though tourism is beneficial for almost all types of tourists (Hartwell et al., 2018), some studies argue that vacation experience is not as important as assumed for the wellness of elderly visitors (e.g., Milan, 1998; Milman, 1998). Some scholars even highlight the negative health effects of tourism, while others disagree with the consensus regarding the effects of leisure travel on life satisfaction. For instance, Milan (1998) found that tourism does not increase tourists' well-being by comparing the sense of well-being of seniors before and after participating in an escorted tour. Moscardo (2009) also claimed that tourists are unexpectedly exposed to different levels of health risks during their vacation.

However, other studies have confirmed the positive benefits of tourism for the elderly. For instance, Kim, Woo, and Uysal (2015) examined the interrelationship between elderly tourists' behavior and their quality of life and found that taking a vacation significantly affects their life satisfaction and overall quality of life. The intangible spiritual benefits of travel for the elderly have also been revealed by Moal-Ulvoas and Taylor (2014), who interviewed 16 older adults and found that traveling helps them achieve self-actualization and build a new identity. The

benefits of traveling for the health and medication of the elderly can last for at least two months (Eusébio et al., 2010). The well-being of other target groups, such as young children (Eusébio & Carneiro, 2014), low-income families (Quinn et al., 2008), and disabled people (Bergier et al., 2010), are also compared before and after taking a vacation, and results show that tourism somehow helps improve the health outcomes of these populations.

Neal, Uysal, and Sirgy (2007) argued that the contrasting results regarding the well-being benefits of traveling depend on the employed measurement. They mentioned that studies on people's well-being typically adopt an objective measurement, thereby resulting in bias toward the impacts of tourism. This argument echoes the ongoing debate about how the individual's well-being in tourism should be explained and measured (Dodge et al., 2012; Hartwell et al., 2018) despite the increasing amount of research on well-being in tourism in recent years.

The overall finding of these studies highlights a positive relationship between traveling and well-being. However, such relationship is complex and is affected by many factors, such as the differences in the participants' socio-economic and demographic characteristics, tourism circumstances and types of activities, participation intensity and duration, and cultural contexts and backgrounds, which influence their well-being either positively or negatively. Moreover, these studies have mainly focused on specific tourist activities or traveling drivers. A rethinking of the pursuit of well-being through tourism is therefore recommended (Filep & Laing, 2019). Furthermore, research on tourist eudaimonic well-being remains in its infancy. According to Filep and Laing (2019), "much less is known about the intensity, durability, and the overall nature of eudaimonic experiences in tourism" (p. 349). An exploration of the role of challenges, hardships, personal growth, and self-fulfillment in well-being is thus needed in the tourism context.

CHAPTER 3 TRANSFORMATIVE TOURISM

The links between individuals' well-being and transformation with regard to intrinsic values and extrinsic behaviors are well acknowledged in the context of tourism (Pope, 2018). This study views well-being and its relationships with tourism and transformation as an interactive process in which people engage with places, time, and others to produce diverse meanings and achieve personal objectives. To uncover the interplay among well-being, transformation, and tourist experience, this study initially describes the essence of transformation through tourism, identifies the role of tourism experience in one's personal transformation, presents a critical reflection of tourists, and describes the transformative changes resulting from tourism experiences.

3.1 Contextualizing Transformative Tourism

3.1.1 Conceptualizing tourist transformation

> All human activity, as well as any satisfaction found in it, is a matter of mutual transformation of the self and its world, human and nonhuman, organic and inorganic alike. (Sullivan, 2001, p. 143)

Proposed by Mezirow (1978), personal transformation is viewed in transformative learning theory as an expansion of consciousness to transform people's worldviews and lives. Transformation is a process rather than an end result (Mezirow, 2006). Inspired by this idea, the definition proposed by Holland-Wade (1998, p. 713), who considered personal transformation as "a dynamic, uniquely individualized process of expanding consciousness whereby individuals become critically aware of old and new self-views and choose to integrate these views into a new self-definition," is adopted in this study. The transformation process is also a non-linear one in which people positively change their attitudes, values, and behaviors (Christie & Mason, 2003).

Due to its liminal features, tourism is an acknowledged catalyst for personal transformation (Teoh et al., 2021). Travel enables people to engage in unfamiliar conditions and foster their awareness of ecological and social impacts. In a transformative trip, individuals experience an inner journey that "is part of the awakening of consciousness, and creates more self-awareness, more self-inquiry into the purpose of life, living by a higher set of values, and making greater

contributions to others" (Sheldon, 2020, p. 2). The benefits of transformative tourism in enhancing tourists' attitudes and values are also emphasized in its conceptualization. Transformative tourism has been widely investigated over the last few decades, but the transformation of tourists mostly results from specific experiences, such as overseas study, backpacking, volunteering, ecotourism, and spiritual tourism.

Previous studies on transformative tourism experiences often concentrate on particular types of tourists, such as backpackers (Noy, 2004), overseas volunteers (Coghlan & Weiler, 2018), international students (Brown, 2009), "gap year" tourists (Lyons et al., 2011), spiritual tourists (Fu et al., 2015), and long-distance walkers (Saunders et al., 2013). However, Lean (2012) proposed that "everyone is transformed by travel to some degree" (p. 169). According to Reisinger (2013), conventional forms of tourism, such as mass tourism or business tourism, are unlikely to provide transformative learning experiences. By contrast, alternative forms of tourism, including nature-based, adventure, rural or agricultural, heritage, religious, wellness and spa, educational, and volunteer tourism, offer ample opportunities for individual self-growth. For example, international educational trips are able to promote self-growth, resilience to pressure (McGladdery & Lubbe, 2017), international concerns (Grabowski et al., 2017), knowledge and competence, and interpersonal relationships (Brown, 2009). The transformative outcomes of wellness tourism are rooted in the physical and psychological health of tourists. Wellness tourism plays a significant role in promoting positive changes in the physical, psychological, and spiritual well-being of tourists (Voigt et al., 2011). Meanwhile, the major goal of volunteer tourism is to assist local citizens and vulnerable groups in their communities. This type of tourism involves individuals who, as holiday makers, willingly contribute their time, resources, and efforts to support various social or environmental initiatives on a global scale (Wearing, 2002). Given its ultimate purpose, the transformative impacts of volunteer tourism have attracted considerable attention. This type of tourism also enables volunteer tourists to obtain new skills and knowledge (Crossley, 2012), achieve self-fulfillment and cultural awareness (McGehee, 2014), and gain opportunities for personal exploration and reflection (Coghlan & Weiler, 2018). Such experiences are complex and full of contradictions (McGehee, 2014). Therefore, tourists should intentionally deconstruct their journey in order to be "truly" transformed (Knollenberg et al., 2014).

How to ensure that a tourist is transformed or how to define a transformative tourist raises an important question. Inner transformation is potentially applied to all human beings despite "the

given culture, tradition, ethnicity, age or gender" (Sheldon, 2020, p. 1). According to Mezirow (2003), although people may not be consciously engaged in the transformation process, travelers can only be transformed if they are willing to report self-reflection and involve themselves in an internal "dialogue involving the assessment of beliefs, feelings, and values" (p. 59). In other words, only when tourists accept to question themselves in terms of their well-established assumptions, attitudes, and worldviews can they gain a transformative experience. From this view, the tourists' consciousness and ability to engage in self-reflection are the primary drivers of their transformation success (Phillips, 2019).

In this study, transformative travel is determined by an assemblage of different factors rather than by a specific tourism type (Robledo & Batle, 2017). Specifically, transformative travel is defined as a journey in which tourists experience an inner transformation process that "is part of the awakening of consciousness, and creates more self-awareness, more self-inquiry into the purpose of life, living by a higher set of values, and making greater contributions to others" (Sheldon, 2020, p. 2).

3.1.2 Understanding the transformation process

According to Mezirow's (1994) transformative learning theory, the processes through which individuals acquire new knowledge and skills can be divided into 10 steps (Figure 3.1). Although largely criticized, this linear segmentation represents the first attempt to conceptualize complex transformation activities. Among the phases of Mezirow's (1994) transformative process, the significance of disorienting dilemmas, self-reflection, and critical discourse has been highlighted (Cavender et al., 2020).

[1] A disorienting dilemma,
[2] Self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame,
[3] A critical assessment of assumptions,
[4] Recognition that one's discontent and process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change,
[5] Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions,
[6] Planning a course of action,
[7] Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans,
[8] Provisionally trying out new roles,
[9] Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships,
[10] A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective.

Figure 3.1 Mezirow's ten-stage transformative learning process (Mezirow, 1994, p.225)

Disorienting dilemmas, which refer to crises or challenges that individuals encounter with their well-established ways of thinking, trigger these individuals to reconsider their preconceptions, thereby transforming their values or beliefs (Mezirow, 1997). According to Taylor (2000), a disorienting dilemma provokes a transformative experience. Critical self-reflection is then integrated into the transformative process to reconstruct learners' frames of reference and reshape their viewpoints (Mezirow, 2003). Snyder (2008) divided individuals' reflections and changes in their transformative process into four hierarchical levels. At the bottom level of reflective action is content and process reflection, which describes to what extent and how learners critically reflect (Snyder, 2008). At the next level, premise reflection describes why individuals think, feel, and act the way they reflect on their actions. This type of reflection concerns individuals' dialectical thinking at a high cognitive level (Cavender et al., 2020).

In his meta-analysis, Taylor (1997) found that individuals do not need to go through all the 10 steps proposed by Mezirow. Many studies utilizing Mezirow's theory to explore tourists' transformative experiences broaden the present understanding of the transformation process in the travel and tourism contexts. For example, Coghlan and Gooch (2011) applied the transformative learning steps and noticed that steps 7 and 9 of Mezirow's (1994) process are missing in volunteer tourism. Taylor (2008) extended the transformative learning process by adding several components, namely, self-reflection, dialogue, and inter-cultural experiences, which facilitate the initiation of transformation. These studies tend to treat the process as several stages in tandem and relatively underestimate the interactions or co-creations among different entities and the critical role of tourism experiences. Therefore, what actually happens during the journey in terms of transformation remains relatively unknown.

Based on Mezirow's (1994) process, Ross (2010) proposed an extensive framework that uses three features to understand individual transformation. He defined transformation as

> a dynamic sociocultural and uniquely individual process (a) begins with a disorienting dilemma and involves choice, healing, and experience(s) of expanding consciousness towards the divine; (b) initiates a permanent change in identity structures through cognitive, psychological, physiological, affective, or spiritual experiences; and (c) renders a sustained shift in the form of one's thinking, doing, believing, or sensing due to the novelty of the intersection between the experiencer, the experience, and the experiencer's location in time (Ross, 2010, p. 54).

In contrast to the well-known transformative learning theory, this framework highlights the individuals' awareness of transformation and introduces the various experiences that contribute to transformative changes. Ross (2010) suggested that transformative experiences should be

explored by focusing on the multiple interactions among different dimensions, including the experiencer, the experience, and the place. Teoh et al. (2021) recently explored experience dimensions in tourism and argued that transformative experience is derived from interactions among the experience, experience consumer, and experience facilitator. While this holistic and interpretive framework highlights the importance of experience, a wide range of tourist experiences and subjective initiatives of individuals are underrepresented in this model from Ross's (2010) standpoint.

Tourism studies have conceptualized transformative travel in various ways. Apart from the original Mezirow's model involving 10 stages at most, Robledo and Batle (2017) cut down these stages into three, namely, departure, initiation, and return. Kotteler (2002) adopted a psychological perspective that is highly synergistic with the original Mezirow's process. Specifically, tourists initially confront an unfamiliar environment as the stimulus and then survive by showing their resilience when facing adversity, developing relational networks in their communities, learning new perspectives from others, and making enduring changes after their return as a result of their transformed beliefs.

Among the existing conceptualizations of tourist transformation, the four-dimensional model, which includes disorienting dilemma, self-reflection or examination, resolution, and positive changes in attitudes, beliefs, or behaviors, is perhaps the most effective in identifying and coding the mechanisms of tourist transformation (Soulard et al., 2020). Many studies (e.g., Coghlan & Gooch, 2011; Coghlan & Weiler, 2018; Wolf, Ainsworth, & Crowley, 2017) have empirically examined these four dimensions across various types of tourism. Describing transformation as a phased process is particularly necessary because tourist transformation is precipitated by changes in attitudes, values, and self-views, which may or may not be accompanied by observable behavioral changes (Coghlan & Weiler, 2018). As such, how the transformative processes are involved in tourism should be identified and discussed through these four highly manageable dimensions.

3.1.3 Disorienting dilemmas in transformative tourism

Tourism studies define a disorienting dilemma as a challenge that tourists fail to deal with during their journey by using their previous knowledge (Frost, 2010). According to Mezirow (1996), a disorienting dilemma is critical to individual transformation. The same case applies

in transformative tourism, where a disorienting dilemma may be defined as disrupting events that undermine the ideals of tourists (Soulard et al., 2020).

Based on the extant reviews of transformative tourism, the disorienting dilemmas in tourism are commonly initiated by two disrupting events. Borrowed from transformative learning theory, one catalyst is the important life events of travelers, such as divorce, graduation, childbirth, or loss of loved ones (Folmer et al., 2019). The other catalyst is a range of epiphany-type experiences, such as volunteer tourism, overseas study, or meaningful and long-lasting interactions with locals from another culture (Kirillova et al., 2017b; Laing & Frost, 2017).

When facing a disorienting dilemma, travelers experience intense emotions before achieving enduring changes. Mezirow (1991) only addressed the negative emotions present in a disorienting dilemma. According to Coghlan and Gooch (2011), a disorienting dilemma comprises "periods of negative emotions, such as frustration, irritation, discontent, worry and tenseness." By contrast, the recent conceptualization efforts in transformative theory find that a wide range of emotions may be experienced by travelers during and after their journey, including fear, bittersweetness, nostalgia, joy, and ecstasy (DeCrop et al. 2018; Laing & Frost 2017).

According to Mezirow (1991), facing a disorienting dilemma is the first step in transformation. Similarly, many tourism scholars suggest that a disorienting dilemma occurs during a journey (e.g., Wolf et al., 2017; Coghlan & Gooch, 2011), which may explain the popularity of sequential-oriented models in transformative tourism research. Recent studies propose that a disorienting dilemma, which is a key aspect of the transformative travel, can occur at various stages of one's travel experience. Soulard et al. (2020) argued that tourists only encounter a light version of a disorienting dilemma when they are at their destinations and then encounter a more intensified version upon returning home. This argument echoes the contentions of less sequential conceptual models in which a disorienting dilemma may occur later after the journey (Coghlan & Weiler 2018; DeCrop et al. 2018). As such, Kirillova, Lehto, and Cai (2017c) proposed that the temporality of tourist transformation warrants further research because travelers only experience a disorienting dilemma upon returning home. DeCrop et al. (2018) explained this phenomenon by stating that transformative travelers may experience reverse culture shock after their return.

3.1.4 Mapping tourist transformation

Tourist transformation is a multidimensional construct. According to the above discussion, the commonality of transformation through tourism is that tourists encounter disorienting dilemmas engraved by intensified emotions. To recover from the initial shock they experience during their trip, these tourists rely on disruptive feelings that motivate them to reflect on their worldviews. Specifically, a transformative moment triggers the occurrence of transformation. Travelers' intrinsic assumptions, values, or beliefs can be shaken by a disorienting dilemma that can be represented by significant life events or meaningful tourism experiences (Soulard et al., 2019). A transformative moment involves "emotionally intensive, sensorially impressive and cognitively stimulating" (Kirillova et al., 2017c, p. 645). In addition, travelers need to be psychologically open and prepared for the occurrence of these dilemmas.
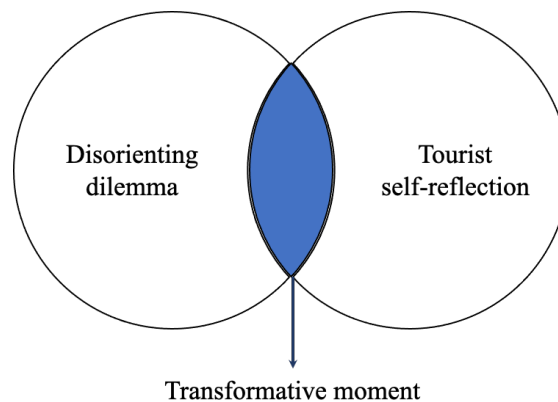
Figure 3.2 Mapping tourist transformation
Source: the author

As a result of their reflections, tourists ultimately gain a broader worldview and a new understanding of their values, attitudes, and beliefs (Phillips, 2019). Tourists are enduringly changed by this process and start adopting solid changes in their lives. A transformative travel experience is considered successful when travelers are permanently changed and improved by their trips (Reisinger, 2013). Upon returning home, tourists will adopt their new assumptions and reflect on the changes they have experienced during their journey.

Some studies recently propose that the conceptualization of transformative travel should consider the variability of temporality and mobility (Lean, 2015) because of the distinctive feature of transformative tourism, which entwines physical (e.g., travelers physically appearing at the destination) and mental travel (i.e., the constant flow of thoughts and ideas in the travelers'

minds) (Lean, 2012). As discussed above, tourist transformation may occur at different periods. Illeris (2014) found that a regressive transformation might occur if a person fails to overcome a disorienting dilemma. Thus, delineating tourist transformation needs to consider the potential differences in how and when tourists relate to transformative experiences.

3.2 Transformative Triggers: An Experience Perspective

Tourism experience has long been linked to transformation. In their meta-analysis of the essence of transformative experiences, Teoh et al. (2021) confirmed the critical role of experience in personal transformation. They claimed that transformations "occur when one undergoes an experience, which generates ideas necessary for new behaviors to occur; and, tourism experiences provide such opportunities to generate ideas and influence change in consumers to a degree" (p. 177). As such, transformation is generated on the basis of experiences that deviate from one's usual life. To some extent, tourism experiences allow the production of ideas and drive changes among tourists. These experiences challenge individuals' roles and assumptions and generate reflections that may modify their viewpoints in a transformation process (Kitchenham, 2008; Mezirow, 1978). When these beliefs or behaviors are accepted and applied following the trip, tourists undergo a transformative experience (Teoh et al., 2021).

Tourism research also acknowledges the importance of memorable (or peak, extraordinary, transcendent) tourism experiences in facilitating individual transformation (Kirillova et al., 2017b; Sterchele, 2020). The experiential triggers of transformation in tourism can be characterized into multi-sensory experiences and social engagement (Kirillova et al., 2017a; Teoh et al., 2021).

3.2.1 Multi-sensory experience

Tourism has long been recognized as a mentally and physically beneficial activity. Some of the earliest forms of tourism were designed specifically to improve people's health and well-being (Hartwell et al., 2018). Wellness tourism has emerged as a popular marketing term for various tourist products and refers to trips that are inspired by visitors' desire to improve their health and well-being, such as staying at facilities that promote physical and mental well-being

(Voigt et al., 2011) and joining therapeutic, treatment, or dietary programs that aim to improve tourists' body, mind, and spirit (Smith & Puczko, 2009). Most wellness tourism experiences are also landscape based. Wellness tourism centers design different programs or activities, such as yoga, Qigong, and meditation, to promote customers' bodily health (Voigt et al., 2011).

Tourists' pre-trip state of mind regarding physical challenges is another important initiator of their transformation. Fu et al. (2015) found that many guests in retreat centers report their desires to improve their physical health state, such as by losing weight, changing their eating habits, relieving chronic pains, and improving their immune systems. Similar observations were also made in other forms of tourism experiences. For instance, in Kim and Jamal (2007), the participants reported remarkably heightened bodily feelings during the Texas Renaissance festival. The concept of body–mind–spirit is frequently emphasized when discussing tourist transformation in relation to health benefits. According to Smith and Kelly (2006), a large scale of tourism activities in relation to people's bodily changes can be linked to the transformation of the self. As such, tourism experiences can trigger personal transformation by improving people's physical conditions.

The visual experience of tourists is the most emphasized act in personal transformation. Nature-based experiences can trigger transformation (Hitchner et al., 2019). Kirillova et al. (2017b, p. 506) found that a naturally contextual environment, such as "awe-inspiring nature, encounters with wildlife," can trigger tourists' transformation. Similarly, Farber and Hall (2007) revealed strong associations between natural environment (e.g., mountain sceneries and wildlife) and visitors' positive emotions, which lead to extraordinary experiences in tourism. The splendor of nature in national parks offers immersion experiences to long-distance hikers and eventually transforms them (Hitchner et al., 2019). Another form of tourism emphasizing tourists' senses during their trip is ecotourism, which is defined as traveling to protected natural areas to study, admire, and enjoy the scenery or the wild plants and animals and other manifestations (Fennell, 2001). Wolf et al. (2015) attributed the benefits of natural environment to its capacity to restore personal health. Furthermore, in their study of VW campervan tourists' experiences, Wilson, Chambers, and Johnson (2019) found that tourists' perception of well-being or anxiety is intimately linked to the sounds of their vans. Even though the natural landscape cannot "instigate transformative changes" (Kirillova et al., 2017b, p. 506), it inspires individual transformation through sense of awe and escape from routine life (Laing & Crouch, 2009).

Despite the progress in understanding the sensory experience of transformative tourists, most studies have focused on the external environment that triggers tourist transformation. For instance, Teoh et al. (2021) proposed that personal transformation is co-triggered by both natural and constructed environments. The most widely investigated constructed spaces in the transformative tourism context are retreat centers, wherein tourists experience transformation through the service stimuli of activity programming, service delivery, and physical settings (Fu et al., 2015). Other constructed landscapes, such as museums in dark or heritage tourism, can also transform tourists either consciously or unconsciously (Teoh et al., 2021). Constructed sites with historical, educational, cultural, religious, or spiritual importance are designed within nature to provide tourists with peak experiences (Fedele, 2014; Magee & Gilmore, 2015). When immersed in these experiences, tourists achieve serenity, awe, healing, freedom, and rejuvenation, which ultimately foster their transformation (Teoh et al., 2021).

Only few studies have explored the impact of tourism experiences on tourists' sense of well-being from an embodied perspective. The few studies that investigate tourists' transformative experiences from a multisensory lens reveal connections between these experiences and tourists' well-being. For example, Saunders et al. (2013) found that tourists participating in long-distance walking tours become physically resilient and strong over time, which simultaneously impacts their mental resilience. Song et al. (2020) noted that traveling to places like Tibet is a complex process in which the body and mind interact with each other constantly. This experience triggers tourists' emotional desire and physical challenge in the entrance period, physical discomfort and emotional enjoyment in the immersive period, and physical adjustment and emotional sublimation in the extraction period. This experience is prominently manifested in the interactions between physical sensation and emotional enjoyment. These findings underscore the need for tourism research to go beyond conceptualizing transformative travel and to further explore dynamic accounts of body–mind interactions. How tourism encounters shape personal transformation should not be understood as independent of tourist embodied experience (Country et al., 2017; Matteucci, 2021); these connections are best understood by examining the interconnected trajectories across one's transformative journey. Through embodiment, one can understand how tourists' transformation occurs across dynamic settings and how their evolving emotional needs are met through their travel experiences. The detailed associations and applications of the embodied approach on tourist transformative experience will be elaborated in Chapter 4 before presenting the proposed conceptual framework.

3.2.2 Social engagement

The importance of social interactions in generating memorable experiences (Kim & Fesenmaier, 2017) and triggering individual changes (Germann Molz, 2016) has been acknowledged in the tourism discourse. According to Kirillova et al. (2017a), social relatedness is the most significant circumstantial aspect in the triggering environment of personal transformation. Several scholars have described the social bond in transformative experience as communitas, which was initially defined by Turner (1967) as a sense of community among people who share a liminal experience. Mezirow (1997) also confirmed the role of connecting to others in fostering transformative learning. The existence of communitas has been identified by scholars in different tourism contexts. For instance, Luik (2012) found that the communitas in pilgrimage experiences is developed through sharing "secrets, worries, and burdens" with strangers (p. 27). In his empirical research of transformative learning theory, Morgan (2010) suggested that communitas is developed through mutual learning with fellow travelers and the host community. Interactions with members of the host community are regarded as facilitators of positive transformations.

For couchsurfing tourists, Decrop et al. (2018) found that their socialization and acculturation facilitate their acceptance and adaptation to different values and practices, which eventually shift their viewpoints and integrate new meanings into their daily lives and interpersonal connections after their journey. Although scholars describe social engagement using different concepts, such as socialization (Decrop et al., 2018), social connectedness (Wolf et al., 2015), social bonding (Teoh et al., 2021), and tourist encounters (Pung et al., 2020), they all refer to tourists' interactions with others in a specific tourism setting. Tourists' cultural shock is reduced as a result of their increased social and service-oriented interactions with local residents (Fan et al., 2017). This argument was supported by Yu, Lee, and Kim (2014), who found that exposure to the lifestyle of the local population contributes to cultural adaption, self-discovery, and a shift in one's worldviews and shared values.

Regardless of their origins, triggers all affect tourists through psychologically inspiring moments with a series of specific senses that potentially foster their transformations. In other words, the tourists' self-reflection of their circumstantial environment consciously or unconsciously instigates their final transformative changes.

3.3 Self-Reflection

Self-reflection is the most critical trigger of transformation. Kitchenham (2008) argued that the process of transformation should be represented by critical reflections, which reframe people's perceptions or assumptions on a subject matter through various experiences. In line with this argument, transformation is an individualized process in which people reflect on their experiences and make changes in many aspects. In the tourism context, tourist experience is the continuum of the bodily and multi-sensory trajectories of tourists. Tourist transformation involves a number of factors, including the gained knowledge or skills and the mental processing reflections. Panskepp and Northoff (2009, p. 193) introduced the concept of "self-related processing" as a mechanism of self-reflection that engages the brain's self-related processes and has the potential to modify internal working models. In this metaprocessing stage, the affective–emotional aspects of personal consciousness serve as the foundations for a variety of self-reflections (Panskepp & Northoff, 2009).

The role of intense emotions at the transformative travel has been emphasized in many studies. For example, when coding the transformative process, Kirillova et al. (2017c) deconstructed the triggering episodes in transformative trips and found that intensely mixed emotions, both positive and negative, contribute to individual tourists' final transformation. They also revealed that peak episodes help heighten the cognition of transformative tourists who are consciously involved in mental processing. Sterchele (2020) also noticed the interactional underpinnings of memorable tourism experience, particularly the interplay among emotion, shared memory, and after-trip outcomes, and highlighted the transformational power of shared emotions and memories with friends or family after the tourist experience. These arguments suggest that a critical reflection may occur after the trip and is closely connected to collective support from others. Transformative tourists carry emotional energy and form emotional bonds with their surroundings.

Overall, tourists' self-reflection is centered within their emotional and memorable experiences as a result of interrelated actions. Although transformative tourists' intensive emotions have been investigated in many studies, their underlying processing mechanisms remain unexplored. Specifically, how the affective–emotional aspects act on personal transformation warrants further study.

3.4 Transformative Changes

Transformative outcomes in tourism usually refer to attitudinal or behavioral changes (Pung et al., 2020). In ecotourism research, transformation outcomes are divided into personal benefits and destination loyalty. The transformative benefits gained by tourists through ecotourism enhance their destination satisfaction and their intentions to revisit (Wolf et al., 2017). However, the benefits for destination are beyond the scope of this study, which only focuses on personal transformation. Unlike other discourses that merely present a list of key words or sentences, Fu et al. (2015) identified four themes of personal changes, namely, bodily, emotional, attitudinal, and skill changes, in their study of transformative experiences in Thai retreats. Meanwhile, Decrop et al. (2017) categorized the transformation outcomes of couchsurfers into inner/personal (e.g., changes of values and attitudes) and outer/societal transformation (e.g., engagement in local community).

Changes in personal value system and new knowledge or skills are temporary habits that are limited to the trip yet eventually change tourists' attitudes and long-term behaviors (Pung et al., 2020). The psychological changes in values and beliefs are highly profound, while bodily and skill changes are relatively minor (Ourahmoune, 2016). Overall, these changes can be characterized as either internal (including psychological and knowledge changes) or external (including bodily and social changes) transformation.

3.4.1 Internal changes

Psychological changes

Changes in emotion, attitude, value, belief, and sense of self can be collectively defined as psychological changes resulting from transformative experiences in tourism. These changes in mental aspects can influence one another. Tourism experiences, as stimuli of transformation, have the potential to change individuals' attitudes toward meaning making (Pung et al., 2020). Fu et al. (2015) revealed that retreat experiences improve the emotional regulations of guests in a messy state and help them reduce their pre-trip pressures and stresses. Emotion is usually considered a significant component of tourists' transformative experiences with a short-term

affect. Transformative moments are labelled with intensive and strong emotions and heightened cognition through external sensory stimulus (Kirillova et al., 2017b).

Many studies have reported transformative changes in the attitudes and value systems of tourists that may potentially alter their long-term behaviors (Pung et al., 2020). This notion is supported by Fu et al. (2015), who found that guests in retreat centers tend to apply their gained positive self-perspective to their daily lives. For example, traveling in protected areas instills a sense of ecological protection among tourists and trigger their environment-friendly behavior (Wolf et al., 2017). Overseas study experiences also lead to permanent behavioral practices as revealed by Grabowski et al. (2017), who found that young people with overseas experiences may shift their worldviews and push them into paying attention to societal affairs. Brown (2009) also found that student sojourners may adjust their future career development under the influence of the transformative experiences they accumulated during their international study.

Another significant aspect related to psychological change is a new sense of self or identity that results from improved self-belief and self-perspectives (McWha et al., 2018). Soulard et al. (2021) suggested that having meaningful interactions with local residents may help transformed tourists rethink their post-trip self-identity. As one of the most studied contexts in transformative tourism, volunteer tourism allows tourists to achieve self-fulfillment and cultural awareness (McGehee, 2014) and improve their personal exploration and reflection (Coghlan & Weiler, 2018). However, these experiences are complex and full of contradictions (McGehee, 2014). Tourists need to intentionally deconstruct their journey to be "truly" transformed (Knollenberg et al., 2014). Kirillova et al. (2017c) supported this notion by revealing that negative emotions may stimulate tourists' existential anxiety, which would change their perceptions toward their identity and the meaning of their lives. Although the transformations in these scenarios may be momentary, they can evoke permanent and holistic attitudinal or behavioral changes, such as life-changing decisions and post-trip habits.

Knowledge/skills gains

According to Fu et al. (2015), knowledge and skill change are tangible changes. The acquisition of new knowledge is a fundamental character of personal transformation (Reisinger, 2013). Visitors participating in retreat centers report that their spiritual lessons and interactions with others helped them acquire new knowledge and skills. Pung et al. (2020) proposed that during

a transformative journey, tourists may notice the development of a new skill, such as independence, a new language, or self-confidence, by practicing, experiencing challenges, or simply showing their interest in the destination. Teoh et al. (2021) found that tourists' knowledge gained through transformative tourism can be characterized into two aspects, namely, developing new lifestyle knowledge and improving cultural, environmental, and economic sustainability skills. They proposed that such knowledge, which is apparently gained from "wellness and nature-based" tourism activities, allows tourists to be personally and socially implicated or developed (p. 185). After returning to their home environment, these tourists practice their newly gained sustainable knowledge and strategies by participating in some environmental conservation activities and contributing to community development (Walter, 2016).

Scholars have also discussed the consciousness of tourists in acquiring new knowledge or skills. Some studies on transformative learning suggest that when encountering challenges, tourists can consciously integrate knowledge to deal with their situation (Robledo & Batle, 2017). For example, previous studies show that students gradually improve their self-growth, resilience to pressure (McGladdery & Lubbe, 2017), international concerns (Grabowski et al., 2017), knowledge and competence, and interpersonal relationships (Brown, 2009) as a result of their transformative experiences.

However, from the perspective of existential transformation, tourists transform themselves after their trips, that is, they do not necessarily self-reflect or make meaning during their journey (Kirillova et al., 2017c). Moreover, the knowledge gaining process in tourism is regarded as a mutual process that should involve not only the tourists but also the facilitators in tourism. However, according to Teoh et al. (2021), only a few scholars have explored the transformative outcomes of the hosts, guides, and service providers in a destination, even though some studies have investigated the potential transformative benefits for the destination (e.g., Pope, 2018). The mutually beneficial relationship highlighted in these studies merely focuses on the capability of transforming tourists and the tourism setting. Therefore, future research should incorporate other individuals within the tourism setting into their discussions.

3.4.2 External changes

Bodily changes

Tourism experiences involve the bodily and sensory paths of tourists in a destination (Crouch et al., 2001). Bodily changes are visible changes observed in transformative experiences. Health benefits are frequently referred in wellness and spiritual tourism, which focuses on people's body, mind, and spirit enhancement (Voigt & Pforr, 2014). For example, guests in retreat centers report many positive body-related changes, such as losing weight, quitting unhealthy life habits, and improving their fitness. Overall, bodily changes from wellness experiences are described as becoming "healthier, leaner, lighter, and stronger" (Fu et al., 2015, p. 87).

Apart from improved physique, scholars have also noticed gains in tangible skills in relation to physical development through transformative experiences in nature (Bosangit et al., 2015). For example, Walter (2016) found that tourists can gain or develop many unexpected skills, such as hiking, snorkeling, kayaking, boating, fishing, making batik, cooking, planting rice, and making rubber, when engaging in community-based ecotourism. Physical changes can also influence tourists' psychological transformation (Liang et al., 2019). According to Brown (2009) and Wolf et al. (2015), overcoming physical limitations helps tourists improve their self-identity and self-esteem, thereby leading to personal psychological transformation. This notion was also examined in medical tourism research focusing on the potential effects of physical or health improvements on psychological changes (Mathijsen, 2019).

Social changes

As mentioned in the previous section, social engagement plays a significant role in the transformative experiences of tourists, that is, people may also experience social changes through transformative tourism. Teoh et al. (2021) defined social changes as "consumers' mindset towards others and potentially impacts consumers' social surroundings when gaining broad-mindedness and tolerance for others" (p. 183). Although the social changes referring to transformative outcomes have not been explicitly discussed prior the work of Teoh et al. (2021), the changes in the social attitudes, ideas, and norms of tourists through transformative experiences have been reported in many studies. For example, DeCorp et al. (2018) found that

couchsurfing experiences may evoke social changes by allowing tourists to socialize and acculturate in a disconnected setting. Consequently, couchsurfing tourists become engaged in the communita, which facilitates their societal transformations (Decorp et al., 2018).

Social changes are also related to people's openness to and tolerance of their social surroundings (Becker, 2018). During their overseas study, young students become open to cultural differences they perceive in their environment, thereby leading to societal transformation (Nyaupane et al., 2008). Teoh et al. (2021) suggested that the link from personal transformation to home societal transformation should be explored in the future.

CHAPTER 4 THEORETICAL CONSTRUCTS

4.1 Using Embodiment Theory to Explore Transformative Experience

By taking into account the embodiment theory, this study is able to look into how embodied experiences trigger personal transformation through the interplays of the scenario, body, and mind. More specifically, tourist transformation takes place within the ongoing embodied experience that is seen as a process in which enduring changes can be traced by unfolding the multidimensional interactions of tourists taking place during the journey. It thus starts with an overview of studies on embodiment theory, including the evolution and paradigm shifts and theoretical basis, followed by an emphasis of the literature on tourism and experience. Afterwards, to provide guidance and impetus for this study, a conceptual framework grounded in an embodied approach is formulated.

4.1.1 A shift from dualism to embodiment

Research on the relationship between body and mind has experienced a long and turbulent history. Originated from 17th century, Descartes' Cogito ergo sum marked the beginning of philosophical focus on mind and body. He placed the mental plane as the transcendental part of human, while the corporeality as an adjunctive and supportive role (Johnson, 1987). In this sense, mind and body were two dual substances. Cartesian dualism dominated the western philosophical and religious conceptions from the 18th to the 19th centuries.

The 20th century witnessed the prosperity of multi-disciplines. At this time, Heidegger's *Dasein* emerged to spark the insights into the phenomenological turn. *Da* refers to the way that people exist in the world. The *Dasein* as "being in the world" means that human is embedded in their bodies from the beginning. Their existence in the world is closely associated with the surroundings, history, and the whole society. The prevailing dualist science was thus against by this notion, which also set the philosophical threshold of embodied logics (O'Connor, 2017).

Merleau-Ponty (1945) as a seminal scholar in phenomenology of body, disrupted the Cartesian hierarchical dualism between mind and body. In other words, people's awareness cannot be separated from their material bodies. Merleau-Ponty's work originally came up with the

concept of "embodied subjectivity", arguing that corporeality is the initial means of our concisousness, through which we obtained knowledge. Our sensory experiences including vision, hearing, smell, gustation, and tactus are the very beginning way that we get to know the world. For Merleau-Ponty, the body is not a transcendent object, but a situational means of our thoughts (Crossley, 2001). Merleau-Ponty's work has sparked the "bodily turn" in modern western philosophy, shifting to the focus on "embodied" and "embodiment". Embodiment, according to Crouch (2000, p. 68), is:

> "a process of experiencing, making sense, knowing through practice as a sensual human subject in the world. The subject engages space and space becomes embodied in three ways. First the person grasps the world multi-sensually. Second the body is 'surrounded' by space and encounters it multi-dimensionally. Third, through the body the individual expresses him/herself through the surrounding space and thereby changes its meaning. It is evident that the world is not only 'out there' at a distance but surrounds the individual. It is touched and smelt and so on with all the senses working together. It is grasped multi-sensually."

Therefore, embodiment as reflected by a dialogic relationship between the body and the external environment, incorporates various elements including physical acts, multiple senses, and the embodied experiences within the world (Duffy et al., 2010). In this sense, the embodied theory incorporates the body as the subject of cognition, emphasizing that human consciousness, intelligence, emotions, attitudes, and values are all generated through the raw material body (Vereza, 2001). The integrity of body and cognition has been emphasized, indicating that human feelings and subjective experiences result from the dynamic interactions between the body and mind. In other words, human's thinking system is built on the body. In addition to this, embodiment theory also points out that the people's perceptive capabilities are embedded in a broader biological, psychological and cultural context (Varela et al., 2016). Apart from the physiological distinctions, people are different from each other in terms of cognition as a result of the acquired physical experiences, and the external environment whereby their cognitive systems form (Wilson, 2011). As argued by Harrison (2000), body is not only a "generative" but also an "expressive medium" through which the subjective meanings and experiences are consumed and created (p. 504). In other words, embodiment studies are not about the body per se, but about "culture and experience insofar as these can be understood from the standpoint of bodily being-in-the-world" (Rakić & Chambers, 2012, p. 1617).

Hence, embodiment as the basic feature of human existence is widely used to understand individuals' subjective experiences. According to Merleau-Ponty (2001), experience is the result of the established interactions between the body, the world, and the others. That is, figuring out the complex relationships is the key to unfold the patterns of individuals' experiences. More importantly, bodily perception is the prerequisite of experiences. Cognition and emotion arise from the physical experiences and activities within the interactive process with the world (Gibbs, 2006). In addition, cognitive and affective processes under the rubric of embodiment are interrelated with each other (Barrett et al., 2005). Within this framework, cognitive and affective aspects of human experience are intimately intertwined, forming a dynamic interplay that significantly influences how we perceive and interact with the world around us. In essence, this perspective acknowledges that our thoughts, emotions, and bodily sensations are not isolated entities but rather interconnected components that collectively shape our understanding of reality. This interrelation between cognitive and affective domains within the realm of embodiment emphasizes the inseparable nature of how our thoughts and emotions are intricately woven into the fabric of our experiences.

More recently, the emerging research in embodied cognition and emotion has complemented and expanded the theoretical insights into the nature of embodiment (Niedenthal & Maringer, 2009; Niedenthal et al., 2005). Although the coherent theoretical framework of embodied cognition and emotion has yet to be developed, one acknowledged theme is that the synergy of cognition and emotion contributes to human embodied experiences (Rakić & Chambers, 2012). In one word, the relation between the body and the mind is transactional and recursive from the embodiment perspective (Semin & Smith, 2008).

4.1.2 Embodiment in tourism

Inspired by theoretical insights from feminist and critical social theory, there has been a growing wave of embodiement research in humanities and social science discipline from the 1990s (Johnston, 2001). Sociological studies "built on Western hierarchical dualisms" mainly produce "hegemonic, disembodied, and masculinist knowledge" (p.181). Drawing on the bodily turn in social theory, Veijola and Jokinen (1994) firstly noticed the absence of "body" in tourism research. Later, Thrift (1997) proposed that body including multiple senses as the medium of daily life representations should be appreciated. In other words, people interact with the world in an ongoing process whereby the subject and object are folded into each other

(Thrift, 1997). Obrador Pons (2003) further argued that an embodied anlaysis in tourism is required to understand tourists' everday routine actions, instead of focusing on the exotic and peak activities. He (p. 57) thus contended that "many bodily and sensuous acts", rather than merely sight and language, should be paid attention to understand touristic experience. As such, the critical turn of embodiment in tourism studies inspired researchers to shift to study how multisensory experiences can help better understand tourism and performance (O'Connor, 2017).

An appreciation of the bodily sensory acts thus moves beyond Urry's (1990) well-established notion of the tourist gaze (Edensor, 2006). Urry's "gaze" is criticized for priviieging the role of visual sense on tourism experiences based on "a masculine, middle class and imperialistic imaginary made dangerously universal" (Obrador Pons, 2003, p. 57). Besides, tourist body is considered as a "technologically mediated moved body" (Larsen, 2001, p. 94). Andrews (2006, p. 219) adds to the argument and proposes that "an emphasis on the gaze renders the tourist experience as pre-determined and static, a subject-object dualism, rather than as a process in which the tourists are fully engaged". In contrast, embodiment deems that the symbolic power provided by our senses based on the material body determines the way that we experience the world (MacLachlan, 2004). In tourism research, most studies thus focus on the multi-sensory and multi-dimensional features of tourism encounters (Scarles, 2009). Cohen and Cohen (2012) claim that embodiment is one of the most important issues in current tourism research areas.

4.1.3 Embodiment of tourism experience

The embodiment of tourism experience has been widely acknowledged by a number of scholars and scientists (O'Connor, 2017). According to the embodied approach, bodily experience emerging from the locomotor body is the basis of human cognition; while the cognitive activities are embedded in a broader biological, psychological, and cultural situation (Varela et al., 2016). In other words, bodily experiences are rooted in the multiple relationships among corporeal bodies, external environment, and the world. Tourism and leisure entail interactions with place, and embodiment refers to how tourists grasp and understand the world around them through the engagements of both body and mind (Crouch, 2000). The embodiment of tourism experience can be understood by the interactions of bodily perceptions, cognitive and emotional experiences, as well as the situated context (as shown in Figure 4.1).
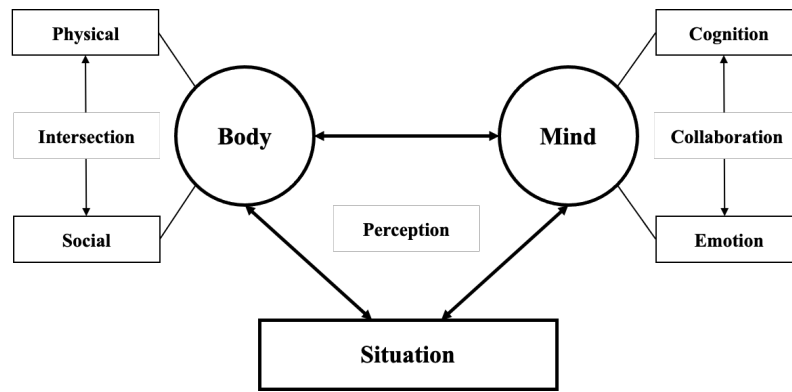
Figure 4.1 Theoretical framework of embodied tourism experience
Source: the author.

First of all, tourist experience is based on multisensory bodily perceptions. Rooted in the bodily perceptions, tourists acquire various cognitive and emotional experiences (Agapito et al., 2014). Embodied theory emphasizes that physical experience is the basis of travel experience (Gibbs et al., 2004). According to Chronis (2015), moving bodies with proprioception, kinesthesia, and intersensory perceptions constitute the foundation of tourist staged experience. Proprioception involves body position, and posture perception; kinesthesia refers to movements of arms, muscles, etc.; intersensory perceptions include the various senses of vision, hearing, taste, smell, tactus, etc (Fan & Xie, 2017). Small et al. (2012) empirically reveal the role of senses in tourism experiences of the person with vision impairment. They find that tourist with vision impairment has the similar experiences with sighted individuals through a focus on the senses of hearing and tactile. As a result, it is through the multisensory bodily experience, tourists can obtain emotional experiences and cognitive experiences such as sensation, perception, memory, imagination, etc.

Studies in multisensory tourism experiences have been conducted recently. Vision is considered as the dominant sense in tourist perceptions, and also the most memorable and recognizable (Agapito, 2020; Krishna, 2012). Listening is found to be the interactive result of neural, psychological, and cultural processing in event tourism (Waitt & Duffy, 2010). It plays an important role in the formation of the spatial meaning and tourism experiences. Smell is considered to be the stimulation of some memorable experiences. For example, aroma helps tourists develop the sense of place, contributing to the construction and maintenance of social taste (Dann & Jacobsen, 2003). Obrador Pons (2009) believes that tactile is the main source of pleasure for tourists by using ethnography to study the tactile performance of tourists in activities of beach sunbathing and sand castles construction. However, research on the holistic

bodily experiences remains scant. Rather, tourism studies put more focus on sensory perceptions, leaving the embodiment of feelings, emotions, affect, and cognition underrepresented. As revealed by Matteucci (2014), a lack of systematic understanding of the perceived and active body still exists in tourism studies.

Embodied emotion and cognition are the two main aspects of embodiment (Xie & Sun, 2018). The emotional experience is the result of embodied perceptions, meaning that the body helps to constitute the mind in developing an emotional reaction (Barrett and Lindquist, 2008). According to Spinoza (1914), the body and emotion are connected through perceptions, meaning that a sequential and intersective relationship exists between the body, perception, and the mind. In other words, embodied emotion regards emotion presenting, perception, processing, and understanding as a process closely associated with the body (Niedenthal, 2007). In general, the mind and the body interact with each other in the process of emotional information processing. The emotion generation is the result of the interactions of body, mind, and the exterior world (Niedenthal & Maringer, 2009). According to the embodied cognition theory, cognition and emotion work in concert (Kock & Ringberg, 2019). The positive relationships between emotional experience and cognition in tourism has been examined by Lee (2016).

In tourism studies, embodied cognition and emotion which are highly relevant to tourist experiences remain yet underexplored (Kock & Ringberg, 2019). By engaging into an all-male premarital stag tour, Thurnell-Read (2011) finds that a variety of emotions ranging from celebration joy to sentimental farewell are intertwined within the physical experiences from the noise bar, the strong taste of beverages, and the roaming occurring on unfamiliar streets. In other words, emotions and senses are closely related.

Embodied experience is usually rooted in an external environment (Barsalou, 2008). As one of the defining foundations of embodied theory, embodied situations emphasize the constraint mechanisms of exterior environment to the human body. Physical and mental activity is essentially and intrinsically grounded in the body's interaction with the outside world. Tourist experience is a product of intersections between the material body, social environment (e.g., social norms, customs, and values), and tourism natural environment (Cai & Tao, 2019). It is a process whereby a series of possibilities may run through the travel situations. The

experiential outcome depends on consumers' reflections towards their encounters with the tourism environment (Agapito et al., 2014).

In one word, the embodiment of tourism experience can be understood by two means: 1) tourist perceptions, emotions, and cognitions are all grounded in the body; 2) their perceptional, emotional, and cognitive experience are always affected by social norms, customs, values, etc. Tourist experience is developed "through an intersection of the material body and the socially constructed body" (Small & Darcy, 2012, p. 947).

4.2 Conceptual Framework

The link between well-being and personal transformation is marked in many tourism studies. Tourism may influence how people live by emphasizing psychological and emotional well-being and changing people's perspectives of themselves and the world (Reisinger, 2015). The overlaps between well-being and personal transformation are grounded in the understanding of eudaimonia. More precisely, the relationships between well-being and transformation regarding individual tourists can be identified from their intrinsic attitudes and extrinsic behaviors. The logical flow of this study is figured as follows. It should be noted that the conceptual framework only outlines the reviewed scholarship in the above chapters, which still needs further verifications.
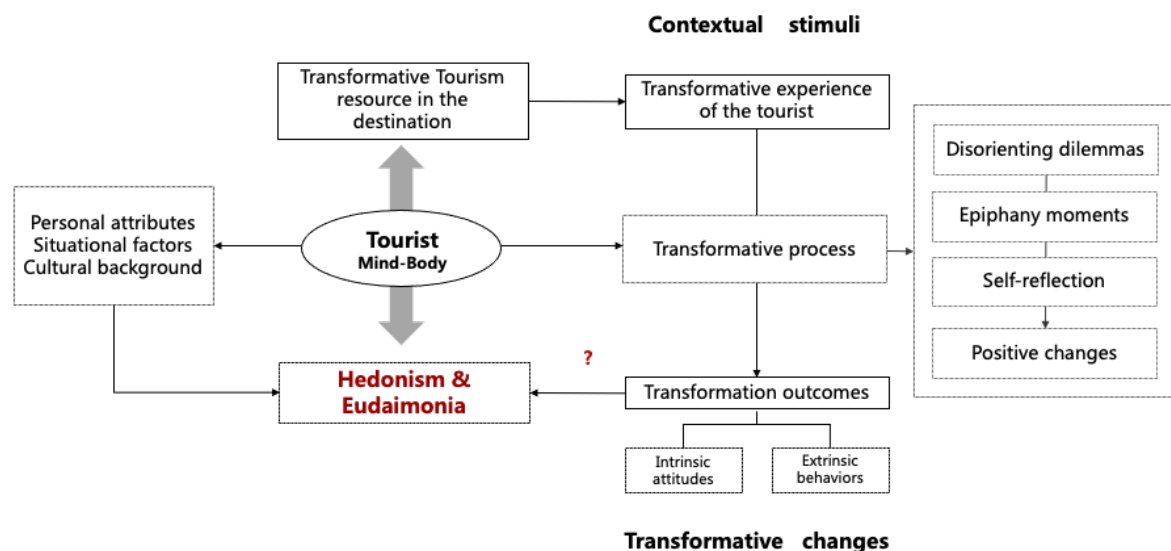
Figure 4.2 Conceptual framework

In the discipline of well-being, eudemonia focuses more on the processes that facilitate self-actualization, meaning-making and self-transcendence (Deci & Ryan, 2008). It implies a "more stable and enduring" sense of well-being with widely long-term influences on personal experiences (Ryan et al., 2013, p. 142). In this way, the eudemonic happiness appears to be linked to personal transformation both intrinsically and extrinsically. People have the intrinsic motivation and tendency to personal growth, which includes "striving for change, striving to understand oneself and the world better, striving to grow as a person, to become better in one's chosen fields and domains of life" (Smith & Diekmann, 2017, p. 6). Well-being is a motive for travel and the eudaimonic perspective linked to self-actualization, self-development, or self-transcendence is more aligned with the goal of personal transformation. In this sense, it can be proposed that transformation is a means of way to eudaimonia.

It is noteworthy that the positive effect of negative feelings, hardships, or challenges has scarcely been explored in well-being and tourism research, despite a few scholars mentioned the delayed positive effects of some unpleasant activities or painful moments in a wellness journey on one's self-development and transformation (Knobloch, Roberston, & Aitken, 2016). This echoes the suggestions of Filep and Laing (2019) for well-being research, in which the role of eudaimonia involving uncomfortable conditions and reflective interrogation remains highly underexamined. In other words, negative emotions, risks, and limits encountered during the journey deserve further investigation to understand their significance in tourist transformation and wellness from the eudaimonic lens.

Moreover, it is acknowledged that bodily challenges through tourism activities provoke tourists' inner perceptions and potentially contribute to ultimate changes. Specifically, all of a person's noema such as experience, feeling, perception, emotion, memory can be emphasized by embodiment, which emphasizes the interconnectedness of mind, body, and environment (Wu & Tang, 2018). Tourists can build embodied practices through making senses of the materials, people, and spaces around them, according to Prince (2017). In this sense, tourist experience is influenced by the surrounding environment through different senses. Overall, from the embodiment perspective, tourist experience is determined by objective elements and interpersonal interactions (Ryan, 2010). More precisely, tourists build their inner conceptual systems by reacting and interpreting the outer environment through the interactions between bodies and minds (Lu, Chan, & Cheung, 2020). Sensory perceptions and bodily reactions act as distinct sources of subliminal information that affect tourists' cognition, emotions, and

behaviors (Barsalou, 2008). Embodiment theory is integrated in this study focusing on the series of physical, embodied interactions that engage both the bodily and mentally perceptions. Thus, tourist experience should be a result of the interaction between a series of relational factors such as cognition, body and environment rather than a merely psychological perception formed in the journey. Based on this, tourist embodied experience is suggested to be a dynamic and intricate two-way loop involving with body, mind and situation as a tripartite framework (Wu & Tang, 2018).

In this study, tourist embodied experience plays as the triggering dimension, while multisensory and multilevel reflections within the tourist are the essential of transformation. The transformative metaprocessing course, including both the experience dimenisons and tourist reflections, will be described and clarified using the embodied approach. As aforementioned, people's attitudinal and behavioral changes due to personal transformation will influence their perceptions towards what is happiness and how happy they are. Thus, tourism has the potential to alter tourists' inner perceptions towards being well. Apart from this, the enhancement of well-being is unquestionably one part of the transformation outcomes through tourism. As such, the other transformed outcome concerning well-being might lie in people's outer expressions towards their well-being state.

CHAPTER 5 METHODOLOGY

This chapter discusses the adopted research design and methodology in detail. This discussion serves two main purposes, namely, to enhance transparency by providing a clear overview of the research methodology and to explain the rationale behind the chosen approach. An overview of the research design route is shown in Figure 5.1.

Paradigms				
Positivism	Realism	Pragmatism	Constructivism	
Approaches				
Quantitative		Qualitative		
Methodology				
Narrative	Case study	Grounded theory	Phenomenology	Ethnography
Techniques				
Photo-induced semi-structured interviews		Participant observation	Photos and postings	

Figure 5.1 Research design route
Source: the author.

The philosophical basis of this research will be initially addressed followed by the proposal of narrowed approaches. Afterward, the rationale behind the use of IPA to explore embodied transformative experiences will be presented. Multiple research methods, including in-depth interviews, participant observation, photos, and postings, are employed to collect data about the eudaimonic tourism experiences featured in this study. The data collected using each of these methods will be used to verify the findings in the literature and to guide the decisions for the next stages (Strauss, 1987). The data collection process will be also thoroughly discussed together with the reflexive role of the researcher, ethical issues, and research trustworthiness.

5.1 Research Paradigm

Paradigms describe how reality is observed and studied (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). They shape "the researchers' epistemological, ontological, and methodological premises" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 31). The fundamental differences between qualitative and quantitative research methods lie in their philosophical assumptions. Quantitative approaches usually focus on the numerical context and attempt to verify the relationships among variables based on hypotheses. According to Creswell (2003), quantitative research is "a means for testing

objective theories by examining the relationship among variables. These variables, in turn, can be measured typically on instruments, so that numbered data can be analyzed using statistical procedures" (p. 4). Meanwhile, qualitative approaches often use textual information, such as texts, photos, observations, and symbols, to understand people's experiences (Liamputtong, 2013). The foundation of qualitative studies is based on an interpretive approach to social reality and a description of human lived experience (Atkinson, Coffey & Delamont, 2001). Given that this study aims to examine how transformative tourism experiences promote individuals' eudaimonic well-being, a qualitative approach is adopted due to its strengths in reflecting the participants' embodied and lived experiences. Furthermore, qualitative research focuses on human behaviors, emotions, attitudes, and perspectives (Tong et al., 2012). To gain a better understanding of the topic at hand, researchers should clarify their philosophical assumptions in relation to their research topics.

Social science scholars noticed that the relative preference of each research methodology depends on philosophical questions surrounding ontology and epistemology (Tuli, 2010). Ontology is related to "the nature of our beliefs about reality." Researchers make assumptions about reality, how it exists, and what can be learned about it. As the theoretical connection between researcher and knowledge, epistemology describes the way that researchers understand reality or "what is counted as evidence" (Mason, 2002, p. 16). Meanwhile, methodology refers to the practical approach embedded in ontology and epistemology (Goddard & Melville, 2004) and is described as a comprehensive plan of technique or action designed for the accomplishment of certain objectives. After establishing the research paradigm, especially the underlying ontological and epistemological assumptions, the most appropriate set of research methods can be identified.

Social science has two broad and contrasting traditions. Positivism holds that the reality is independent and needs to be measured by conventional scientific methodologies (Bassey, 1995). Positivist researchers view reality as "being out there" in the world and can be measured using a quantitative methodology without distancing themselves from their subject (Tubey, Rotich & Bengat, 2015). By contrast, constructivist researchers view the world as a social construct of humans and argue that reality cannot be approached irrespective of people (Tuli, 2010). In this sense, the constructivist approach treats people as participants rather than "objects/items/specimen" in research (Tubey, Rotich & Bengat, 2015, p. 225). As such, researchers with a constructivist orientation prefer to use qualitative methodologies to

understand, explore, and explain social realities from the meaning making of people (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000).

Following the above discussion, this study adopts a constructivism paradigm because the reality of the world resides in the experiences of individuals. According to this paradigm, the objective of inquiry is to understand a specific phenomenon rather than to generalize the research to a certain population (Farzanfar, 2005). Constructivism suggests that people are active entities and meaning makers that should be processed by subjective understanding. Well-being transformation through tourism as a mental product of participants is constructed internally but reflected externally. This transformation captures how individuals engage with and perceive the world of tourism and how they cognitively understand their surrounding environment (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013).

With regard to the ontology and epistemology of social constructivism, the ever-changing nature of reality is influenced by diverse experiences and the varying levels of comprehension of individuals (Wilson & Hollinshead, 2015). Constructivism seeks the underlying meanings via interaction and reflection (Schwandt, 1994). Therefore, constructivism can be viewed as an emic process of exploring the subjective experiences of the observers and researchers. Researchers should collaborate with the observers to uncover subjective meanings through interactive discourse and hermeneutic interpretation (Thibaut, 2017). To understand the relationship between tourism experiences and well-being, this study employs several approaches that involve examining the participants' interactions with tourism and interpreting the cognitive processes through which their understanding is transformed. Several data collection methods are designed to delve into these mental processes and gain insights into the impact of tourism on individuals' well-being.

5.2 Research Design

This study adopts phenomenology as its methodology given its aim to understand the eudaimonic experience of transformative tourists. Phenomenology focuses on individuals' common or shared subjective perceptions of the meaning assigned to their lived experiences, aiming at discovering the underlying variations of a given phenomenon (MacDermott, 2002). In the case of this study, phenomenology allows the author to address the embodied experience

of transformative tourists. This study also attempts to explore the essence of eudaimonic transformation and explore the very nature of transformative experiences using an embodied approach. The intent of phenomenology is not only to uncover what the participants experience but also how they experience a phenomenon (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Therefore, phenomenology provides a solid methodological foundation for understanding the embodied perceptions of transformative tourists. Using multiple research techniques in phenomenology also provides the researcher with more adequacy and flexibility. In this study, in-depth interviews and participant observation are performed to explore the embodied perceptions and reflections of the participants.

5.2.1 IPA

Rooted in phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiographic, IPA is one of the most well-known and widely used qualitative methodologies in psychology that aims to portray personal lived experiences in detail (Smith, 2011). This approach emphasizes the subjective phenomena experienced by individuals (Creswell, 2009) and the unique and personal nature of these experiences and seeks to uncover the underlying meanings and themes that emerge from the participants' narratives. Given these functions, IPA has been widely applied in examining various research topics. However, despite the substantial body of research using IPA, Smith (2011) revealed that only 27% of IPA studies conducted between 1996 and 2008 satisfied the criteria of a good IPA. Therefore, he developed an evaluation guide for conducting high-quality IPA work (Figure 5.2).

An acceptable IPA must subscribe to the three theoretical touchstones of this methodology. Phenomenology refers to the philosophical concern with lived experiences that are embedded with meaning, thereby requiring researchers to approach such experience closely to gain a detailed understanding (Smith et al., 2009). IPA is called a double hermeneutic process in which "the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of what is happening to them" (Smith, 2011, p. 10). Idiographic is an IPA approach that deals with very small samples, or even a single case, to examine a phenomenon in depth. This approach also develops new knowledge and insights into general truisms through a specific exploration at the individual level (MacLeod, 2019). The IPA method also inspires researchers to explore not only individual experiences but also how a phenomenon is shaped by historical, social, and cultural contexts (Lopez & Willis, 2004). Therefore, IPA is applicable to the context of

transformative tourists, whose embodied travel experiences are affected by their social environments and living worlds to some extent (Lopez & Willis, 2004). In other words, IPA should be conducted with a theoretical underpinning of phenomenology and hermeneutics, a synchronized interpretative epistemology, and an idiographic data collecting and analysis process (Larkin et al., 2011).

Figure 5.2 IPA evaluation criteria

(1)Acceptable paper meets the following four criteria:
 1.1 Clearly subscribes to the theoretical principles of IPA: it is phenomenological, hermeneutic and idiographic.
 1.2 Sufficiently transparent so reader can see what was done.
 1.3 Coherent, plausible and interesting analysis.
 1.4 Sufficient sampling from corpus to show density of evidence for each theme:
     1.4.1 N1-3: extracts from every participant for each theme;
     1.4.2 N4-8: extracts from at least three participants for each theme; and
     1.4.3 N>8: extracts from at least three participants for each theme+measure of prevalence of themes, or extracts from half the sample for each theme.
 1.5 Caveats Compensation. Evidence base and interest factors considered together so that, e.g., a paper with particularly interesting data may gain compensation for a less than ideal evidence base. Partial acceptability. A paper may be deemed acceptable if it has partial but discrete pockets of acceptable, e.g.,
     1.5.1 Paper may present four themes, two of which are interesting and well evidenced while two of them are not.
     1.5.2 Paper may have number of themes but evidence each with data from the same single participant. This paper may be considered acceptable if the account of the individual is sufficiently coherent that it can be read as an interesting idiographic case-study.
     1.5.3 Paper may present data from two participant groups, e.g., males and females and be deemed acceptable for one participant group but not the other.

(2) Good Paper must clearly meet all the criteria for acceptable. It then offers these three extra things: 2.1 well focused; offering an in-depth analysis of a specific topic;   2.2 data and interpretation are strong; and   2.3 reader is engaged and finds it particularly enlightening.

(3)Unacceptable paper fails on one of the four criteria for acceptable. It may be:
 3.1 not consistent with theoretical principles of IPA;
 3.2 insufficiently transparent for reader to see what was done;
 3.3 not of sufficient interest; and poorly evidenced. Predominantly what lets a paper down is the poor evidence base. Typical ways this can occur:
     3.3.1 large number of descriptive/superficial themes from a large number of participants;
     3.3.2 each theme has short summary and one or two extracts without interpretation;
     3.3.3 insufficient extracts from participants to support the themes being illustrated;
     3.3.4 no explanation for how prevalence of the themes was determined;
     3.3.5 analysis is crude, lacks nuance.

Source: Adopted from Smith (2011, p. 17).

5.3 Data Collection

In line with the constructivism paradigm, a multi-method approach that includes verbal (interviews), textual (observation notes), and visual (pictures) data is utilized in this study.

Semi-structured interviews and participant observations are also conducted as the primary phenomenological methods. Conducting in-depth interviews is the central data collection technique in phenomenology (Smith et al., 2009), whereas close observations complement face-to-face conversations (Andriotis, 2009) by allowing researchers to approach immediate experiences and witnessing the natural and authentic behaviors of tourists (Sarantakos, 2005). Therefore, in-depth interviews and participant observation are adopted as the key data collection methods in this study. The key and projective research techniques are discussed in the following section.

5.3.1 In-depth interviews

As the exemplary method for IPA study, in-depth interviews are applied to explore informants' transformative experiences and eudaimonic perceptions post-trip (Kirillova et al., 2017a), which enables the researcher and the interviewee to involve in an immediate-feedback dialogue. The in-depth interview is suitable for this study because it provides a deeper understanding of human experiences, attitudes, and behaviors (Rowley, 2012), which is particularly insightful for this study on embodied consumption of transformative tourists. In contrast to unstructured or structured interviews, a semi-structured interview allows participants to express their thoughts and feelings more flexibly through open-ended questions. In the meantime, the researcher is offered more controls on the flow of the conversation with a clear interviewing agenda.

5.3.1.1 Photo-induced semi-structured interviews

Smith et al. (2009) proposed that collecting additional data can help contextualize the interview data in IPA. For instance, a further exploration of the available resources and deeper understanding of the topic can be achieved by examining media representations (Smith et al., 2009). Therefore, a photo inducted technique was designed for this study to capture the participants' embodied transformative experiences and the personal perceptions, subjective feelings, and meaning making associated with such experiences. According to Harper (2002), people react differently to visual and verbal modes of representation. As a different form of information, photography elicitation can arouse deeper awareness of people compared with words (Harper, 2002).

Photo-induced interviews can be conducted in a variety of ways, ranging from "the simple idea of inserting a photograph into a research interview" (Harper, 2002, p. 13) to a more advanced approach, such as the Zaltman metaphor elicitation technique (Zaltman, 1997). This study adopted the elementary technique, in which pictures were incorporated to establish rapport with the participants and to trigger their memories in retrospective interviews (Warren &Karner, 2010). Upon recruitment, the participants were requested to take several representative photographs from their life-changing trips with them during the interviews as a way to stimulate conversation. This elicitation strategy also encourages the participants to contemplate on their experiences before the interview (Everett & Barrett, 2012).

5.3.2.2 Biographical technique

A biographical technique was also employed to rebuild the participants' life trajectory through interviews. According to Levinson (1986), the biographical approach has great value for studying the life structure development of adults. The biological approach is the only method that offers researchers with a detailed understanding of their participants' lifespan at a specific point in time and track how their lives change over time. Moreover, to describe, interpret, and explore the participants' perceptions and transformation of their well-being through a series of their travel experiences, their individual life courses and life events should be addressed to gain a concrete sense of their changing process.

The biographical method is a retrospective longitudinal technique (Ladkin, 1999) that allows researchers to explore temporal cause-and-effect connections and compare similar topics across different periods (Ritchie, 2005). Conducting biographical interviews enable researchers to "reconstruct the social phenomena in the process of becoming" (Rosenthal, 2004, p. 50). In this study, biographical interviews with transformative tourists helped the researcher understand their well-being (re)construction process in tourism from a life course perspective.

The value of the biographical method has been noted in tourism research as it "opens up complex, personalized and fine-grained understandings" of a person's traveling behaviors (Sedgley, Pritchard & Morgan, 2011, p. 430). This approach matched well with the current study, which aims to discover and reflect on the heterogeneity of transformative tourists' perceptions toward tourism and well-being through a life course approach. This method assumes that key life events or transitions can change one's personal values and attitudes

toward well-being and tourism, and the focus of this study is to examine how the effects of tourism vary across different life courses.

Semi-structured and open-ended questions were used to encourage the interviewees to share their life stories and traveling experiences. One important thing before the interview is to build rapport with the participants to put them "at ease with regard to asking them about their lived experiences" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 64). The interviews started with a story sharing session in which the participants were asked to share their chosen photos. The researcher followed the interview schedule of Hefferon and Gil-Rodriguez (2011) (Figure 5.3). The most general questions were asked first, and the funneling strategy was applied to elicit more specific views (Alase, 2017). Follow-up questions were also asked when a new relevant topic was opened up by the participants to gain deeper insights into their reflections.

Figure 5.3 Interview schedule guide

1. Having determined the overall area to be tackled in the interview, think about the broad range of issues you want your interview to cover.
2. Put the topics in the most appropriate sequence. Two questions may help here. What is the most logical order in which to address these areas? Which is the most sensitive area? In general, it is a good idea to leave sensitive topics until later in the interview to allow the respondent to become relaxed and comfortable speaking to you.
3. Think of appropriate questions related to each area in order to address the issue you are interested in.
4. Think about possible probes and prompts which could follow from answers that might be given to some of your questions (see below).

Source: Adopted from Hefferon & Gil-Rodriguez (2011, p. 61).

The following example questions were asked during the interviews:

- Could you please tell me about this travel experience in your photos? Where did you travel to? How long did you stay? With whom did you travel?
- Did any special life event happen before this vacation? Could you talk about this important event?
- What did you travel for? What attracted you to go?
- How did this travel experience make you feel about yourself/your current life?
- How did this travel experience impact your feelings toward/viewpoints of the world?
- How did this travel experience impact your views toward being happy?

5.3.2 Participant observation

Observation is applied when the data cannot be easily collected through face-to-face conversations, such as during experiential processes. Participant observation is an important embodied dimension of phenomenological research that allows researchers to understand the

transformative context in which the tourists find themselves (Steadman, Banister, & Medway, 2019). Participant observation is to be conducted at potential transformative potential trips by shedding light on tourist embodied experiences between 2022 and 2023, with time spent observing, questioning, and conversing.

A fieldtrip was organized in this study for the data collection. The researcher joined the participants in a 1-day trip on November 17, 2022, where they hiked for 12 miles and engaged in bowling meditation in a remote district of Beijing. The hike was designed with a niche, sparsely populated, and lightweight suburban mountain route, which posed a challenge for non-professional participants. The entire trip involved 15 people, including 5 organizers. During the fieldwork, the researcher participated in all routine activities as a hiker and a researcher. The team departed from the city center at 7:00 and returned around 19:00. The researcher adopted a balanced stance by acting as an insider and an outsider simultaneously, which allowed her to "combine(s) participation in the lives of the people being studied with maintenance of a professional distance that allows adequate observation and recording of data" (Fetterman, 1998, p. 34).

The selection of this hiking tour for my participatory observation activity is grounded in several compelling reasons. Firstly, the activity's description and promotion on the Internet platform explicitly highlights its purpose as a journey of healing and personal growth amidst mountains and forests. The organizers stress that this expedition is designed to be challenging and not suitable for beginners. This clarity in the activity's intent suggests a potential for transformative experiences. Secondly, aligning with prior scholarly research on transformative tourism, hiking trips have been identified as a viable category (e.g., Buckley & Westaway, 2020). This establishes a theoretical foundation that supports the potential for transformative outcomes within this context. Thirdly, the decision is further reinforced by feedback garnered from previous participants of this activity. Their reviews consistently underscore the healing and transformative nature of the experience. The feedback specifically mentions feelings of self-challenge, self-transcendence, and self-healing as outcomes of the journey. Given these factors, choosing this hiking tour for participatory observation is justified.

As an insider, the researcher carefully recorded observations related to four main areas of focus: 1) what embodied the experiences involved in the hiking trip; 2) what were the activities offered during the trip; 3) how did the other tourists accept these offerings and interacted with

their environment and one another; and 4) the researchers' own feelings and reflections after her participation. As an outsider, the researcher joined the trip's WeChat group wherein she observed the participants' thoughts and reflections. This group also allowed the researcher to access the participants' personal social media platforms, such as Redbook and WeChat Moments, from which she could extract information about their hiking journey. Specifically, the researcher observed the online posts of the participants, conducted interviews, engaged in informal conversations about their experiences and feelings, and took photographs and videos. Field diaries, voice recorders, and cameras were used to capture the observations, interactions, conversations, thoughts, feelings, and reflections of the participants.

The field observation involved observing and following the tourists during their trip. The researcher identified six team members who participated in the hike in a successive frequency. To ensure that the trip was indeed transformative, the researcher conducted a longitudinal observation by tracing and marking down the perceptions and reflections of the participants over time. Details about the number of trips taken by the participants and their corresponding dates are listed in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1 Online observation for data collection

Name	Nickname	Trip-taken time	Posting time
F01	Da Lei	Nov 17, 2022	Nov 19, 2022
		Mar 20, 2023	Nov 22, 2022
			Mar 20, 2023
F02	Luo	Nov 17, 2022	Nov 30, 2022
		Nov 19, 2022	Dec 03, 2023
F03	WeExplore	Nov 17, 2022	Nov 20, 2022
F04	Lucy	Oct 25, 2022	Oct 26, 2022
		Nov 17, 2022	Nov 20, 2022
F05	Jiao	Nov 17, 2022	Nov 21, 2022
		Feb 05, 2023	Feb 06, 2023
		Feb 17, 2023	Feb 18, 2023
		Mar 19, 2023	Mar 20, 2023
F06	Kerry	Nov 17, 2022	Nov 19, 2022

5.4 Research Sampling

5.4.1 Participants and sampling strategy

IPA is usually conducted with a small sample because an intensive case-by-case analysis of detailed individual statements is required (Hefferon & Gil-Rodriguez, 2011). According to Smith et al. (2009), a sample of three to six participants is adequate for an IPA. In a qualitative study involving 60 participants, Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) verified that the information derived from the first six participants already accounts for 94% of all participants, while the information derived from the first 12 participants explains 97% of the efficiency of the results. Therefore, a sample of 12 participants is considered enough for an IPA. Another scholar suggested that the number of participants in a phenomenological study may range from 2 to 25 (Alase, 2017). These arguments highlight the flexibility of IPA in terms of sample size (Finlay, 2011), which is partly decided by the following factors (Hefferon & Gil-Rodriguez, 2011, p. 56):

> *a) the degree of commitment to the case study level of analysis and reporting,*
> *b) the richness of the individual cases,*
> *c) the constraints one is operating under.*

As opposed to the nomothetic approach, IPA adopts the idiographic approach that focuses on a highly homogeneous sampling group. In this sense, a fairly homogeneous group should be identified at the primary stage of IPA. According to Smith et al. (2009), "within the sample, we can examine convergence and divergence in some detail" (p. 3). Therefore, in this research, purposive and referral sampling methods were adopted to identify the potential participants. Following Hefferon and Gil-Rodriguez (2011) and Smith et al. (2009), samples in an IPA should be selected purposively because the analysis requires a deep insight into the participants' experiences. Moreover, researchers should find and select individuals who are knowledgeable and willing to provide detailed information about the research topic through purposive sampling procedures. The referral strategy helps attract other potential participants to participate in the research.

The major research techniques pertinent to this study are participant observation and in-depth interviews. Therefore, how to sample the observed group and select the potential informants are equally important in this study. Following Soulard et al. (2019), the researcher devised a

set of selection criteria to ensure the transformative nature of the observed experiences and to specifically target tourists. The following criteria were derived from an extensive review of the literature on transformative tourism:

1) Tourists are immersed in unfamiliar cultures and circumstances.
2) Tourists are engaged in self-reflection.
3) Tourists indicate that their experiences are memorable, meaningful, and life changing.
4) Tourists report their attitudinal or value changes as a result of their journeys.

The above criteria were adopted to ensure that the selected experiences and tourists are indeed transformative.

5.4.2 Participant recruitment

The profiles of the interviewees are presented in Table 5.2. The identities of these participants were kept anonymous by using codes. The chronological order of the interviews was used to code each participant with the letter "T," standing for the word "transformation." A total of eight female and five male participants, with a relatively balanced gender proportion, were interviewed. Among the female participants, five opted to travel alone, two chose to travel with their friends, and one traveled with her mother due to her young age. Meanwhile, all male participants chose to travel with their peers. These interviewees were aged between 24 and 45 years, and the trips they recalled during the interviews were mostly taken before 2020 due to the travel restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic. The majority of the interviews were conducted online through video calls. Most of the interviewees had a high education level, and four of them were pursuing doctoral degrees. Six participants engaged in transformative trips while they were studying, and the other participants took their transformative trips when they were already employed.

Eight participants embarked on transformational journeys in China, with travel times ranging from as short as three days to over eight months. Two of these participants repeatedly visited the same destination. The interviews lasted for a total of 966 minutes, and the collected data consisted not only interview transcripts but also impressive photos, videos, travel notes, content shared on WeChat Moments, and reports of interviewees receiving magazine interviews during their transformative trips.

Table 5.2 Respondents' profiles

Name	Gender	Age	Occupation	Interview duration	Interview type	Trip year	Destination	Trip duration	Travel companion	Collected materials
T01	M	24	PhD Student	52m	Video	2018	Many locations in France	10 days	Parents and their friends	Photos
T02	F	26	Social Worker	1h10m	Video	2010	Sanya, Hainan	7 days	Mother	Photos
T03	M	45	Photographer	1h37m	Face to face	2016-2019	Many locations in Tibet, Xinjiang, Gansu, China	A few times, the longest 8 months	Group members	Photos, videos
T04	M	31	Government Officer	37m	Video	2018	Xiamen, China	5 days	Parents	Photos
T05	F	34	Destination Promoter	1h2m	Video	2019	Langkawi, Malaysia	7 days	Solo	Photos, WeChat posts
T06	F	28	PhD Student	1h8m	Video	2019	Switzerland	12 days	Friend *(Guimi)*	Photos
T07	F	35	Tour Designer, Operator	1h19m	Video	2012	Many locations in Northwest China	2 months	Solo	Photos, magazine reports
T08	F	37	Lecturer	1h2m	Video	2020	Shangri-La, Dali, Yunnan	3 times: 7 days, 15 days, more than 1 month	Solo	Photos, WeChat posts
T09	F	34	Insurance Broker	1h5m	Video	2019	Dunhuang, Gansu	4 days	Solo	Photos
T10	M	28	PhD Student	1h34m	Video	2020	Many locations in West Sichuan	18 days	Girlfriend	Photos, travel notes
T11	F	34	Real Estate Consultant	1h41m	Video	2020	Lake Baikal, Russia	6 days	Friend *(Guimi)*	Photos, WeChat posts
T12	F	27	PhD Student	1h21m	Video	2021	Southwest, China	3 days	Solo	Photos
T13	M	42	Tour Leader	1h31m	Video	2015	Many locations in the world, e.g. Antarctic, Africa	17 days	Group members	Photos

5.4.3 Ethical issues

Ethical issues concerning morality and responsibility were observed throughout the research. There are three laws pertinent to daily ethical research concerns: respect, benevolence, and being just (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2011). The participants' privacies, dignities, anonymities, safeties, and equalities are all covered by these three laws. As a phenomenological and interpretative approach, IPA concerns the participants' privacies and dignities, especially in biographical interviews.

While formulating the research design and stepping into the field, the researcher made sure that all participants were fully informed about the research and gave their written consent. Ethical considerations were also observed in the participant observations. When observations are performed in public spaces, it is not always possible to gain all participants' informed consent. Therefore, before the observations, the researcher instead sought the consent of the tour organizer or guide. While moving into the collection stage, the participants were informed that their participation in the study was strictly voluntarily and that their identities would be kept anonymous. They were also informed that they can quit or refuse to answer any questions that make them uncomfortable. Safety and confidentiality issues were also addressed throughout the whole research. In terms of utilizing content derived from social media platforms, it's important to note that the posts and images shared by users are accessible to the public. The ideas, thoughts, and content that they share are voluntarily made available for public viewing. However, even though the posts were already in the public domain, their consent was sought during informal conversations on the trip before using their content. This additional step underscores the ethical consideration of respecting individuals' autonomy and ensuring that their content is used in a way that aligns with their intentions and comfort levels.

5.5 IPA Thematic Analysis

According to Smith et al. (2009), IPA involves a series of common procedures and principles. Typically, the analysis involves moving from a specific viewpoint to shared perspectives. This process is iterative and inductive as described by Smith (2007). Followed the practical steps and guidelines proposed by Smith et al. (2009), the researcher initially transcribed the interview recordings word by word by listening to each recording repeatedly. Some important notes,

including inflections, intonation, and non-verbal cues (e.g., tears, sighs, and pauses) were also recorded. All written materials, including transcripts, observation notes, social media posts, and travel notes, were then read and re-read.

Themes that represent the features of each note and transcript were identified and calibrated. These themes were conceptual and reflected certain essential features of the data. At this stage, the researcher read the transcripts and notes line by line and performed the analysis. Each transcript was uploaded to the NVivo software to be coded, categorized, and analyzed. After conducting further interviews using the same format, the researcher analyzed the data by coding the common themes until a data saturation was reached.

At the third stage, the structure of the data was introduced into the analysis. In the previous stage, the researcher listed the identified themes and evaluated their relationships. Some themes formed natural conceptual clusters as they shared common meanings or relationships, while the other themes were characterized by their hierarchical relationships. The thematic clusters identified in this stage should be reasonable compared with the original data (Smith et al, 2009).

A structured list of themes was then created, with each theme explained by accompanying quotes. This list only included those themes that fully reflected the participants' lived experiences. The researcher then integrated all individual cases. After creating a checklist for each participant, the researcher combined these checklists into an inclusive high-level theme list that reflected the experiences of all respondents.

After intense reflection and complex processes of reduction, the researcher identified several themes that captured the essence of inner transformation as experienced by transformative tourists. These themes emerged from the data and are crucial to understanding transformative tourism experience.

5.6 Reflexivity of the Researcher

Adhering to an interpretative approach within the constructivism paradigm, this research is a dialectic process between researchers and participants (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). Reflexivity recognizes the importance of interactions between researchers and informants in knowledge

production (Dupuis, 1999). Researchers need to be intentional and constantly self-introspect throughout the research process (Berg & Lune, 2011). From the constructivist perspective, the whole research process, including the theoretical lens, methods used, and organization of the data, is influenced by the socio-cultural context (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The researcher adhered to the stance that highlights the influences of contexts by preparing memos about the relationships between personal experiences and the phenomenon of interest (Chen et al., 2020).

Reflexivity also corroborates the values of participants and researchers in the research process. A trusting connection should be established between the participants and researchers, and the researchers' awareness should be self-disclosed (Dupuis, 1999; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The researcher should also promote inclusiveness by interacting with the participants in the process of knowledge creation and description (Ponterotto, 2005).

As a double-hermeneutic and participant-oriented approach, IPA requires researchers to constantly self-reflect (Alase, 2017). Phenomenological researchers intrude into other people's life experiences when conducting IPA. Reflexive statements are not just regular statements but rather represent a "step-by-step detailed and descriptive journey" (Alase, 2017, p. 18). With the epistemological basis of subjectivity, IPA believes that interpersonal actions and personal lived experiences construct the reality. Given that this study aims to understand the constructed phenomenon, eliminating the subjective bias of the researcher is not necessary. Instead, a comprehensive personal reflective account should be incorporated into this study to provide its readers with a clear processing course.

5.7 Research Trustworthiness

Research trustworthiness "demonstrate(s) truth value, provide the basis for applying it, and allow for external judgements to be made about the consistency of its procedures and the neutrality of its finds and decisions" (Erlandson, 1993, p.29). Guba (1981) developed a model for evaluating the methodological justifications of qualitative research that highlighted credibility, applicability, dependability, and confirmability as the four principles of research trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Apart from positivism that focuses on a single and objective reality, constructivism–interpretivism research requires the participants to share multiple realities to ensure credibility. This research adopted data triangulation to improve its justification (Decrop, 2004). This process involves gathering and comparing data from multiple sources to ensure their accuracy and reliability (Rubin & Babbie, 2016). Triangulation is mainly built on the facets of multiple data collection methods and sources (Burke, 1997). This study adopted three sources to generate data in various forms, namely, textual (observation fieldnotes and posts), oral (in-depth interviews), and visual (photos). The researcher captured additional data by writing filed notes, which included her self-reflections on specific phenomena that cannot be directly recorded into the transcripts.

In qualitative research, applicability concerns the transfer of the obtained knowledge to other objects, such as contexts, populations, and settings. This study selected transformative tourists as a case to explore the eudaimonic experiences in tourism from an embodied theoretical lens, which can be extensively adopted to observe the interplay between tourism experiences and well-being. From the experiential perspective, this study viewed transformative tourists as a homogeneous group instead of assigning them to a specific tourism context (e.g., volunteer tourism, overseas study, and backpacking) that is applicable to many other settings.

Dependability is about ensuring consistency and correspondence between the collected data and the reality (Decorp, 2004). Dependability is strengthened by creating a comprehensive research plan, making intensive preparation before entering the field, and seeking participant verifications. In this study, the participants were asked to interpret their photos to further understand their experiences and to cross-check the results of the interview.

Confirmability was enhanced in this study by triangulating the methodology and keeping a reflexive journal throughout the research process. The regular feedback and check-ins from the supervisor also improved the confirmability of this research. An audit trail was also used to establish the rigor of this study by offering details on the data analysis (Streubert & Carpenter, 1999). This audit trail recorded the processes of reduction, analysis, and discussion from the raw data to the synthesized findings. In this way, an audit trail helps establish the dependability and confirmability of a study by allowing auditors to review and verify the path followed by the researcher (Burns & Grove, 2001).

CHAPTER 6 FINDINGS

This section presents the essential themes elucidated through the narratives of respondents' transformative tourism experiences and the meanings derived from the experiences. Uncovering and articulating the essential themes necessitated intense reflection, thematic reduction, meticulous writing and re-writing, and holistic analysis of the parts and the whole. The purpose of this study was to explore tourists embodied transformative experiences and the meaning-making of those experience that applies to transformative tourists. Careful contemplation and interpretation of participants' lifeworld and stories led to the elicitation of essential themes. Essential themes elucidated in the meaning of transformative tourism experiences evolved around four thematic items: 1) transformative antecedents; 2) transformative triggers and agents; 3) epiphany moments in transformative tourism; 4) transformative outcomes related to well-being. Figure 6.1 presents the storyline of the results.

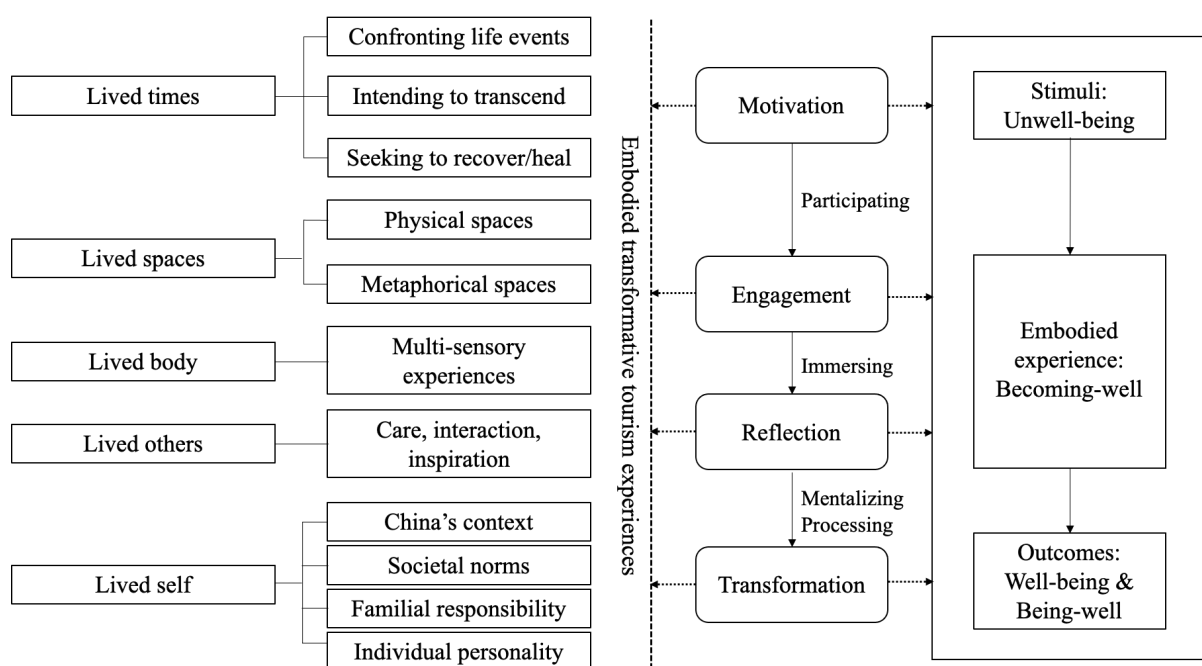**Figure 6.1 Storyline of the results**

6.1 Life Crises as Disorienting Dilemmas Before the Journey: Lived Time

Significant life events not only affect people's temporary well-being but also influence their travel behavior and patterns, such as their selection of destination, travel preferences, travel companions, mode of transportation, etc. (Huber et al., 2019). A crucial motivation for travel

is to break away from the mundane routine and explore unconventional environments that offer new experiences and perspectives. These unique travel experiences can have a positive impact on one's mental health, providing an opportunity for self-reflection and personal growth (Bhalla et al., 2021). However, it's important to note that travel preferences and motivations can vary greatly among individuals, and an unconventional environment for one person may not be the same for another.

This study found that respondents of various ages and stages in life experienced difficulties, confusion, and depressions before undergoing transformational tourism. These individuals took the initiatives to make changes by choosing to travel and thereby relieving themselves of current academic, career, and even life challenges. This is labeled as disorienting dilemmas by scholars in transformative tourism and also an essential factor in developing transformative experiences (Kirillova et al., 2017b).

6.1.1 Growth challenges

Many individuals choose to travel when encountering major life milestones to temporarily detach themselves from significant events. In the study, numerous respondents expressed feelings of frustration and hesitation when facing growth difficulties such as pressure to pursue higher education, academic completion, and growth confusion. For these individuals, traveling serves as a "rite of passage" to achieve transformation when they reach a critical point that needs to be broken through or changed (van Gennep, 2019). To discover the essence of transformative tourism experience among individual tourists first necessitated an understanding of lived time that reflects people's temporal way of being in the world. As suggested by Van Manen (2016), when getting to know someone, we often inquire about their personal life story and their goals for the future, thereby exploring the temporal dimensions of their past, present, and future.

These dimensions form the horizons of a person's temporal landscape, and their past experiences, whether remembered or forgotten, leave an indelible imprint on their being. Furthermore, the past is dynamic and subject to change under the pressures and influences of the present. As people develop their personal projects in life, they are constantly striving towards a future, which is in turn shaped by their past experiences. In this way, the past and future are interlinked, and their connection plays a significant role in people's lives. The past

affects how individuals perceive the present and future, while their aspirations for the future influence how they interpret their past experiences (Van Manen, 2016).

Therefore, gaining a deeper understanding of an individual's temporal landscape is essential for understanding their identity and the motivations that shape their lives. By examining how past events and future aspirations intersect, we can uncover the underlying factors that drive an individual's behavior and decisions.

The experience of interviewee T12, currently pursuing a PhD, illustrates the impact of past experiences on present decisions: *"I am currently pursuing a PhD until I feel that my 21-year life journey has been so smoothly. Although literally 2021 marked my fourth year of graduate studies, I was unable to complete my doctoral thesis due to inadequate preparation. The process of preparing for and ultimately failing my confirmation was a significant blow to me. It not only meant personal failure, but also suggested that I may not have reached a true level of independent research ability during the past three years of my doctoral studies. Consequently, I recognized my emotional state was low, and the burden was pressing down on me. At the age of 25, I realized that I needed to change my student mentality, which relied heavily on the guidance of others, especially my supervisors. I acknowledged that my overall mental state was immature and that I always hoped for someone to teach and lead me. However, I had to face the reality that I was still immature even at 25. My conflict with my mentor was also direct and ongoing, but it forced me to confront my limitations and reflect on my learning experience. After returning home from summer holiday, I felt bored and trapped in a closed state for more than half a year. Finally, I think I need a transformative time and therefore, I chose to travel to take a break and relax."* This predicament led her to seek a break from her closed environment, motivating her to travel and reflect on her past experiences.

What's more, those gifted students, who have lived a smooth life in the Ivory Tower, often encounter sudden pressure and problems on campus, leaving them confused. As a result, many of them turn to travel as a means of changing and healing themselves. Another respondent T06 also reported her puzzles when facing one key decision-making in her study life. In addition, the interviewee also shared the difficulties she faced due to societal and familial pressures during her academic career. A major event in her life occurred during her graduation trip in January 2019, when she missed the application deadline for a PhD program at a specific university. She felt depressed and confused, realizing that she had failed to prepare adequately

by not taking the language exam or writing a research proposal. This state of confusion continued, and she felt lost and uncertain about her future. Moreover, she was away from her family who had also been experiencing health issues. During that time, she often felt heavy-hearted and uncomfortable communicating with her family, fearing that she might hear bad news. Having previously enjoyed a smooth academic experience in mainland China, suddenly experiencing confusion and setbacks made her feel like a "loser" who had failed to comply with societal expectations. The pressure to keep moving forward quickly was overwhelming, leaving her with a sense of urgency and regret for not cherishing the moments she had with her family. Although she had studied outside of her hometown, there was still a sense of entanglement between her personal aspirations and familial obligations, leaving her with a sense of discomfort and longing for a balance between the two.

Therefore, prior to setting out on her travels, the interviewee faced a multitude of life choices that left her feeling conflicted. On the one hand, she felt a deep yearning to break out of her comfort zone and explore new experiences. However, she also appreciated the stability and comfort of her current life. As a result, she grappled with questions about what she truly wanted, and whether pursuing a job or staying put would lead to the outcome she desired. This internal conflict left her feeling somewhat schizophrenic, as she questioned whether she was truly prepared for the journey ahead. She recognized that these struggles were universal, and that many others have experienced a similar feeling of fighting alone to move forward. Despite the anxiety and uncertainty accompanying her journey, she pushed forward, driven by a deep desire for personal growth and self-discovery.

In addition to facing difficulties and challenges, some interviewees actively choose to step out of their comfort zones, confront anxiety and uncertainty, and explore their inner selves. Interviewee T08, after repeatedly encountering emotional issues, opted to delve into her inner needs: *"I recollect there were possibly two trips taken in 2020, both of which were consecutive and related. The first trip was prompted by a series of life events that led me to feel like I had hit rock bottom due to my lack of experience. Following a few setbacks, I sought solace in spiritual and philosophical thoughts to try to understand what was happening to me. As someone who tends to experience similar problems repeatedly, I often blame myself and think that I am the one with the problem. This leads me to believe that there is something wrong with me, or that the issue at hand cannot be resolved. Consequently, I explored various avenues, including mental and physical well-being, to try to understand and deal with my problems."*

6.1.2 Career challenges

In addition to facing growth difficulties, many transformational tourists choose to temporarily withdraw through travel when their career development encounters bottlenecks or undergoes transformation. For instance, interviewee T03 experienced a transformative journey during a period of career confusion, which helped him achieve transformative changes: *"After working in advertising for 10 years, it can feel like hitting a dead end, where the satisfaction of being recognized by customers and peers is no longer as fulfilling as it once was. During this time, I began to feel confused once again. However, in moments of confusion, I find solace in working hard. I become focused on making money every day, as I feel that I haven't earned enough throughout my life. It's possible that my entire life has passed me by in this way. Fortunately, an opportunity presented itself to me in the form of a client who was passionate about photography. I accompanied the client to a popular photography spot in Inner Mongolia called Ejina Populus Euphratica Forest. As the client's direct contact person, I was responsible for driving off-road vehicles daily and guiding them to take photos. At first, I didn't fully understand the appeal of photographing…"*

Other interviewees may not have the same opportunity as T03 to transition during a period of confusion, but they take proactive steps to resist repetitive fatigue in their work. One of our respondents T11 described her working experiences before that memorable trip: *"I can relate to the struggles of dealing with clients in my work. It can be frustrating when clients have points that are difficult to comprehend, leading to anger and dissatisfaction. Requests for report revisions and other requirements can be time-consuming and overwhelming. As someone who is easily impatient and angered, I find myself influenced by these negative emotions. During a recent trip, I met up with a friend who is also in the top four. Our daily work is similar, with frequent business trips and a constant stream of projects. We both work for foreign companies, which can add to the complexity of our work. We share similar emotional struggles and understand the challenges of balancing work and personal life."*

When faced with career constraints that seem insurmountable, some individuals choose to leave their work environment entirely and take a break to focus on self-healing while traveling. By doing so, they hope to return to work in a better state of mind and achieve personal and professional growth. As respondent T09 described, she didn't plan to take that trip until she couldn't bear the work pressures any more: *"Initially, I had planned to return home after taking*

the exam. However, I knew I had failed as soon as I finished the exam. I felt overwhelmed and knew that passing was not an option. I approached my boss and requested a leave of absence, explaining that I needed time to relax and unwind. Prior to the exam, I had already experienced several emotional breakdowns due to the pressure from my aunt and colleagues. As the CEO of our hotel company, I was under a great deal of stress and had a short temper. Despite this, my male colleague was supportive and understanding. I spent almost 24 hours a day with him and even cried twice in his presence. He suggested that I take a break and go on a trip if I couldn't handle the stress anymore. After the exam, I realized that I couldn't do it anymore, and I needed to take a break and decided to go on a hasty but significant trip…"

In addition, the respondent T05 reported that her transformative journey occurred during her gap time after resigning from her previous job, which left her with painful memories. As a career woman entering a period of marriage and childbirth, she experienced discrimination and unfair treatment that greatly impacted her self-esteem and confidence. After resigning, she chose to embark on a solo travel adventure. Before leaving on her trip, she reflected on her decision to leave her previous job in advertising. Although she had a unique professional role, she felt that the company did not provide her with the opportunities and experiences she had hoped for. She began to doubt herself and questioned why she had joined the company and why she had to suffer. When she left, she was unhappy and felt that the company had not given her what she deserved. She shared a personal experience of being told by her boss that if she were to get pregnant, she would have to leave the company. She was surprised that the modern workplace would take such matters so seriously and felt that she had been unfairly treated: *"...and during the performance evaluation period, he disguised his intentions by giving me a salary reduction, citing poor performance as the reason. This incident dealt a significant blow to my mindset and confidence in my work, leaving me unmotivated to continue working there. Eventually, I left the company and found a new job. During this time, I experienced self-doubt and sought solace in chatting with friends and traveling…"* Through these experiences, she eventually gained clarity about what she truly wanted in her career. That's why the journey of self-discovery was a crucial part of her transformation.

6.1.3 Family issues

Family well-being is one of the important domains in determining life satisfaction (Diener & Diener, 1995). In times of family emergencies, such as accidents or illnesses, people can be

thrown into a negative mood, and travel may become necessary. The experience of respondent T06 reflects this point: *"My grandmother was seriously ill at the time, but my parents did not inform me about her condition. There were many emotions involved. Unfortunately, my grandmother passed away about four or five days after my trip. Looking back, there is another story involving the classmate who accompanied me on the trip. He is a very cheerful person, but his father was diagnosed with cancer last year, and he experienced a lot of emotions during that time…"*

What's more, family alienation and conflicts arising from unfavorable family circumstances will negatively affect people's well-being and happiness (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Although the interviewees did not mention any significant family conflicts, differences in values across inter-generation still impacted their relationships with their parents and other family members. At times, these differences intensified conflicts, affecting their current mental state. Respondent T01 shared that although he had not experienced severe family problems such as violence or insults, he still recalled the lack of company from his parents during his childhood. He felt that his way of interacting and communicating with his parents had inadvertently affected his self-esteem and self-confidence: *"Although some of my family issues were not severe, they still required me to face and address them. I wanted to ask these questions because I was unsure if everyone's story was similar to mine… When I was young, my parents were often busy, and I rarely saw them. When I was eight or nine years old, my mother frequently traveled to Africa for work. When I was 14 or 15 years old, we (with mother) lived in Paris, and my mother had a high-pressure job with a terrible work environment that caused her to suffer. This pain was projected onto me, and I was also in a new environment without any local friends or significant interests. This situation, I had to say, had an impact on my psychology, including a reduction in my self-worth and recognition... I also experienced avoidance because I had no way to study and was in an escape mentality…"*

Similarly, respondent T08 found that her conflicts with her parents regarding life meanings and individual growth and also discovered that personal growth is achieved through changes in cognition and perspective: *"During this process, I have been studying and studying, and I have been pursuing a PhD until I am 30 years old. However, I may feel quite oppressed and feel that there are also those who live according to their own ideas or are quite tired. In this way, I may be better than many people, and I am not as miserable as most people. However, in*

reality, it is still a bit unpleasant that everyone has a bit of this so-called harm from their original family, More or less, it is also the cultivation of my emotional outlook, including my close relationships, my parents would interfere with me, which indirectly led to me. The different ideas and thoughts will fight in my mind. On the one hand, I feel that I should not think like them, or make mundane or material demands like them, But indeed, you will feel that from the many things you see in reality, it is indeed a very important factor that needs to be considered, so this is also very painful. Being at home all the time is very sad, leading to some of these things, and gradually pushing yourself to where you are, including maybe getting older in the year, after the age of 30, including pursuing a doctoral degree, I think the higher the degree, For people, it's not necessarily different to say that they have a lot of knowledge or anything, but more importantly, I think the perspective of problem-solving and cognition has greatly improved my outlook. After realizing another height, I will definitely not be able to get married and have children very comfortably, and it will bring me some pain in the opposite direction." T08's experiences highlight the ongoing struggle to reconcile personal desires and parental expectations, leading to personal growth and self-discovery in taking trips.

6.2 Transformative Existentials: Triggers and Agents

Van Manen (2016) suggests that the lived experiences and the structures of themes used to describe and interpret those experiences constitute the immense complexity of the lifeworld. Drawing on Van's classification of the themes of human life experiences, this article explores the triggers and agents that generate transformative experiences of tourists through three aspects: lived space, lived body, and lived others. Building on previous literature, the triggers of transformation in tourism can be characterized by multi-sensory experiences and social engagement (Kirilova et al., 2017a; Teoh et al., 2021). This section will use the interviewees' narratives to explain the relationship between spatiality and corporeality, as well as the relationship between transformative experiences.

6.2.1 Lived space and lived body: Natural and human landscape

Natural scenery has been found to have a positive impact on human health and well-being. Studies have shown that exposure to natural environments can reduce stress, lower blood pressure, and improve mood (McMahan & Estes, 2015). This phenomenon is attributed to the restorative effects of nature on the human body, which includes physiological changes such as

reduced cortisol levels, increased parasympathetic activity, and improved immune system function (Van den Berg, 2009).

Tourists may not be familiar with physiological indicators and may not be able to accurately identify them when describing their experiences. However, they can perceive changes in their bodies when experiencing natural scenery. The experience of interviewee T06 illustrates this point: *"...before visiting the lake, my friend and I were unaware of its existence. Upon reaching the lake, both of us were amazed by its beauty. Actually, we had both been experiencing physical ailments, such as rhinitis and shoulder periarthritis, during our travels to different places and countries... However, the air, environment, and mood at the lake seemed to alleviate our pain. It was so magical and I wanted to search for the video of the lake to show you... As an art student, I rarely encountered such breathtaking scenery and likened the scene to heaven in the sky..."*

Additionally, tourists' sensory experiences are heightened and mobilized by impactful scenery and surrounding environments, leaving a lasting impression on them even after many years. Interviewee T11 was deeply impressed by both the beauty of Lake Baikal and the local coldness: *"When we arrived at Lake Baikal, it was extremely cold, and even our feet were freezing. In the countryside, there were very few street lights, and the feeling in the village was also cold. The temperature was around minus 30 degrees Celsius, and even the warm boots we brought were useless. The distance from the hotel to the scenic spots was very cold and piercing. However, when we saw the Blue Ice and the air artillery, it made everything worth it. I can send you photos of it."* T11's experience demonstrates how the sensory impact of natural scenery can outweigh the physical discomfort, leaving a lasting impression on tourists. However, the physical discomfort experienced during travel can be alleviated by the beauty of natural scenery. Interviewee T11 recounted their experience of visiting a hillside and observing the Milky Way. Despite the cold and danger of the terrain, the beauty of the scenery left a profound impact on T11 and their companions. T11 described the shock and awe of witnessing the natural beauty, which left them struggling to find the right words to describe the experience. The encounter with nature allowed for a sense of open-mindedness and a shift in perspective, leading T11 to reflect on the significance of their journey and the importance of such moments in life. This experience highlights how the transformative power of natural scenery can provide a sense of perspective and meaning, even in the face of daily struggles and challenges.

What's more, natural scenery has been found to enhance cognitive function and promote inner healing. Interviewee T07 was deeply moved by the stunning beauty of the Xiahe Grassland in South Gansu, which evoked a strong emotional response. Although the trip took place over a decade ago, T07 still vividly recalled the intense feelings of the moment. T07 explained, *"I finally understood why I went to Xiahe. The journey was so beautiful and worthwhile. I was overwhelmed with emotions and cried uncontrollably, energized by the scenery. Our ancestors have always been connected to nature, but as we become more developed, we increasingly live in cities. When we return to nature, we feel as if we are coming home, and our cells are refreshed. However, we may have lost touch with our natural environment due to urbanization, leading to feelings of unhappiness. When we encounter such breathtaking scenery, it can evoke a powerful emotional response that we cannot control or restrain."* T07's experience highlights the restorative and transformative power of natural scenery, which can evoke deep emotions and provide a sense of connection to our natural environment.

Furthermore, transformative travel experiences emphasize the embodiment of the journey. Another traveler shared that in nature, without distractions or signals, they were able to leave behind their troubles, anxieties, and pains associated with their sense of self. *"...by focusing solely on the present moment, I was able to fully engage my senses—breath, heartbeat, smell, touch—and accept the gifts that nature offered with ease. (Posted by F01 on November 19 in Redbook)"* This sensory-rich experience enables travelers to center their attention on the travel itself and fully immerse themselves in the present moment.

Figure 6.2 Photos shared by respondents (Source: respondents)

Similarly, T11's admiration for the beauty of nature is evident in their narration, which left them feeling a sense of inadequacy as a master's graduate. Her experience demonstrates how the beauty of nature can evoke powerful emotions that are difficult to express in words. T11 struggled to find the right words to describe the overwhelming emotions they experienced while witnessing the breathtaking scenery: *"When I sent the video to my friends, I couldn't find the words to express how I felt... The temperature was -37 degrees, and the scene was so shocking that I was speechless. I felt like I was dying. My friends commented on the video, asking me to share more, but I struggled to find the right words. I felt frustrated that my language skills were inadequate to convey the depth of my emotions. I was left speechless, and all I could say was 'fuck', which felt like a poor reflection of my true feelings."* These firsthand accounts illustrate how transformative travel experiences allow individuals to connect deeply with nature and experience a sense of insignificance in the face of its vastness. By immersing themselves in the present moment and embracing their senses, travelers can fully engage in the transformative journey and find solace, clarity, and a renewed perspective on their own lives.

The awe-inspiring natural landscapes can evoke a sense of insignificance in tourists. For instance, the interviewee T13's experience of visiting the Antarctic at 90 degrees latitude made them realize the power and scale of nature, and the limits of human influence. In the face of nature, he persisted that human must respect its power, even with the most advanced technology and mechanical tools. Based on his narratives, in Antarctica, there is no good weather, only a window period between two bad weather conditions during which people can complete their tasks. Antarctica is the largest ice sheet in the world, covered by hundreds or even thousands of meters of ice. If the ice sheet melts, many coastal cities will be submerged. Standing in front of the ice sheet, T13 described that human was such small and insignificant,

and the sight of the massive glaciers was truly spectacular and overwhelming. Similarly, as expressed by a fellow traveler, participating in activities such as hiking can provide an opportunity to discover one's own insignificance in the grandeur of nature. The act of hiking together allows individuals to realize their own smallness in comparison to the vastness of the natural world, which can be a profound realization. *(Posted by F01 on November 19, 2022 in Redbook)*

As an experienced explorer who has traveled to Tibet and climbed snow-capped mountains, interviewee T13 has a deep appreciation for the power and beauty of nature. T13 expressed his belief that one must approach nature with a sense of awe and respect. He explained, *"I don't mean to be superstitious, but in the face of nature, we must show respect. We should not try to conquer it, as some people say. Instead, we should approach it as tourists and experience its beauty and power."* This perspective highlights the importance of humility and respect when encountering nature, rather than attempting to dominate or control it. By approaching nature with reverence and appreciation, people can better appreciate its transformative power and the role it plays in our lives.

In addition to the sense of awe and wonder, the natural environment can also provide a sense of peace, tranquility, and healing. Interviewee T12 was struck by the expansive views when entering western Sichuan, and the coolness of the environment opened up their heart: *"When I arrived in western Sichuan, the mountains were tall, and the scenery was vastly different from the urban landscapes I was used to. My mood suddenly expanded, and even though I experienced some altitude sickness, I was so excited that I jumped and ran around. The change in scenery provided a wider perspective, and the cool temperature and clear air brought a fresh feeling that was very comfortable. In August, the city can be quite hot, but the cooler temperature in western Sichuan was a welcome relief."* T12's experience highlights the restorative and transformative power of natural environments, which can provide a sense of calm and rejuvenation.

Another interviewee, in a different situation from T06, also experienced the peaceful healing power of nature. She explained, *"During my trip, my most comfortable stay was when I was surrounded by snowy mountains... I was tired after a long day, but when I woke up the next morning and looked out the window of my Airbnb, I saw a snow-capped mountain and smoke*

rising from the kitchen. The scene was truly healing and rejuvenating…" The beauty of the snowy mountains and the warmth of the kitchen created a peaceful and restful atmosphere that allowed the interviewee to recharge and feel refreshed. It highlights how the natural environment can provide a sense of calm and comfort, even in the midst of a busy and tiring trip. Interviewee T08's spiritual travel experience in Dali, Yunnan, confirms the restorative power of nature: *"On the first day of my trip, we went for a walk by Erhai Lake. In the evening, the sunset was layered and beautiful, with clouds that looked like they were lit up. Life in Dali is slow-paced, and there is no pressure or rush. The aura there is different from big cities like Beijing. In crowded places, I often feel uncomfortable and overwhelmed, but in Dali, life is simple and comfortable. The people dancing in the square or the crowded places do not create a feeling of comfort, but in Dali, the energy field is different. It is a very comfortable and relaxing place… When you go there, you will feel stretched."*

In addition to providing healing, the natural environment can also create psychological pressure in some situations. Both interviewees T07 and T09 expressed feelings of loneliness when surrounded by open natural environments. T07 described feeling overwhelmed when arriving in Northwest China as a southerner: *"When I got off the train, I collapsed. I felt very lonely because I had never been to a place like Northwest China. It is vast and empty. When I arrived in Xining, I was completely stunned and overwhelmed. I started to question why I came to this place and felt helpless. The whole city felt lonely, just like the desert in the northwest. Additionally, I didn't know about the weather there. I went there in September, and it was already quite cold. As someone from Cantonese, I had never experienced such low temperatures before…"* Respondent 09 also experienced feelings of loneliness in a vast desert environment: *"When I was sitting on the sand dunes, I felt like I was the only person left in the world. Even though there were people around me, I felt a sense of loneliness that was all-consuming. It was a feeling of being completely alone, and I couldn't think of anyone else at that time."*

Respondent T13 acknowledged that some extreme environments can bring physical discomfort and pain. As he concluded, *"Travel can be painful, especially in places like the Antarctic and Arctic. Hiking in the Arctic involves navigating irregular ice surfaces, while the Antarctic has high elevations. The continent is relatively flat, but the sea ice in the North and South Poles is like a turbulent sea wave with many cracks and high-level ups and downs. Mountain climbing can also be challenging due to the lack of oxygen at high altitudes, and I am personally afraid*

of heights. Climbing on ridges with leeward snow on one side and cliffs on the other can be uncomfortable and even painful."

However, despite the initial discomfort, tourists were eventually healed by the natural environment, like interviewee T07 described her experience: *"When I was on the train, I saw a beautiful landscape even though I was the only one on the train. The whole northwest was different from anything I had ever seen before. I cried on the train because I was so moved. The emptiness of the desert and the vastness of the sky made me feel small, but in a good way. When your heart is big, your ego becomes small. I wrote a diary along the way, and I listened to a song by Beyond that was very touching. The whole experience was transformative and healing."* This highlights how natural environments can create a sense of isolation and solitude, even when surrounded by others. The vastness and emptiness of the natural environment can intensify these feelings, creating a powerful emotional experience that can be both overwhelming and transformative.

6.2.1.1 Embodied Cognition Effects on Transformative Tourist Experience

Sensory experiences and bodily sensations are widely believed to exert a significant influence on an individual's cognition, emotion, and behavior (Barsalou, 2008). In the field of tourism research, it is recognized that the cognitive process and psychological states of tourists are shaped by the interactions between their bodies and their environments. Specifically, concrete experiences that elicit contingent cognitive responses, attitudes, and behaviors are highly relevant to the study of tourism. While many of these responses are bidirectional, the concrete sensory domains (e.g., weight, temperature) often serve as source (i.e., reified) concepts that generate abstract incidental ideas about target concepts. This study explores how the sensory experiences of transformative tourists are related to their feelings and emotions. This part will revolve around how transformative tourists interact with the environment, and how the sensory experience affects their perceptual and affective changes especially in terms of well-being.

Visual experience is a crucial element of the tourist experience. It has the power to transform the way that people perceive the world around them. According to Qiu et al. (2018), more than 80% of sensory information in tourist experience comes from the visual landscape. This means that the visual environment plays a crucial role in shaping people's perceptions and emotions. The transformative impact of visual experience on the tourist experience cannot be overstated.

The current study sheds light on the transformative impact of visual experience on the emotional states of tourists. The findings reveal that interviewees most frequently mention the shock and awe experienced upon encountering certain visual landscapes. These landscapes can evoke powerful emotions such as calm, tranquility, and ecstasy. For example, the vastness of a lake, the unexpected beauty of a snow scene, or the expansive horizon in western Sichuan can all elicit such strong emotions. The boundless desert in the northwest and the starry sky in Antarctica are also examples of natural landscapes that have the power to transform tourists' emotional states. However, it is not just positive emotions that can be elicited by the visual environment. Negative emotions such as loneliness and isolation can also be experienced, especially by tourists traveling alone. Consequently, tourists expect warmth and support from other sources, such as interpersonal communication (Kock & Ringberg, 2019).

In addition to the visual experience, the auditory sense also plays a crucial role in shaping people's emotions. The audio-visual experience is considered the primary factor influencing changes in people's inner emotional state (Hewlett et al., 2017). Words such as *"ping jing (平静)"*, which incorporates the meanings of *"peace"* and *"quiet"*, are commonly used to describe natural landscapes such as lakes, starry skies, and plateaus among the respondents. Additionally, when describing the atmosphere of these environments, emphasis is placed on their quietness and peacefulness. From an anthropological perspective, this preference for quietness may stem from the hunting period in human history, where a quiet environment meant safety and allowed hunters to relax (Herzog & Chernick, 2000). Furthermore, sounds with certain frequencies can also induce feelings of peace. Examples include sound-guided activities, such as singing bowls for healing, which slowly ease people into a state of calm. This experience supports the idea of soundscape as a tourist attraction (Jiang et al., 2018).

F06's description from his Redbook highlights the transformative power of soundscape in his outdoor experience. The various sounds he encountered, such as the bowls with high and low scales, the flowing streams in the distance, and the sounds of crows flapping their wings, created a captivating auditory environment. These natural sounds immersed him in a peaceful and tranquil atmosphere. As F06 engaged with the soundscape, he found himself transitioning from a state of alertness to a more relaxed and meditative state. The changing sounds, shifting from near to far, likely played a role in inducing a sense of calmness. The immersive experience led him to lie down, meditate, and eventually fall asleep, even to the point of snoring. Despite

the short duration of just 20 minutes, F06 woke up feeling refreshed and transparent, suggesting a rejuvenating effect on his well-being. The combination of natural sounds, such as flowing water and bird calls, creates a soothing and serene ambiance that promotes relaxation, meditation, and a sense of rejuvenation. The transformative potential of soundscape lies in its ability to transport individuals into a state of deep relaxation, enabling them to disconnect from the stressors of daily life and immerse themselves in the healing qualities of nature.

Olfactory is also an essential factor contributing to the transformative travel experience. Similar as visual and audio experience, smells are effective in creating calmness. According to Herz (2009), smell is the most primitive human sense that is directly connected to the limbic system of the brain, which is responsible for processing emotions. This connection means that smell can provide crucial information about our surroundings and elicit strong, specific emotional responses unrelated to the smell itself. For instance, the singing bowl experience is an example of how healing activities can be combined with specific aromas, such as citrus, lavender, jasmine, and other scents, to create a relaxing, comfortable, and pleasant atmosphere. Similarly, the Yunnan spiritual journey, as mentioned by one interviewee, involved the coordination of multiple sensory experiences of sight, sound, and smell during the hypnosis process. This sensory integration helped to induce a peaceful psychological feeling in the hypnotized person.

Temperature also affects tourists' emotional well-being. The temperature of a destination can significantly influences tourist experience, and low temperatures can have a particularly significant impact. A study conducted by Williams & Bargh (2008) found that low temperatures can make people feel lonely and separated. This feeling of loneliness can drive tourists to unconsciously seek out social activities that can provide warmth and comfort. For example, in the study, one respondent expressed that the cold weather at Lake Baikal made her feel small and insignificant in the vastness of the world. To counteract these negative emotions, she visited a local tavern almost every night to drink with locals who also frequently consumed strong alcoholic beverages as a means of dispelling the cold and seeking psychological warmth. The locals' drinking behavior also acted as a form of psychological compensation that helped to alleviate the respondent's loneliness and displacement caused by the low temperature environment.

Another respondent in the study was born and raised in the southernmost region of China but traveled to the cold and dry northwest of China. During her trips, she discovered her love and expectations for social activities. She realized that she enjoyed the company of others more and found pleasure in meeting new friends of similar interests. This experience highlights how low temperature environments can influence tourists' expectations and preferences during travel. Social activities serve as a crucial psychological buffer that alleviates loneliness and displacement caused by low temperatures. Temperature acts as an essential factor that affects tourists' emotional changes, which can have a significant impact on the tourist experience.

The perception of weight is perceived to influence the pleasure derived from an experience or activity. When the burden on an individual exceeds a certain threshold, it can induce feelings of sadness (Hung et al., 2017). The study highlights the negative impact that excessive weight can have on the tourist experience. Carrying too much weight can lead to a deterioration in mood and can make the tourist feel as though their luggage is getting heavier. This can exacerbate the negative emotional impact of carrying a heavy load, causing significant discomfort and distress. This can be especially problematic on physically demanding activities such as mountaineering. The study provides an example of how the perception of weight can affect the tourist experience during a mountaineering trip. One informant described how his companion gradually collapsed during the climbing process due to the heavy weight they were carrying. As the man became increasingly exhausted, the weight of his luggage became unbearable, leading to a breakdown. He stopped halfway up the snow-capped mountain, resolutely refusing to move forward, and cried loudly. In the end, the informant decided to take his luggage and carry it for him to the top of the mountain. This act allowed the man to relax and reach the summit by himself. It also indicates that the influence of sensory experience and mental feelings is bidirectional.

In addition to the above ones, other sensory experiences also play a significant role in tourists' physical feelings and psychological emotions during travel. For instance, trying spicy food (taste), navigating through crowded spaces (haptic), or hearing wolves howling at night (lighting) can all impact the tourist experience. These sensory experiences can evoke strong physical and emotional responses, contributing to tourist perceptions and reflections. It demonstrates that sensory experiences are integral to the transformative tourist experience.

Table 6.1 Embodied cognition effects on transformative tourist experience

Tourism Scenario	Sensory Experiences	Bodily Feeling	Emotions
Viewing landscapes like lakes, snow scenes, starry skies etc.	Visual	Breath easily, stretching	Sense of awe, serenity, ecstasy
Experiencing peaceful soundscapes	Auditory	Relaxation	Tranquility, quietness
Engaging in healing activities combined with specific aromas	Olfactory	Relaxation	Comfort, sense of calm, peace
Experiencing low temperatures at destinations	Temperature	Cold	Loneliness, isolation
Carrying excessive weight during strenuous activities	Weight	Fatigue, soreness	Despair, misery, loss of faith
Tasting spicy food	Taste	Dry and thirsty	Irritable, impatient
Navigating crowded spaces	Haptic	Crowding, compact body	Sense of insecurity, aggression
Hearing wolves howl at night	Lighting	Trembling	Frightened, sensitive

Table 7.1 provides a more detailed overview of the specific embodied cognitive experiences that tourists can experience during transformative travel. These experiences can range from embracing new perspectives and engaging in personal growth to experiencing a sense of awe and wonder. Each of these experiences is tied to specific sensory and cognitive processes that together contribute to the transformative nature of the travel experience.

In conclusion, one interviewee beautifully captured the essence of transformative travel by stating, *"Travel has five senses, while traveling has six senses. I pay more attention to the sixth sense: the heart. It is about following your own heart, listening to your inner voice. Travel is a journey of self-discovery, learning to be alone with yourself, and embracing personal growth at a gradual pace."* It highlights the importance of connecting with oneself, exploring one's passions, and finding solace in solitude during travel experiences. By acknowledging the transformative power of travel, this sentiment aligns with the core themes and objectives of this study.

6.2.2 Lived others: Interaction and Inspiration

Through lived relationality, meeting and connecting with others allow us to "transcend ourselves" (van Manen, 2016, p. 105). Interviewee T07 also emphasized the importance of interactions during travel: *"For me, no matter how beautiful the scenery is, it cannot compare with the interaction with others. The most important thing is when you collide with others*

during the travel process." Her statement is consistent with Kirillova et al.'s (2017a) findings that social relatedness seems to be the most significant circumstantial aspect in the triggering environment of personal transformation. While not every interviewee agreed with this statement, nearly all of them expressed the positive experiences they had with others while traveling. This included interactions with traveling companions, casual tourists on the trip, and local residents. These interactions can be transformative and infectious, creating a sense of community and shared experience that enhances the beauty of the natural environment.

Tourists are often impressed by the random strangers they meet during their travels, and the good times they spend together. Respondents T05 and T07 both met many like-minded individuals during their solo travels, which enriched their journey. T05 achieved her small goal of making friends while traveling: "*I think of one or two friends I met in Malaysia. We still communicate on WeChat now. I was alone at the time and went to the beach near Shanla, Langkawi. During a sea fishing trip, I met a young man from Xi'an and a couple of girls. After we finished fishing, we all wanted to go to the beach and take pictures of the sunset. I was the only one without a car, but I had all the cameras and equipment. So, we formed a group and drove there together. It was a happy experience.*" Chance encounters with strangers can lead to meaningful and lasting connections, adding depth and richness to the travel experience.

Interviewee T07 even changed her original itinerary because she met several nice and kind peers, just to walk with them and leave a pleasant memory: "*...because we got along so well and had a lot of fun, we decided to go to Golmud and visit Salt Lake on the way. We didn't want to go to the famous tourist attractions, so we asked the locals for recommendations. This led us to discover authentic and interesting places that few people visit.*" In the process, she gained a deeper understanding of herself and found that she is a person who needs to communicate with others and enjoys it very much. She explained, "*The interaction between people during a journey is what makes you really forget and feel nostalgic. Sincerity, communication, and sharing are the things that can make the most profound impact. When you set off, you may think that you want to be alone, but you can't keep to yourself. Eventually, you will interact with people, and you may find that this is what you really want. After that journey, I have never traveled alone, and I discovered that I am still a person who likes to communicate with others. I learned a lot about myself...*"

In addition, the unusual environment in traveling seems to be conducive to tourists opening their hearts and being moved by the sincerity of strangers, making them more open and talkative. Interviewee T05 believed that the people she met during her journey were friendly, which was a stark contrast to her previous job where she felt that the people around her were dangerous. As she explained, *"...from the tour guides to the different people I met during the trip, I think everyone's ideas and practices were relatively friendly. It allowed me to have a different experience..."* Respondent T09 also believed that the liminal environment in trips made her more susceptible to being infected by strangers: *"I initially wanted to be alone, but when someone asked for my help, I took the initiative to strike up a conversation. In the process, I found that their sincerity infected me. When others take the initiative to strike up a conversation with me or actively want to know me, I seem to be more open. As long as the other party is willing to communicate with me, I can initiate and communicate with them. I don't close myself off..."*

In addition to having a good time together, travelers can also heal and inspire each other during their journey. Interviewee T07 shared how she met a fellow traveler who inspired her when she was feeling depressed and self-doubting: *"I met an old man from Guangzhou who was over 60 years old and had just retired as a civil servant... I was feeling unhappy at the time, thinking why I needed to wake up at five or six in the morning, find a bus in the dark, and go to that totally unknown place. Why was I so determined to do this? Then that morning, the old man had just moved into a youth hostel, and we happened to meet. We chatted, and he told me that he admired me for traveling alone at a young age. He said that he had been in a very stable environment all his life and had never come out, so he wanted to go to Tibet while he still could. I suddenly felt that in the eyes of others, I still have so many points worth admiring... He inspired me to see the value in my own journey and to have confidence in myself, so I picked up the bag with confidence and strength and set off again..."*

Interviewee T09 also shared an experience of being inspired by a strong-willed old woman during her journey with brother: *"I met a pair of siblings from USA who traveled all the way from Xinjiang and Tibet to Dunhuang. The sister had a disease similar to cardiovascular and cerebrovascular diseases and became paralyzed. Despite this, she was a nurse herself and insisted on rehabilitating herself... and was able to walk again before coming back. At that time, I was quite touched. I felt that even an 80-year-old man still didn't want to die and had such wills to travel...she told me she was curious about everything and wanted to travel to as*

many as places… It made me reflect on my own life and emotions. What have I experienced? I was just so young comparing with her…and I felt like I was just trapped in my own emotions…" Encounters with individuals who have faced challenges and overcome them inspire respondents to see the value in life and to overcome their own obstacles. It also shows how travel can provide a new perspective on life and help break free from emotional limitations.

The beliefs and lifestyles of destination residents and locals can also have a profound impact on tourists' feelings and values during their travels. Interviewee T03 shared a powerful experience he had while climbing snow-capped mountains and encountering a Tibetan man who demonstrated the strength of his beliefs: *"…I saw a Tibetan man tinkering with a gadget and taking out a hada to tie a child to his back. The hada had many tassels, and there was a large beetle stuck to one of them. The beetle's legs were entangled in the tassels and had many barbs. The Tibetan man took the hata and picked the beetle down one by one while chatting with us for more than ten minutes. This act was incredible to people without faith because the beetle could not get down by itself and would likely die. For us, climbing up quickly was more important. However, the Tibetan man sat there for 20 or 30 minutes, picking the beetle off one by one. When we got down, he continued to pick the beetles off for about an hour, muttering to himself and releasing them. This incident shocked me far more than any other scenery I had saw… It showed me that for people with faith, any life is worthwhile…"*

The lifestyle and attitude of local residents can deeply impact tourists who may be confused or anxious. Interviewee T06 was moved by the simple and unadorned life of the Swiss. Despite living in abundance, they pursued enjoyment and natural beauty, making it easy for tourists to get along with them. This experience made T06 reflect on her own impetuousness in the past. Respondent T11 was also impressed by the diligence and satisfaction of the staff around Lake Baikal and reflected on her own work attitude: *"I was struck by the staff's satisfaction with their current life. It wasn't because they were earning a lot of money. In fact, we didn't have much to share with them monetarily. Despite this, they worked hard driving us around in the winter, taking care of our meals, and even posing for photos with us despite not understanding what we were saying. I don't feel that they disliked their job… They found satisfaction in it either through the money they earned or the sense of accomplishment they felt."*

In addition to the encounters during the journey, post-travel connections can also be a driving force for tourists to remember and reflect on their trips. The interviewee T07 shared a story

about her transformative trip experience. A partner she encountered still thought of her and connected with her memories, making her feel that her trip was quite meaningful: *"When I was in Zhengzhou, Henan, I met a boy who was just a freshman. We started chatting, and I told him about my travel plans. He was very happy, and we exchanged QQ accounts. He gave me his address, and I sent him a postcard from trip later… Two years ago, which is 8 years after my trip, he suddenly contacted me. He was planning a trip to Japan with his family and thought of me. He wanted to send me a postcard from Japan. He said that I had impressed him too much, and he still remembered what I said and what clothes I wore on that day we met. I was touched that he remembered me and my trip after so long... It made me feel that my trip was meaningful…"* The post-travel connections deepen the impact of a trip and inspire others to remember and reflect on their own experiences.

6.2.3 Transformative experience en route and in situ

Researchers embarked on an exploration of transformative experiences during a 12-kilometer walk and singing bowl journey, aiming to unravel the underlying mechanisms. To capture the essence of this process, a framework (Figure 6.3) was developed, incorporating participant observation and spontaneous on-the-go interviews. This framework delineates four key elements of the transformative tourism embodied experience, facilitating the transformative journey towards healing. By offering an initial framework, this research aims to advance our comprehension of the healing process.
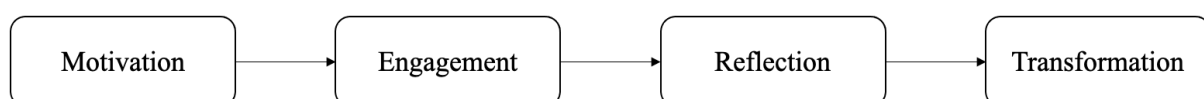
Figure 6.3 Transformative experience en route and in situ

The first element of the framework revolves around the diverse motivations driving participants. While some seek healing and wish to immerse themselves in the experience of singing bowls, others are drawn to the adventure of suburban hiking and the personal challenges it presents. Additionally, there are those who join the group due to work-related responsibilities, assuming roles as team or key leaders. Notably, these motivations are shaped by the routes and offerings provided by the team. Through their hiking and nature singing bowl meditation activities, the group imparts a unique understanding and awareness of the transformative and healing qualities inherent in their product.

As the transformative journey unfolds, the second element of the framework emerges: engagement. This element is particularly significant due to the unconventional nature of the climbing route. The path is adorned with rocks, scattered leaves, fallen branches, and even intermittent streams. Consequently, tourists must maintain unwavering focus throughout the hike, attentively following their designated leaders and directing their attention solely to the terrain beneath their feet. Amidst this journey, an outdoor singing bowl meditation activity takes place, further fostering active engagement among the participants. Tourists willingly collaborate and wholeheartedly partake in the experience, allowing themselves to be guided by the instructor's expertise. In doing so, they immerse themselves fully in the transformative encounter, surrendering to the harmonious fusion of nature and sound. This immersive engagement heightens the transformative potential of the experience, as participants embrace the moment and surrender to the present. By harmonizing with the surroundings and actively participating in the singing bowl meditation, tourists deepen their connection to the transformative essence of the journey. Their engagement facilitates a profound sense of presence, amplifying the impact of the transformative elements and setting the stage for personal growth and healing.

This active engagement not only facilitates transformative experiences but also paves the way for profound reflections and introspection, representing the third element of the transformative process. These reflective moments provide participants with valuable opportunities to contemplate their experiences and emotions, ultimately fostering a deeper sense of self-awareness. One participant shared after the mediation, *"The guidance from the instructor allowed me to fully immerse myself in meditation... I felt a surge of energy in just fifteen minutes."* Interestingly, during the fifteen-minute singing bowl meditation, some participants even found themselves drifting into a peaceful slumber while lying on the ground. The harmonious blend of the natural outdoor surroundings and the intentional healing environment collectively create a conducive setting for transformative experiences, igniting introspection, comparison, and profound reflection.

In the final stage of the transformative journey, participants experience profound internal changes both during and after the hiking experience. They develop a sense of peace, inner rest, and strength that resonates within them. As one participant aptly expressed, *"Despite the early winter chill in the mountains, I felt warmth in my palms... because my heart was devoid of*

resistance, fully open, and accepting... When I resumed my journey, I felt rejuvenated, as if I had enjoyed a deep slumber, and the 12-kilometer hike posed no cause for concern… (Posted by F01 on November 19 in Redbook)" These words capture the transformative essence of the experience, highlighting the profound impact it has on the participants' physical and emotional states. The sense of tranquility, rejuvenation, and ease they feel serves as a testament to the transformative power of the journey, leaving a lasting impression on their well-being.

6.2.4 Unusual environment and unusual state

Several interviewed tourists highlighted how the trips providing an unusual environment, influenced and even changed their values, thoughts, and ideas. Traveling provides them with a physical environment away from their daily work and routine. Respondent T01 believes that tourism provides him with liminal spaces: *"…being in a certain environment can have a strong psychological impact. It's important to physically distance oneself from negative daily influences. Looking back, I may have thought that everyone was just having fun in that trip, but in reality, it was more important for me to physically distance myself from the usual environment that often made me feel frustrated and lost. This allowed me to regain self-confidence and face a new environment with my strengths and weaknesses. In this sense, that trip meant a lot to me..."*

Respondent T12 also reflects this point and proposed that traveling provides a different environment that allows for new thoughts and experiences, which is a valuable aspect of personal freedom. However, simply leaving everything behind and going on a trip may not necessarily result in significant changes. As interviewee T09 stated, the act of traveling allows individuals to get themselves from their negative emotions or the environment that caused them. It is up to the individual to open themselves up to self-discovery. Without a willingness to explore and reflect, no matter where one goes, they may not be able to truly think about their experiences. The process of self-discovery or self-recovery can come from one's own experiences or from learning from the experiences of others, whether it be through what they see, hear, or feel. Ultimately, it is the individual's own willingness to explore and reflect that leads to the eventually personal growth or changes via trips.

Furthermore, one interviewee mentioned that travel provides an environment where she doesn't have to think about the consequences or bear the follow-up of the actions. She (respondent T09)

can focus on being her selves without worrying about the future: *"When I was in travel, I don't have to think about the follow-up consequences. I don't have to worry about how I will look in the future. I am not burdened by the same interpersonal relationships that I have at usual. I can just be myself, without any psychological baggage. I can be my true self because I am in an unfamiliar environment... Especially when traveling alone, I can release myself without caring about the opinions of anyone..."*

Another interesting aspect of tourism as an unconventional environment is that interviewees believe that during travel, tourists are "forced" to distance themselves from everyday people and things. This may be due to the destination they visit. For example, Lake Baikal is relatively remote, and the poor network signal means that T11 and her friends rarely use their mobile phones, which to some extent isolates them from work interruptions. In addition, the lack of business in the area limits the choice of accommodation, reducing their dependence on mobile phones. She described this by saying: *"You can only be quiet... When the biggest factor that disturbs you is eliminated, those disturbances will be far away from you. Your heart will slowly calm down, allowing you to reflect on your impulsiveness... You can be completely silent..."*

Tourism can thus provide a respite from usual environment with daily distractions and allow individuals to focus on their own thoughts and emotions. It shows how being in an unusual environment can help individuals find inner peace and calmness.

6.3 Epiphany Experiences

6.3.1 Dilemmas in situ

Transformative tourism often presents unexpected challenges to tourists, leading to a sense of epiphany as they confront these difficulties and approach problems from a new perspective. For instance, during an interview, Interviewee T03 shared an experience of facing tire blowouts and being stranded in a deserted environment three times while traveling to Tibet. He described feeling overwhelmed and losing confidence, lying in a place that seemed to be entirely gray. However, he also shared that he realized that lying down and giving up was also a solution, and encountering obstacles did not mean that they could not be overcome: *"...at that moment, I understood that it was essential to face challenges head-on and work hard to overcome them... I had learned an essential truth: when problems arise, there are always solutions, and*

sometimes lying down and resting is also a solution. I came to realize that there was nothing in the world that I could not overcome... From that point on, no difficulty seemed insurmountable, and everything that happened had its logic. While some things were inevitable, you just need to focus on what you could do in the present moment and did it well...”

Sometimes, just being in an unfamiliar environment can cause anxiety for tourists. In the case of Interviewees T06 and T07, who were traveling with friends and alone in Switzerland and Qinghai, respectively, they experienced feelings of panic and helplessness. Interviewee T06 described an instance where they were climbing a snowy mountain without proper equipment and struggling to navigate the terrain. The cable car was also unreliable, and they were hesitant to use it due to its condition and high cost. As they searched for the way to the top, they became increasingly anxious since no one was around, and they were afraid of getting lost or being stranded in the snow. They felt particularly vulnerable as two girls traveling alone in unfamiliar territory. They decided to follow other people, but soon realized that skiing could be dangerous, as they learned of a tragic accident that occurred in the past. They limited their movements and were worried about getting lost since their phones would shut down at low temperatures. Interviewee T06 expressed frustration when her iPhone shut down and could not access Google for assistance.

T07 expressed her thoughts when traveling alone on the local bus: *“I remember a funny experience when I was on a bus in an unfamiliar place... I had taken a trip to Xiahe, and the bus was supposed to take me over a mountain. However, very few people went down there, and even fewer people went to that place. As a result, I was the only tourist on the entire bus. All the other passengers were local Tibetans wearing traditional Tibetan robes. They all looked at me strangely, and I was seated in the middle of the back row. I was scared out of my wits, especially since the bus was the kind that went over mountains and turned left and right, making me even more nervous. I was too scared to say anything about the type of bus it was, and I even stopped in the middle of the journey, just to let everyone go to the bathroom. I held on tight to my seat, thinking that the bus might tip over or something. Even though the bus ticket was illegal, bought at the bus station, I was still very scared. But I tried to resist my fear and started chatting with the other passengers. Gradually, I became comfortable chatting with everyone, and even discussed safety aspects during travel. Looking back, I had no idea what I was doing at that time, and those one or two hours were terrifying...”*

Culture shock is a common challenge for transformational tourists, especially when they visit a destination that is vastly different from their own cultural environment. The impact of such a change can be more significant in countries that have been affected by war. When Interviewee T13 visited the Democratic Republic of Congo in Africa, he experienced a stark contrast to his peaceful upbringing. Interviewee T13 expressed distress at the lack of appreciation for peaceful living among some people. He recounted an incident where they were shopping when a gunfight broke out on the road outside. The sound of submachine guns had them trembling with fear, and they were unsure of what was happening. Later, they learned that the army and police had started fighting, but thankfully, there was no bloodshed. Interviewee T13 noted that such events were chaotic and backward, unlike China, where they were used to living in a peaceful environment. He acknowledged that some of his colleagues had even experienced being robbed and held at gunpoint, which was a confusing experience for them. Despite the challenges, Interviewee T13 felt happy to have travelled to many foreign places as a Chinese person. He believed that some people who were dissatisfied with the government were being sent to war chaos countries like Africa or Southeast Asian instead of appreciating their peaceful lives in China.

Tourists often experience intense culture shock and are taken aback by differences in lifestyle and eating habits, which can impact their overall experience. These differences can make them feel insecure and alone. One respondent T07 shared her experience of feeling overwhelmed after trying spicy food and feeling uncomfortable due to the hot weather: *"...because I could never eat spicy food, but nearly all food there was spicy and dry…I cannot bear the dry weather… and eventually I felt so lonely, questioning myself about why I had come to this place... I had planned to travel alone, but after arriving, I was too scared to move around freely. I realized that I was not happy being alone as expected and felt conflicted about my decision… I spent two painful days in this state of mind…"* T07's experience highlights the psychological impact of cultural differences on transformative tourists.

In addition, conflicts and contradictions that arise between people during the journey can also be seen as challenges that leave a profound impression on transformative tourists. The intense conflict that occurred between interviewee T10 and his tour guide made him understand the importance of sincere communication for mutual understanding. He realized that it was communication that helped resolve their conflicts and led them to friendly understanding. He recounts the experience, *"...there was a lot of conflict between me and the tour guide... The*

online sales promotion was unreliable, and the promotional route was different from the actual experience, which caused discrepancies. One incident that caused friction was during lunch. The tour guide had said we would gather in half an hour, and everyone else had gathered in about 25 minutes. I took my time eating and looking at souvenirs, assuming I still had time… However, when the tour guide saw everyone else was there, he called and said they were leaving soon. Due to previous conflicts, I rudely asked the tour guide, 'What's the hurry?' The tour guide hung up and deleted my WeChat account… Despite this incident, the tour guide waited for me when the group returned to the city, and we eventually reconciled. Especially during the 8-hour drive, we chatted and communication became better. I came to understand that it was not easy for the tour guide and appreciated his efforts. I also acknowledged that I was at fault for being late... Overall, despite the initial conflicts, we were able to reconcile and have a better understanding of each other..."

The majority of respondents reported choosing to avoid or tolerate unexpected events related to people during their travels, unlike Interviewee T10's experience. For instance, Interviewee T07 recounted encountering a robber in Tibet and quickly giving up their belongings due to fear. She shared, *"At that time, a friend and I were eating at a restaurant, and we put our things on the table. Someone came over directly and took our bags away... neither my friend nor I reacted at the time because he was too open and behaved too normally. Both of us were stunned. After reflecting, we realized that he was a very typical local person, very burly, and we didn't dare to do anything at that time. We left there immediately and didn't eat any food... I think there are still many things to be cautious about (when traveling)."*

Interviewee T08 believed that some unfriendly actions of local people could come from their ignorance of tourists, leading to culture shock for both parties. She shared an experience in Shangri La where they went out for drinks and encountered a local person who behaved like a gangster or a teenager causing trouble. She explained, *"...this kind of thing happened, and the local people may also be a bit wild. And he would think that you guys are like I came from a big city and sat there chatting, feeling like you had a sense of superiority or showing off, but I really didn't understand. Then people came to you to do things like this... I think it might be related to culture or that they think you are an outsider... and they didn't know your background or your stories, they also feel uncomfortable to unfamiliar things and people…"*

Difficulties encountered while traveling may not always be unpleasant experiences. Tourists may also be impressed by how they overcome challenges with strangers in unfamiliar environments. Interviewee T05 shared an experience where she and some other tourists helped another one who was stranded after being stung by sea urchins, *"During my trip to the beach, an unexpected incident occurred. Two girls were playing along the shore and accidentally got stung by sea urchins. There were not many people around… a young man appeared and drove us to the hospital, and I contacted my tour guide to recommend a hospital and doctors that could speak Chinese and understand the situation. We came together and took the injured girls to the hospital for treatment. Afterward, we checked them in at their hotel and continued to follow up on the girl's recovery. Even after we disbanded, we still returned to our respective hotels after sunset. The next day, I asked the girl how her foot injuries were progressing, and even after they returned home, everyone checked to see if she had seen a doctor again. This incident left a deep impression on me. It was my first solo trip, and I had never encountered such a sudden situation. I was surprised that everyone was so willing to come together and help. It showed me the importance of teamwork and kindness to strangers in unfamiliar environments…"*

6.3.2 Self-reflection

According to Kitchenham (2008), critical reflections should be used to represent the process of transformation. This involves reframing people's perceptions and assumptions on a subject matter through various experiences. Many interviewees in this study recounted their experiences of personal reflection during their travels. Although the mental journeys of each person are different, they all gain a deeper understanding of themselves through self-reflection during their trips. This includes criticizing personal shortcomings, acknowledging one's own limitations, making changes, and reconciling and accepting oneself after self-reflection.

For instance, Interviewee T03, who has challenged the snow-capped mountains in Tibet multiple times, expressed a sense of urgency in life due to the short and bitter days ahead. He reflected on his past negative experiences and regrets, saying, *"Now I clearly feel like I don't have enough time, and I still have a lot of things to do. At that time, I was so good, so young, and with such good physical strength, why didn't I know to do these meaningful things? I think I waste my life there every day..."*

Similarly, Interviewee T09, a tourism practitioner, reflected on her past arrogance and prejudice during her solo trip to Dunhuang. She realized the need to shed her biases and became more open-minded. She said, *"I really felt like I needed to get rid of the bias that I had as a practitioner from that time. It was not always about demanding others based on my own requirements, but to demand other scenic spots based on industry standards. During this trip, I followed the instructor and listened attentively to every detail, paying attention to what real tourists were filming and noticing. It was quite touching…"* This experience helped her to become a better tourist instead of tourism practitioner and appreciate the importance of seeing things from different perspectives.

Another interviewee in the study reflected on her inability to continue learning and improve her level of knowledge after work. She found it difficult to describe what she saw and gained on her travels with advanced and beautiful words. This led her to reflect on her low level of leisure and entertainment activities outside of work. She realized that her limited language skills were due to a lack of reading habits and knowledge. She reflected, *"I really felt that my language was poor. It's not a joke. To be honest, I was a master student who studied social science. Why did this language poverty become what it is now when faced with this situation? It's really important to read more. By reading books, you can learn to use words more effectively and express yourself better."* She wondered whether social media platforms like Tiktok, Red book, Douban, and WeChat moments were taking up too much of her time, and if this was preventing her from reading more books. She realized that as she got older, she knew less and less, and this was because once she started working, she became restless and couldn't sit still to read a book. She suggested that browsing the phone has a great impact on reading, as it can distract and take away the focus from reading. She concluded that more time should be devoted to improving personal growth and development.

Travel not only provides tourists with the opportunity to recognize and acknowledge their shortcomings but also gives them the chance to realize that they should change. Interviewee T08 tends to attribute the problems she encounters in life to herself and looks inward to find the fundamental solution to the problem. She believes that if the same problem persists, she needs to change herself, *"If you feel uncomfortable with something, whether it's related to a person, a matter, or a certain social phenomenon, including significant social events, you need to change yourself."* She believes that everyone is different, and there is no absolute sense of right or wrong. Therefore, what may be uncomfortable for one person may be normal for

another. She suggested that when feeling uncomfortable, one needs to adjust and be more inclusive. It is essential to see things from different perspectives and understand that people do things for a reason.

Interviewee T12 had a different experience. She admitted that her lack of effort led to a lack of smooth doctoral studies during her journey. Travel made her willing to face her past and evaluate her learning process objectively. She acknowledged that she did not study hard during the first three years of her doctoral life. She described, *"I belong to the kind of growth experience that has been gradual since I was young. Most of my classmates at that age are just beginners who have entered the stage of their master's degree. Although I am a doctoral student, my understanding of myself was in the feeling of being still in the master's stage. I couldn't objectively evaluate myself as not studying well."* However, during her trip, she realized that there was a significant difference between master's and doctoral studies. She recognized her shortcomings, but she was unwilling to admit them, *"...after returning from the trip, I gradually accepted this reality and could truly take action to change myself..."* This transformative trip gave her a broad perspective and allowed her to escape from her existing living environment. The new perspective and change in mood helped her to accept her shortcomings and take action to improve her learning and doctoral studies.

Another interesting aspect of transformative tourism is that many tourists accept themselves during the process of self-reflection, reconcile with their unfulfilled wishes, uncontrollable desires, and embrace their imperfect but genuine selves. For instance, interviewee T06 began to understand during her journey that the meaning she pursued was insignificant compared to life and death. She explained, *"At the beginning of the trip, I couldn't pass this level in my heart. I always thought about finishing my studies, pursuing postgraduate studies, or directly pursuing a university. I rarely went through the process of choosing a new thing."* However, when her elders left, she began to worry about the time they had together. She realized that it was essential to treasure every moment with the people around her, *"...they (her grandparents) don't care about degrees, money, or possessions. They cherish every minute and every second of the people around them."* This experience helped her to understand the true meaning of life and prioritize what is essential in life. She learned to accept herself and embrace her imperfections.

Interviewee T06 reflected on her journey and accepted the strong side of her personality. She acknowledged that she is a strong-willed person who follows her own ideas, especially when it comes to freedom. She said, *"...this journey helped me realize my strengths. I want to be myself, and it matters a lot. When you achieve what you want to do, you will feel good and happy. As people say nowadays, when you love someone, you first love yourself... You need to satisfy your own needs first before taking into account the feelings of others."* Interviewee T07 also realized that her curious and dissatisfied personality played a significant role in her unique travel experiences. She not only accepted herself but also believed that her personality made her life rich and colorful, *"I believe that my personality plays a significant role in my interest in transformative tourism. I have a natural curiosity and seek out things that make life more exciting. When I hear about something interesting or out of the ordinary, it sparks my curiosity, and I want to explore and experience it. I find the process of discovering and learning about new things very engaging and fulfilling. Additionally, I am a persistent person who doesn't give up easily. Once I set my mind to something, I see it through to the end, even if it's challenging and lonely. Growing up, I was exposed to diverse opinions and ideas, and I enjoyed being exposed to new perspectives. In college, I often participated in unique activities to broaden my horizons and expand my worldview. ...I believe that every time I engage in something new, it opens my mind and helps me grow..."*

Tourists who have experienced extreme tourism are more aware of their limitations and emphasize the importance of acting within their capabilities. As interviewee T03 stated, *"Don't use too much force... You always need to know your limits. Due to my illness, I used to push myself too hard, thinking I was efficient... However, I was actually overworked and not cost-effective. This caused me to lose a lot of time in the future, and if I don't adjust myself well, I may lose the opportunity to pursue my lifelong goals..."* He also stressed the importance of considering one's abilities and being respectful of nature. He advised against being indifferent towards the consequences of pushing oneself beyond their limits. Sometimes, one may not be able to evaluate their own abilities accurately, and the profound impact it has on them may cause indelible damage. Some challenges may be psychological, while others may be physical.

Similarly, interviewee 13, who traveled to the South Pole at 90 degrees, emphasized that one cannot reluctantly challenge oneself during travel and must be fully prepared to face the unknown. He believes that one should not try dangerous activities or places if they are not fully prepared to do so. It is essential to understand the risks and to seek advice from experienced

individuals, *"If I have no experience or haven't been to a place before, I would seek advice and information from friends who have been there. It's crucial to learn as much as possible about a place before visiting it."*

6.3.3 Consciousness & Unconsciousness

There are varying opinions among scholars about when transformative changes occur. This study found that the choice of destination for transformation is not only due to travel but also influenced by contingency and inevitability. Some tourists shared that they only realized the impact and changes of a trip several years after the journey. For instance, Interviewee T01 stated that he had no specific impression of choosing to visit France at the time and did not consider it a significant destination. However, he described the mental journey he experienced during the trip, *"I think I was actually in a state of unconsciousness to a large extent at that time, because it seemed that many things were natural and did not have a particularly obvious appearance when experiencing them. However, when it comes to recalling the doors, I went out a few years ago, I think that time has changed quite a lot. Because when I went out from a young age, it was basically my parents or fellow teachers who arranged everything no matter where I went. For me, it was just a follow-up, obedience, and a good time to play. However, that trip was quite different because it basically talked about the local area, except for whether I had chosen the destination. Hmm, but when I arrived there, it was basically me who arranged the itinerary to go to the place, and even the restaurants to eat. ... they were mainly listening to me to arrange, so it should be said that it was probably the first time that I went out with my parents before, and at least it was rare for us to arrange together. This was basically entirely my own arrangement, and they became a way of traveling with me, I understand that I didn't feel much about this at the time, and I thought it was just going out anyway. However, when I thought about it later, I thought it might have been a bit convenient for my overall psychological perception and made some changes to me."*

Interviewee T02 also recognized the impact of her transformative travel experience many years later. She believed that the trip had influenced her consumption philosophy and her understanding of rest. She stated, *"I want to shape my life into a more comfortable and sustainable lifestyle, and I think I can trace its origin back to that trip..."* In summary, the choice of destination for transformation can be influenced by contingencies and is not limited to solo travel. Tourists may not recognize the impact of the travel experience until years later,

and the changes may be more significant than initially perceived.

Some tourists consciously choose destinations for transformative experiences, seeking breakthroughs to overcome current life difficulties. For instance, Interviewee T08 shared her two journeys of choosing Yunnan as a healing destination. She came into contact with spiritual aspects, including physical and mental well-being, and met friends who provided her with help. She felt that there was a significant transformation during her visit to Yunnan. One summer, a friend invited her to Dali to meet and talk about some issues. Despite facing challenges with travel restrictions, she bought a plane ticket and went anyway, as she could no longer bear staying at home with their parents. During her visit, she explored areas such as psychology and quantum hypnosis, which proved to be helpful in solving many of her problems and releasing emotions. After spending over a month in Yunnan, she returned with a renewed sense of power, and her life was back on track. She felt that their state of mind had become completely different from before, and she no longer needed further help in this area.

T12 chose her destination based on her personal understanding of the vast scenery in western Sichuan. She explained that she usually lives in Xiamen and returns to Chengdu during her vacations, and she desired a new perspective that the scenery in western Sichuan could offer. Having visited other places in the region before, she considered this area for her trip.

Tourists also intentionally travel for resolution and healing purposes, making transformative experiences predictable. As interviewee T09 explained, *"…my previous travels were solely for fun, and I did not travel to relieve depression or to escape the usual environment. However, during my most recent trip, I wanted to alleviate my troubles and depression through travel. Although having this goal does not guarantee its achievement, I found this trip to be particularly memorable due to a chance encounter during my journey…"* In this sense, by consciously seeking transformative experiences, inner change is more likely to occur and to be realized. Although the achievement of resolution and healing goals is not guaranteed, the conscious pursuit of these goals increases the likelihood of transformative experiences. Respondent T11 also shares the belief in conscious rest. She used Disney as an example to explain that when someone is constantly working at a fast pace, spending a day at the amusement park can feel like a break from the daily grind. Relaxing in a joyful environment can be a method of healing, bringing happiness and a sense of well-being. This type of rest is a form of happiness healing, which can help individuals feel refreshed and renewed.

Interviewee T13 believes that his challenging personality provided him with an opportunity for transformative change. He was proactive in pursuing this change, which ultimately helped him get transformed. This includes pursuing his doctoral program, trying new things, and even going to extreme places. In his own words, he articulated, *"I believe I derive pleasure from the challenge of stepping outside my comfort zone, referred to as the 'safe living zone'. This includes embarking on this doctoral program, experimenting with novel concepts, and exploring unconventional environments. My ultimate aspiration is to ascend Mount Everest. I am confident that with diligence, I can achieve this goal, particularly as several acquaintances within my network have successfully done so. Therefore, if they can accomplish this, I am convinced that I am equally capable."* Nonetheless, he emphasized that such undertakings should not be deemed as frivolous adventures but rather, they necessitate meticulous preparation. For instance, aspiring to scale Mount Everest requires incremental elevation challenges, starting from 5000 to 8000 meters to avoid potential fear that may inhibit successful ascension. In this regard, Interviewee T13 affirms that mountain climbing should not be approached as an impromptu activity. It is a process that necessitates careful planning and preparation to mitigate risk, and this gradual progression is inevitable in any technical climb.

In addition to conscious and unconscious transformative experiences, there is a phenomenon commonly observed. During the singing bowl healing mountain climbing activities, the researcher engaged in a casual conversation with a participant who expressed that her primary intention was not necessarily focused on healing or personal transformation, but rather on the desire to engage in suburban hiking and experience the singing bowl activities. While the participant acknowledged feeling positive and experiencing a sense of healing during the activities, she did not anticipate undergoing a revolutionary or profound transformation as a result. Instead, her main goal was to enrich the overall life experience. It is worth noting that the participant expressed a willingness to explore similar activities in the future, indicating a positive outlook towards the potential benefits they may provide. *(from field notes taken on Nov 17, 2022)*

Furthermore, within the team, Lucy initially held a strong resistance towards mountain climbing. As a professional athlete accustomed to pushing her physical limits and surpassing herself in the gym, she openly expressed her initial aversion to mountain climbing on a social platform, stating, *"Honestly, I used to have a strong aversion to it. I subjectively found it dull*

and uninteresting... (Posted by F04 on October 26, 2022 in Redbook)" However, as the climbing process unfolded, Lucy frequently mentioned the enjoyment and excitement she experienced. Following a hiking session, she emphasized the significance of *"balance"*. For Lucy, mountain climbing became a means of finding respite and allowing her body and mind to rejuvenate. She described it as a way to *"recharge the body and mind...to completely unwind the soul. (Posted by F04 on November 20, 2022 in Redbook)"*

6.4 Transformative Outcomes in Relation to Well-being

6.4.1 Hedonism & Eudaimonia as pursuits and outcomes

Transformative tourism experiences are often associated with a sense of fulfillment. However, this study found that transformational travel not only leads to fulfillment based on overcoming difficulties, but also makes people realize that life is short and difficult. Therefore, it's essential to pursue hedonism and enjoy life in the present. As Interviewee T05 explained, her trip to the island have influenced her understanding of how she enjoys life and even her choice of residence, *"I have visited the island almost every year for the past twelve years and enjoys being by the sea, having a cup of coffee on the balcony, and reading a book... The experience even had a significant impact on my decision to purchase a home by the river, where I can deepen my sense of comfort and enjoyment…"*

What's more, Interviewee T02 emphasized the importance of hedonic times in her life. She believes that a life of pure rest is essential, especially now when rest should take up a significant portion of our lives. This understanding comes from her trip with her mother, where she learned to accept and embrace hedonism as a way of life. She believes that this open acceptance of hedonism motivates her to approach work and struggle with more enthusiasm. She explained, *"I take my rest and leisure time seriously, and plans my time accordingly... I even set specific times for rest and leisure, such as after completing a major project or task, and prioritizes activities that bring my joy, such as playing games with my boyfriend and friends. I believe that this combination of work and rest is necessary for a fulfilling life..."* For Interviewee T02, happiness is subjective, and everyone has a different definition of it. However, she believes that it is essential for everyone to accept and pursue hedonism and enjoyment in life. She encourages people to prioritize their own happiness and to incorporate rest and leisure into their lives.

She also started to think about the relationship between hedonism and eudaimonia after that trip. After acknowledging her own pleasure-seeking nature, she believes that embracing it has improved her understanding of human greed and needs, *"…Simply emphasizing the pain in life is meaningless… Life is about saying that you have a happy life in this life, so that you have the confidence to say that you will live your life well. I think this has become a point where I will greatly appreciate others in the future. I no longer admire the ascetic lifestyle of monks… (because) the pursuit of happiness is an essential part of life. While I still acknowledge the value of hard work and discipline, but I believe that achieving happiness is equally important. I no longer solely appreciate people who live an ascetic lifestyle, but also those who work hard and find joy in the process…"*

The interviewees emphasize that happiness is a subjective experience, and it can be specific or abstract. Interviewee T02 provides examples of concrete happiness in her daily life, such as receiving gifts and playing with their dog. She also finds enjoyment in abstract activities like cooking and completing tasks, which brings her a sense of fulfillment. For her, life is now full of fun, and she finds pleasure in everything she does. Interviewee T03 shares a similar sentiment, highlighting how small and personal matters can have a significant impact on one's happiness, even if they may not matter to others. He describes a shared experience with his fellow directors, which deeply touched him but may have gone unnoticed by others, *"…It's very powerful… I really think it's just a very ordinary and small thing. Maybe our fellow directors didn't have such a big sense... They witnessed this thing together with me, but it didn't really affect them…"*

Overall, the interviewees stress that happiness is not universal and that it is important to find what brings one joy and fulfillment in life. This understanding of happiness is unique to each individual and can be found in small, ordinary moments or in larger, more abstract activities. Transformative travel experiences can have a profound impact on our lives, helping us to recognize our true desires and preferences.

Transformative tourism experiences can lead to a more realistic sense of happiness, particularly in overcoming challenges and achieving personal growth. Interviewee T05, for example, traveled abroad alone for the first time and stayed in a hotel for several days. While initially feeling lonely and unsure of what to do, she eventually realized her own capability in solving

problems and became impressed with herself. In her own words, she elaborated, *"…(before the trip) I imagined that after all, I was alone, so I may feel bored sometimes. And I may not speak to many people, and then I would not know what I wanted to do, and there was also no one to take photos for me… However, in fact, during the journey, I almost solved all the problems this time. I suddenly realized that I am actually very powerful, and I can go and solve all these things. After successfully returning, I feel quite impressive myself…"*

Interviewee T10, who had never traveled to high altitude areas before, experienced a great sense of achievement and pride after successfully climbing the Pearl Sea. He described his experience in detail, highlighting the physical challenges of the climb and the impact of altitude on their body. *"As someone who had lived on the plains for a long time, reaching such a high elevation was a significant test of their physical fitness. Despite these challenges, my girlfriend and I were the only adults in the group who completed the itinerary in one day without the use of oxygen cylinders…"* Similarly, Interviewee T13 also experienced a profound sense of achievement in his travels to the South Pole. He described, *"reaching 90 degrees south latitude as a forbidden zone for humans… This experience was particularly challenging and difficult, akin to level 3 difficulty on Earth, and I think it has stayed with me for many years…my achievement of this was really something that worthy to show off, and also a personal accomplishment that has had a lasting impact on myself…"* His transformative travel experiences have made him more confident in dealing with challenges. He is no longer afraid of adventure travel, even when there is uncertainty involved, *"When we were trapped on a deserted island in the South Pole due to sea waves preventing our ship from picking them up, many of the members became flustered, but I can still remain calm and comfort others, because I knew that we could stay the night without any safety issues…But I recognized that individuals who have not undergone similar experiences may not be aware of how to handle such situations. By sharing my experience, I hope to provide insight and stability to those who may encounter similar challenges. (This is because) I have experienced something worse…I (have) learned how to manage uncertainty and overcome challenges with confidence…"* Overcoming physical and mental challenges can instill a sense of pride and confidence, demonstrating the transformative power of travel.

In addition to personal achievement, there is also a sense of accomplishment in completing tasks assigned by others and helping others. Interviewee T03, who has led teams to Tibet multiple times to complete filming tasks, describes his most successful moment as bringing all

team members out of Tibet safely, *"...upon arriving in Hohhot after an 8-month shoot in Tibet in November, when the car key was turned off at night, I had a stone hanging in my heart for the whole trip... I finally brought all the people out safely... From that moment on, I felt like I had achieved great success."*

Whether it be a large or small accomplishment, interviewee T01 deeply values his sense of achievement. During his first trip with their parents, he was responsible for planning and implementing the itinerary. His parents were impressed with the arrangements and expressed their satisfaction, which made interviewee T01 realize his responsibility and ability to take on such tasks. Reflecting on the experience, interviewee T01 explained, *"My parents told me that my planning and arrangement was good one night (during that trip), and then I realized that I had been arranging this trip at that time, and it was my elders who were traveling with me. Besides, I seemed to have a relatively responsible attitude to satisfy their various ideas and needs, and do my best to meet them. Therefore, in fact, it seems like an unconscious state before, but from that moment on, I realized that I am taking on such responsibilities, and at the same time, I also realized that I have the ability to actually take on such responsibilities..."*

Positive feedback regarding the value generated by transformative trips can serve as a driving force for tourists to overcome difficulties and persist in achieving their goals. Interviewee T03, for example, is motivated by the positive feedback received from a Dean of the Communication University of China, who watched their short film and trailer. Upon viewing their work, the dean expressed that it held anthropological value, which gave Interviewee T03 a sense of meaning and purpose beyond financial gain. This positive feedback has helped Interviewee T03 persist in his work, despite facing difficult challenges along the way. Overall, transformative tourism experiences can provide opportunities for personal growth and can lead to a more realistic sense of eudaimonia that goes beyond immediate gratification.

6.4.2 Cognitive changes in relation to life meanings

Transformative tourism promotes cognitive changes in tourists by encouraging reflection on the value and significance of life, including perspectives on struggle, happiness, consumption, work, marriage, and other issues. Interviewee T02 shares that her transformative journey led to a significant change in her perception of the concept of "rest". She now prioritizes hedonic well-being and view it as a goal of work. Reflecting on the experience, Interviewee T02

explains, *"This journey allowed me to rethink my understanding of consumption and rest. Before this trip, I never truly grasped the concept of 'rest'... However, I now understand when and how to rest at different stages of life..."* Moreover, Interviewee T02's comment on being a highly motivated individual and moving forward at full speed to achieve goals emphasizes the importance of setting goals and working towards them, acknowledging the reward of a comfortable rest upon achievement.

Similarly, Interviewee T09, as a "work animal", explains how the transformative experience has prompted a reevaluation of her work and personal life, ultimately leading to a change in mindset and approach. She expressed that she has learned to avoid unnecessary overtime and the urge to please others, as well as to avoid blaming herself for perceived shortcomings, *"My tendencies towards blaming myself and overworking ultimately did not lead to happiness and satisfaction... I have adopted a new perspective that prioritizes my well-being and recognizes the importance of not only my own happiness but that of others as well..."* This testimony highlights the importance of self-care and a balanced approach to life, emphasizing the need to prioritize personal well-being over unnecessary work.

Respondents are increasingly discussing the relationship between money, consumption, and happiness. While some believe that consumption is necessary for a better life, others remain skeptical. For instance, Interviewee T02 expresses that the transformative journey helped her realize the value of spending for enjoyment, even if it may not be accepted or recognized by the general public. As she stated, *"I think after that time, I began to realize that if I wanted to enjoy it, I could pay for it, which affected my ability to buy games now. For example, some game equipment, such as Nintendo. Now, I plan to buy a TV to configure the game. I now strongly agree with the idea of being happy to spend money... What I bought is an irreplaceable enjoyment experience... Similarly, such things as going out to play... Unlike my father who believes that pain in life is necessary... I think the previous generation advocated hard work and simplicity, and (they think) you should not spend money on your own beauty... You should be simple, which is good. Then you should not spend money for your own happiness, because hard work is right... I think his shaping of me lies in the fact but this trip has shaped me because it lets me to know I should spend money for my own happiness... If I feel that this experience is worth it, then I should spend money for it..."*

Based on this, the importance of making money is highlighted when it comes to travel. Interviewee T11, for example, stresses the need to work hard to earn money, as it enables individuals to travel to more beautiful and exotic destinations. She explained, *"...without adequate financial means, it may not be possible to visit certain places, such as Iceland, where I hope to witness the aurora borealis..."* She argued that trying to make money enables individuals to travel to new places and experience different cultures, ultimately enriching lives.

Another viewpoint asserts that happiness is not necessarily related to money, but rather to personal experiences. Interviewee T13 argues that one's life experiences, rather than material wealth or achievements, are what ultimately define their happiness. He used the example of a memorial service, where speakers are more likely to focus on the experiences and impact a person had on others, rather than their financial success or job titles. Interviewee T05, who traveled alone, shares a similar perspective, emphasizing the importance of finding personal fulfillment beyond financial means. She explained that having a balanced life, including personal pursuits and family responsibilities, is more important than simply accumulating wealth. For Interviewee T05, the most significant insight gained from her transformative travel experience was a newfound sense of direction in life.

Some respondents have also shared how transformative travel experiences have affected their views on marriage and love. Interviewee T08, for instance, reflects on how her parents and family had a significant influence on her understanding of a normal marital or family relationship. Nevertheless, through the inner transformative journey, Interviewee T08 realized that she does not necessarily have to conform to her parents' expectations and beliefs, and that societal norms can be at odds with human nature. She explained, *"...in reality, it may be a contrary thing to nature... Well, I am a person who actually yearns for freedom in my heart, so I am not willing to worry about it. Perhaps I think it is also related to the societal attitudes towards relationships, which are influenced by external factors such as culture and time, and that our younger generation may have a more self-focused perspective..."*

Their testimonies emphasize the role of transformative travel experiences in challenging old ideas, societal norms and encouraging the pursuit of individual perspectives, personal fulfillment, even in areas as deeply ingrained as consumption, marriage, and family. It highlights the importance of self-discovery and courage in questioning traditional beliefs, leading to cognitive changes and development.

In addition, transformative travel can also enable tourists to adopt better mindsets and problem-solving strategies. Interviewee T03, for instance, encountered numerous seemingly insurmountable challenges during his trip but was able to overcome them through determination and focus. His journey through Tibet taught him that there are no problems that cannot be solved with the right mindset, *"...the various difficulties we encountered during the trips from May to August, including being surrounded by Tibetans asking for money, encountering wolf packs, and internal team disputes... Despite these challenges, I remained committed to completing the journey and achieving our goals. I think the experience in Tibet provides me with the resilience and problem-solving skills necessary to overcome future obstacles..."*

Respondent T12 also highlights the impact of transformative travel on her learning style and problem-solving abilities. She described returning from her trip with a newfound motivation to change her approach in doctoral career. Though she felt she had fallen behind her classmates, T12 recognized the need to take responsibility for her past and catch up at her own pace. In her own words, she described, *"...and the most important aspect is that after returning, I almost had some motivation to think how to continue my doctoral career...I still need to find ways to take responsibility for myself... after this journey, I know these things must be solved. So, I will still bring myself back to face this matter within a certain range, which should bring me pressure and challenges..."*

6.4.3 From emotional healing to emotional empowering

This study has revealed that transformative tourism experiences not only lead to cognitive changes, but also emotional healing experiences for tourists. The most commonly cited emotional impact of such experiences is a sense of peace and comfort. For instance, Interviewee T02 describes an experience from over ten years ago that has remained deeply ingrained in her memory and helped her better grasp the concepts of life and leisure. While watching the sunset with her mother on the beach, they observed a middle-aged woman doing yoga on a beach mat. This scene had a profound impact on young Interviewee T02, as it demonstrated to her that life can still be peaceful and fulfilling. She emphasizes the transformative power of travel, describing it as a much-needed break and eye-opener that allows for rest and rejuvenation. She reflects on the beauty of the scene, the stretching

movements, and the peaceful ambiance it created. This experience has helped her better understand the true meaning of inner peace.

Interviewees often recall the peaceful scenes they encountered during their transformative travel experiences, as vivid images that immerse them in beautiful memories. These recollections transport them back to the healing scenes they experienced, evoking a sense of tranquility and peacefulness. *"I was struck by the sight of small wooden houses where residents burned wood for warmth and cooking, as if they were living in a fairy tale. Despite the apparent simplicity of their lifestyle, the residents' motivations for living in such a manner were unclear… The scene, however, left me with a sense of the pure and peaceful life that can be achieved through simple living… Then when I woke up in the morning, from the Airbnb homestay where I was staying, I could see the snowy mountains outside. There was the curling smoke from the kitchen, which would make me forget everything. I think it's very healing, really a healing place… If I choose a place to go without considering other issues, it must be there…that this is too healing..."* (Interviewee T06)

Transformative tourism experiences have the capacity to empower and inspire travelers to make positive changes in their lives. Interviewee T05 describes significant changes in her state of mind after her trip, allowing her to face the challenges of changing jobs with renewed energy and a more positive outlook. Many respondents reported feelings of increased courage and strength after their transformative travel experiences. This newfound resolve enabled them to take control of their lives and make the changes they needed to achieve personal fulfillment.

Interviewee T12 noted that her transformative travel experience brought her courage and strength. She found the motivation to confront her shortcomings and explore ways to change themselves. After returning home, she began to track her daily activities. Realizing the need to improve her time management, she started recording her schedule in detail, including the time she woke up, went to the bathroom, and engaged in quiet study time. These changes in mental behavior represent one of the most significant improvements in her life over the past year. Her testimony highlights the transformative power of travel in empowering individuals to confront their shortcomings, develop new skills, and make positive changes in their lives. Through the reflection of F02 on her Redbook, the reason may be found. *"The act of walking becomes a metaphor for personal growth and progress. It is portrayed as a means of engaging in an internal dialogue, listening to the voice within, and finding inner strength and courage."*

(Posted by F02 on November 30, 2020 in Redbook) While traveling, one can escape from being trapped in the same place, both physically and metaphorically. The transformative aspect described in these sentences suggests that the source of courage and strength lies within oneself. It implies that through self-reflection and dialogue, individuals can tap into their own reservoirs of resilience, determination, and personal growth. While nature and landscapes may provide a conducive environment for self-discovery, it is ultimately the individual's internal conversation and connection with oneself that foster personal transformation and empowerment.

For Interviewee T08, this experience was transformative, providing her with the motivation to break out of her unhappiness and pursue a more fulfilling path. She explained, *"Then I basically came back, and my life got back on track… My state became completely different from before, and I had the power to change... So it was like a beginning, and it was very helpful for me… I became more energetic, confident, and brave, and just let many things happen… Unlike many people who are hesitant and afraid, my emotions are generally more open to thought. Then, in the later part, for example, learning these aspects and discussing them with others, including learning a bit of Buddhism, is actually to improve my entire cognitive system. In addition, there are many small things in life that are not particularly in place, including how to think about any problems encountered… I can gradually improve it and sometimes can even help others…"*

Interviewee T12 directly pointed out the healing power of this trip for her, and she said, *"I believe that travel may have a healing effect on me, and I have found a way to draw strength from it, which helps me get back on track in my daily life. After returning from my trip last year, I noticed a significant change in my mood. Despite experiencing ups and downs during my doctoral studies, I felt calmer and more positive in the second half of the year. While I cannot say that it was a magnificent transformation, I definitely felt a sense of emotional healing that has been invaluable to me. In my experience, travel has a unique purpose and function. It has taught me the importance of courage and problem-solving skills in facing life's challenges. Strength is a broad term, but I believe that courage is a crucial aspect of it. By mustering the courage to confront difficult situations, I have gained valuable experience in problem-solving and personal growth. I also recognize that travel has a significant impact on my state of mind and overall mood. It is not simply a matter of feeling energized after a good night's sleep, but rather an ongoing experience that shapes my interests and outlook on life. While I have not encountered many challenges that have left me feeling down in recent years,*

my travel experiences have given me the confidence to believe that there are no problems that cannot be solved."

During her journey, Interviewee T09 found that the people she met had a profound impact on her emotional state. Strangers she encountered helped her overcome her depression, but she noted that it was her willingness to communicate and seek help that allowed her to pull herself out of that emotional state. She acknowledged that if she had not been receptive to their help, it would not have been possible to overcome her depression. Interviewee T07 shared her own experience of exhaustion and self-doubt during a trek. She reflected on how every difficult and painful experience in life is accompanied by a gift, akin to the hidden willows and bright flowers in a village. *"I remember feeling lost and uncertain about my purpose during my trek. I would work until midnight and then sleep, not even knowing who was lying next to me. I was exhausted, and one day I even broke down in tears. However, the next morning, I woke up to my first snowfall ever, and the excitement and joy I felt were indescribable. I forgot all about my exhaustion and was filled with wonder for a whole week. My companions, a group of Tibetan girls, were amazed by my reaction to the snowfall. They remarked that I didn't understand how special the moment was. But I realized that my experience was not so different from theirs. Despite the challenges we faced, we were able to find hidden treasures, like the village with its willows and bright flowers. It's true what they say, that extreme joy can lead to sorrow, and extreme sorrow can lead to joy. I have found that every time I encounter hardship, it ultimately leads to a moment of happiness."*

Moreover, Several respondents' narratives also reveal their emotional transformation during their travels, as well as their gratitude towards the people and experiences they encountered. For example, Interviewee T07 spoke about feeling a deep connection with her family while traveling alone. She noted that reaching out to her father during the trip made her realize how much her family had helped her and how grateful she was for their support. Despite her father's initial opposition to her solo travel, he still secretly gave her money. When her father later called and expressed his appreciation for her, she felt even more emotional. The sound of her father playing mahjong in the background highlighted the contrast between her present experiences and his present life, but also added a sense of comfort. She believed that parents should allow their children to be themselves and pursue their dreams, and that it was important for children to express gratitude towards their parents for this freedom. She felt that this experience had helped her become more self-aware and appreciate her family even more. While

physical proximity was not essential, the emotional bonds and support were crucial, especially during times of difficulty.

Interviewee T12 shared a poignant account of her visit to a temple in a Tibetan region, where she witnessed the genuine sincerity of the monks. When she asked if she could give a donation to a young man, she scanned a QR code and gave him 20 yuan. Although it was a small amount, she was surprised when a staff member, a young monk, presented her with a hada, a traditional Tibetan scarf, which was equivalent to an honorific ride. She realized that the monks appreciated her presence and wished to show their gratitude towards her. This experience left a lasting impression on Interviewee T12, who admired the purity of the monks' intentions and their unselfish generosity.

Figure 6.4 Photos shared by respondents as emotionally impressed (Source: respondents)

Several interviewees have adopted a relaxed and open-minded attitude towards life's challenges, cultivating a sense of detachment towards work, relationships, and daily living.

This perspective allows them to approach difficulties with equanimity and adaptability, viewing them as opportunities for growth and self-discovery. By keeping an open mind and a positive outlook, they have found greater resilience and a deeper appreciation for the beauty of life. For example, interviewee T11 described her reflections after that trip, *"...being open-minded means being free and easy, not getting bogged down by small things, especially those that are not worth the effort at work. While I don't believe this trip has entirely transformed me, it has certainly helped me embrace an open mindset. With the pandemic and other challenges of recent years, I have gradually become more open-minded. Just yesterday, I had a conversation with a younger person who was seeking my advice. I noticed that they were getting caught up in trivial matters, so I advised them to not let insignificant things affect their emotional stability. I emphasized the importance of emotional stability and how focusing on matters that are out of our control is a waste of time. Instead, it's crucial to focus on things that make you happy and bring fulfillment. It's easy to get caught up in someone else's negative behaviors or things that are not relevant to us, but this distracts us from what is truly important. By focusing our time and energy on things that matter to us, we can live more fulfilling lives and find greater happiness."*

Interviewee T09 mentioned the change in attitude towards people around her, saying, *"This trip prompted me to evaluate the relationships in my life, leading me to start to break off some bonds that were no longer serving me. Among these relationships were some that were particularly important, including my connection with my elders. After the trip, I found that the tension between myself and my elders had significantly dissipated... Instead of blindly agreeing and vehemently disagreeing with them, I started to negotiate with them and express my opposition when necessary. Over time, our relationship continued to improve, even after my elder left Luoyang (her residential city). Overall, this trip helped me to reassess the relationships in my life and to cultivate healthier connections with the people around me..."*

In essence, nearly all interviewees share a similar experience of overcoming emotional challenges by finding joy and meaning in unexpected moments. Despite the adversities they faced, they both managed to discover the beauty in life and appreciate the transformative power of travel.

6.4.4 Value and worldview changes

Transformative tourism experiences can lead to significant transformations in values and worldviews. This study has identified transformative tourists experience, which centered on exploring oneself, relationships with others, and the world at large. For example, Interviewee T07 realized that stepping out of her comfort zone and meeting new people deepened her self-awareness and understanding through the journey. She noted that many people's experiences are outside of their comfort zones, and it is remarkable to see them overcome their initial fears and misconceptions. Besides, through interactions with others, Interviewee T07 discovered that many people in the world are unique and diverse, which helped her put her own experiences into perspective. She realized that she was just one of many individuals in the world, which made her feel both humbled and empowered. This realization helped her overcome her fear of socializing and limited herself less. As a result, she no longer felt as scared and enjoyed being around diverse individuals with different backgrounds and experiences. Overall, Interviewee T07's experience indicates that transformative tourism can help to broaden individuals' perspective and embrace a more open and accepting worldview.

In addition, transformative tourism experiences can prompt individuals to contemplate the tension between personal values and mainstream societal expectations, which is one of the key reasons why individuals choose to embark on such journeys. For instance, Interviewee T03 realized during the journey that his previous values were misguided. He now seeks to explore the world and pursue meaningful activities, recognizing that time is fleeting and that life should not be wasted on trivial pursuits. He notes that his evolving perspective has led to a growing distance from friends from his past, who are still preoccupied with materialistic concerns. He explained, *"I have come to realize that there were many issues with my past self... I now recognize that time is limited, and I have a lot of meaningful things to pursue. Looking back, I wonder why I did not prioritize these important pursuits when I was younger and had the physical strength to accomplish them. It feels like I wasted precious time and opportunities. These realizations have led me to distance myself from some of my past friends, as we no longer share the same values and interests. It has become increasingly difficult to connect with some of my acquaintances, as they prioritize materialistic concerns and lack an appreciation for the deeper values of life. Whenever I try to engage in meaningful conversations, they quickly lose interest and shift the topic back to financial concerns. I recognize that they are struggling to make ends meet, but they cannot understand why I have chosen to pursue a different path. In*

contrast, I feel that my perspective has broadened, and I now see things from a more holistic and fulfilling perspective...”

Interviewee T08 shared how transformative travel experiences helped her navigate conflicts between her personal values and societal expectations surrounding marriage and love. She explains that she has always felt uncomfortable with the traditional expectations imposed by her family and society regarding marriage, and struggled with issues in her own romantic relationships. She reached a point where she sought help and realized that her understanding of herself and her femininity was skewed by societal hypnosis. As she delved deeper into self-reflection during her trips, she discovered that she is not a traditionally feminine person but instead possesses a strong, powerful sense of self. She realized that her previous perceptions of herself had been shaped by societal expectations, and that her true self was far more complex and unique than she had originally thought. This realization was transformative, as it allowed her to challenge and overcome limiting beliefs and embrace her authentic self.

While after such conflicts and deep reflection, transformative travel experiences seem to prompt individuals to prioritize their own values and beliefs over societal expectations. As Interviewee T06 reflects on the value of life, she emphasizes the importance of personal experience, noting that true happiness comes from meaningful and enduring experiences, rather than fleeting pleasures obtained through consumption. She believes in taking the time to appreciate the small joys of life, such as listening to birds chirping or watching water flowing, which can lead to a deeper and more fulfilling sense of happiness.

In addition, transformative travel experiences can enhance individuals' self-identity, leading to greater confidence and composure in unfamiliar environments. As Interviewee T12 notes, *“I have come to realize that it is unnecessary to force tolerance for individuals from different social circles. Instead, building genuine connections with like-minded individuals can happen naturally, over time. For example, I bonded with three girls who had different life experiences and perspectives than myself, which taught me that forming connections with others is not dependent on common interests or backgrounds. Building connections with strangers can be challenging, and forcing a relationship is not worth the effort. Instead, it is best to be genuine and true to oneself. If there are individuals who are worth getting to know better, a natural state of contact and conversation will develop over time. However, if there is no such fate, it is okay to let things be. Ultimately, building connections is a complex process that cannot be*

forced, and it is important to respect and appreciate the different experiences and perspectives of others."

Based on this, it seems that as people embark on transformative travel experiences, they often develop a greater sense of self-responsibility and undergo significant personal changes. Interviewee T08, for example, notes that her transformative journey brought about a fundamental shift in her understanding of the value of life, as well as her understanding of herself. Reflecting on her experience, Interviewee 08 describes feeling like she was reborn, with a completely different perspective on life. She said, *"...Rather than feeling like I had simply improved, I felt like my entire perspective on life had been reversed. I realized that many of the ideas I had held in the past were limiting my potential, and that I had been living my life based on assumptions about what I 'should' be doing, rather than what I truly wanted. This realization felt like a rebirth, and while it may sound emotional, it was a deeply transformative experience. Since then, many of the things that once troubled me no longer bother me. Even when challenges arise, I approach them from a new state of mind and a different perspective. Rather than viewing problems as someone else's issue, I understand that they stem from my own beliefs and assumptions, and I am able to adjust my outlook accordingly."* This shift in perspective allowed her to see problems not as external issues, but as opportunities for inner growth.

From a different perspective, Interviewee T07 highlights the importance of taking responsibility for oneself by overcoming personal limitations. She believes that individuals are often held back by their own fears and self-imposed limitations. Prior to embarking on her transformative journey, her family expressed concerns about the safety of the destination, which made her question whether this was a self-imposed limitation as well. However, upon arriving at the destination and seeing many elderly individuals living comfortably in such an environment, she realized that her fears may have been unfounded. She emphasizes the importance of approaching such situations objectively, by separating the reality from the media's portrayal or advertising's deception. By doing so, she was able to take action and gradually break through her own limitations and fears, leading to personal growth and new experiences. She underscores the importance of continually breaking through one's own limitations, even if it means challenging previously held beliefs or assumptions. As her teacher once told her, *"if we feel the same as we did the previous year, then we are not truly growing."* Overcoming limitations and fears is a necessary process in transformative tourism, and it

requires a willingness to challenge oneself and explore new experiences.

Taking responsibility for oneself does not mean becoming indifferent; rather, individuals who embrace self-responsibility often care deeply about helping others and contributing to society. For instance, Interviewee T09 discovered the importance of humility and helping others during her solo travel experience. She realized that her previous arrogance and prejudice had led to a closed-off mentality, which limited her ability to connect with others. This experience helped her to develop a deeper sense of humility and openness, which enabled her to see the world from a different perspective. She describes how abandoning her professional knowledge and approaching situations as an ordinary tourist helped her to better appreciate the joy of travel, while also allowing her to connect with others in a more meaningful way.

Furthermore, Interviewee T09 acknowledges that her willingness to help others in the past may have been more of a habit than a genuine desire to assist others. She reflected, *"I have come to realize that my inner self has been quite closed off, despite being perceived as an enthusiastic and emotional person who is willing to help others by my friends and family. I now understand that my desire to help others may have simply been a result of my upbringing or habitual behavior. I would help others out of politeness and obligation, rather than a genuine desire to assist them from the bottom of my heart. This lack of empathy and pride in my actions made me realize that I have been quite hypocritical."* After realizing this, she began to try to change and gained recognition of her self-worth through the process of sincerely helping others. *"...I also recognize that I have sometimes helped friends not out of a genuine desire to assist them, but rather to repay a favor or because it made me feel useful. This sense of value was important to me, as it gave me a feeling of being needed and acknowledged. It made me feel like I had a purpose in this world and was an indispensable existence to those around me. However, I now understand that this sense of value is not enough to sustain me in the long term. I need to develop a deeper sense of empathy and a more genuine desire to help others, rather than simply doing so out of obligation or wanting to feel valuable. Through this transformative experience, I have come to realize the importance of being true to myself and developing a genuine desire to assist others..."*

Overall, transformative travel experiences can lead to profound personal changes in personal values, including shifts in perspective, greater self-awareness, and a greater sense of personal responsibility.

Transformative tourism has the potential to fundamentally alter a person's worldview and perception of their surroundings. When people are exposed to environments and cultures that are vastly different from their own, it can be a jarring experience that leads to a shift in perspective. For instance, Interviewee T13 recounted his experiences traveling to Congo and Zambia in Africa, which had a profound impact on his worldview. During his travels, He learned about the cultural and political differences between Zambia and Congo. He discovered that even though the two countries are neighboring and share a long political history, their economic environments and societal structures are vastly different. In Zambia, for example, people take three days off work to vote in national elections, which are regarded as significant events. In contrast, the unemployment rate is estimated to be over 20% to 30%, and earning a monthly salary of 1,000 RMB is considered high. He recognized the stark contrast between his own life in China and the realities faced by people in Zambia and Congo. This experience led to a shift in his values and outlook on life, as he came to realize how fortunate he was and the importance of being grateful for what he had.

Meanwhile, transformative tourism can also bring about a realization of the vastness of the world and the individual's relative smallness compared to it. This realization can help people understand that the world does not revolve around them, and that the things they may obsess over in daily life are relatively insignificant. As Interviewee T08 put it, people often attach great importance and sadness to things that cannot be achieved, such as career success, romantic relationships, and financial gain. However, the pain associated with failure is often rooted in the individual's attachment to a specific outcome, rather than the inherent value of the situation itself. In her own words, *"people's desires and expectations are often limited, as they are driven by personal greed or a narrow perspective. However, there may be other outcomes or results that could have a more significant impact on their lives. It is important to recognize that success or failure is not always binary, but can be measured at any point in time. We should focus on the present moment and recognize that each step in the journey has value, regardless of whether or not it results in a desired outcome."*

Transformative tourism also promotes greater understanding of the diversity of the world, leading to more inclusive attitudes. As Interviewee T03 expressed, going through transformative experiences helps people to realize that what they thought, they wanted may not bring them true happiness. This realization can lead to a more accepting and compassionate

outlook, even in the face of social and familial conflict. He emphasized, *"…experiencing the world first-hand is essential for gaining a deeper understanding of diverse perspectives. While reading books and gaining knowledge is important, true understanding comes from experiencing a variety of situations and cultures. Pushed outside of their comfort zones and exposed to new experiences, people are more likely to get a broad view towards the world and will not solely focus on something individualized."*

Interviewee T06 echoes the sentiment that shifting one's focus from daily gains and losses to the broader world can lead to a more peaceful state of mind. As she began to explore different places and perspectives, she found that the challenges she faced in daily life became smaller in comparison. Interviewee T06 also reflects on the broader meaning of life and the importance of cherishing time spent with loved ones. *"…life is finite and we should not only to pursue the goals, but also to appreciate the beauty and diversity of the world around us…I will no longer be fixated on comparing myself to my peers and their accomplishments. I recognize that this mindset is limiting and fails to acknowledge the vastness and diversity of the world. By immersing myself in the trip, I have come to appreciate the richness and complexity of the world, which has allowed me to shift my focus away from narrow, comparative thinking…the world is infinite, and there are countless experiences and opportunities available to me. Rather than obsessing over the accomplishments of others, I am now more interested in exploring the world and gaining a deeper understanding of its complexities… This has allowed me to let go of the need to constantly compare myself to others and has led to a more fulfilling and balanced perspective on life."*

Transformative tourists often develop a humbler understanding of the world and greater respect for rules and regulations. As T13 articulated, *"As someone who has gone through many adventure trips, I have come to deeply appreciate the importance of rules and regulations. During outdoor travel, for example, one may need to sign life-and-death agreements or waivers to ensure safety. Although these agreements may seem daunting, they are necessary for ensuring personal safety and compliance with local laws…Unlike some shortcuts that may seem tempting but dangerous, I would encourage every individual to respect the rules and regulations that govern their safety…"*

He also highlights the limits of human knowledge and influence when it comes to nature. He agrees with the sentiment that one cannot protect something they haven't seen firsthand.

However, he distinguishes himself from extreme environmentalists who may reject modern conveniences and advocate for radical change. He argues that, ultimately, nature is far more powerful than humans. As such, he believes that respect for nature is essential, and that humans must be mindful of their impact on the environment. From his point of view, both the power of nature and the limits of human influence are acknowledged.

This view is supported by interviewee T03, who has come to believe in the fundamental equality of all life in nature based on his many trips to Tibet. This realization has impacted many aspects of his life. He suggests that we often have a subjective view of the natural world, influenced by our education and upbringing, and that our understanding of nature may be limited as a result. In his own life, he has become more mindful of the impact of his actions on other forms of life, *"I commit to avoiding harm to other beings, including refraining from killing... Even when faced with pesky mosquitoes, I opt for non-violent methods of removal rather than simply swatting them..."* Holding the attitude that life is equal and has a beginning and an end, this view also affected his attitude towards the ups and downs that occurred in his life. After entering Tibet many times, he was seriously ill but was always optimistic, and even thought that he would be a blessing in disguise. In his own words, *"...Because I know very well that if my understanding is not wrong, if my direction is not wrong, I will probably get a blessing in disguise, maybe for the rest of my life... I will get more gains because of the changes in this matter. It is really now that this is proven... I started to exercise, and become a vegetarian, and more self-disciplined. My whole physical state is better than before... Too much, much better than before..."*

In the end, using one of the interviewees' testimonies to conclude this session, *"All you acquired, the knowledge or experiences during the trip, should be eventually applied in your everyday life. (Interviewee T08)"* No matter how the world view is transformed, the changes in attitudes towards life is what really matters for individual tourists.

6.4.5 Skills and knowledge gained in relation to self-growth

The respondents in this study noted that their travel experiences resulted in the acquisition of new knowledge and skills, which in turn impacted their work in various ways. For instance, Interviewee T07 reported that her transformative travel experience influenced her career path and job choices. During her several-month-long solo travel, she engaged in outdoor training

for teenagers and organized several outdoor walking activities. She believed that these experiences were highly beneficial for the personal growth and development of teenagers. In her own words, *"I have personally experienced the transformative power of travel, particularly in the area of personal growth. In my previous solo travel experience, I discovered that the most significant gain was not the scenery or the sights, but rather the personal growth and development that came from the experience. This realization has motivated me to pursue a career in outdoor training for teenagers, with a focus on developing their personal growth and comprehensive qualities such as cooperation, self-confidence, and communication. During my tenure at a previous company, I designed a course called 'The Power of Walking', which drew heavily on my personal travel experiences. The course involved taking children to four major locations, including the Silk Road, ancient China, modern Yan'an, and modern Beijing. Each child carried a backpack, and the journey was designed to instill a sense of success and accomplishment, similar to what I had experienced during my own travels. I believe that my personal journey has given me a great sense of self-confidence and accomplishment, and I hope to share this experience with others through my work in outdoor training. I want to help young people develop their personal growth and achieve a sense of success and accomplishment, just as I did during my transformative travel experience."*

Interviewee T05, who specializes in promoting and marketing tourist destinations, viewed her solo travel experience as a valuable learning opportunity that could enhance her performance and career prospects. She approached her trip with a mindset of learning, actively seeking to gain insights and experiences that could be applied to her future work. During her solo travel, Interviewee T05 focused on how each destination could benefit her future career. She reflected on the experiences and insights gained from her trip, considering how they could be used in her work to help her achieve better performance and opportunities. She acknowledges that her solo travel experience served as a valuable source of inspiration and implication for her future work.

Interviewee T11 gained a fresh perspective on work from her travel experience, despite not directly experiencing any work-related benefits. She felt that her trip had enabled her to adopt a more open-minded approach to her work, allowing her to explore alternative solutions and ideas. In her own words, *"Personally, I have gained a new perspective on work through my travel experience. I have learned to approach work with a more open-minded attitude, instead of being rigid with a singular focus. This has enabled me to be more creative in finding*

solutions to challenges, and explore alternative approaches. Rather than sticking to one perspective, I now consider multiple angles and try to find different ways of approaching tasks. Furthermore, I have learned that it is important to take a step back from work and relax. Travel has taught me the value of rest and rejuvenation, enabling me to return to work with a fresh perspective and renewed energy. Instead of constantly feeling tense and overwhelmed, I now make it a priority to take breaks and engage in activities that help me recharge. This approach has helped me maintain a healthy work-life balance and improved my performance at work."

It was revealed that one interviewee (T13) accumulated relevant knowledge before embarking on travel, with the intention of integrating and applying this knowledge during his trip to achieve personal growth. This approach allowed the interviewee to update his knowledge continuously, recognizing the importance of constantly expanding one's knowledge base. As he articulated, *"I strongly believe that knowledge must be updated constantly and continuously. As the saying goes, 'reading thousands of books and traveling thousands of miles' is essential for updating one's knowledge base. I believe that the unity of knowledge and action is crucial to achieving personal growth and development. Before embarking on a trip, I make it a priority to read about the destination's background and history. Specifically, I read books written by individuals who have visited the destination before. This approach allows me to gain valuable insights and enrich my knowledge, enabling me to better understand and appreciate the destination."*

Interviewee T08's spiritual journey included learning some occult knowledge, such as hypnosis, astrology, and astronomy. Maybe her explanation can help this study explain the growth of knowledge and skills in transformative experiences. She mentioned, *"My journey was full of meaningful and impactful experiences, rather than merely acquiring hard knowledge and skills."* Knowledge and skills gained during transformative journey were not solely from formal sources, but rather from the immersive experiences and interactions encountered along the way.

CHAPTER 7 IPA REFLECTIONS

This chapter discusses the main topics reflected in the findings organized by themes extracted from the IPA inquiry. To provide further context and interpretation of the research findings, the chapter also draws on existing studies about inner transformation and well-being. By examining the themes that emerged from the IPA inquiry, this chapter provides a deeper understanding of the transformative potential of tourism experiences and their impact on individuals' experiences and perceptions of well-being.

7.1 Swinging Well-being: Lived Self

7.1.1 Effects of Chinese traditional values

Well-being is a highly subjective experience, shaped by individuals' overall evaluation and feeling of their quality of life based on personal standards. Cultural differences can result in significant variations in people's perceptions of well-being (Lu et al., 2001). Studies have demonstrated that traditional Chinese value system derived from Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist philosophies deeply influence the well-being of Chinese people (Lu, 2010). The concept of well-being and transformative tourism, which originated in the West, is explored among Chinese tourists. The study highlights transformative tourists from China experience a sway and shift between Chinese traditional culture and the Western ideology. These two values significantly influence the perceptions and views of well-being among Chinese transformative tourists. The conflict between Chinese traditional values and Western perspectives leads to confusion and emotional dissonance among Chinese transformative tourists, resulting in their intense reflections during and after the trips.

Confucian well-being is achieved through the cultivation of knowledge, benevolence, and the pursuit of group harmony (Hwang, 2012). This philosophy emphasizes the importance of continuous self-reflection and self-improvement as a means to attain social and moral greatness. In Chinese society, harmony and balance hold paramount significance, both in the broader societal context and within the family structure (Lei, 2017). According to traditional Chinese culture, a lack of balance and disharmony are believed to be the root causes of unhappiness. Within Confucian thought, concepts such as relationships and hierarchy play a crucial role. The values and morals of Confucianism are shaped by significant principles like benevolence,

righteousness, and propriety. Individuals who conform to societal norms and embrace mainstream values are often regarded as happy by the community. During interviews with transformational tourists, many participants expressed the profound impact of traveling with their parents. This experience deepened their understanding of family values, and they found happiness in the harmonious relationships and well-being of their parents. Simultaneously, assuming complete responsibility for their parents' expenses, activities, and overall well-being during the trip became a primary source of their sense of accomplishment and happiness.

Contrary to Confucian beliefs that emphasize moral greatness and material satisfaction, the Taoist perspective on happiness revolves around aligning with the forces of nature and freeing oneself from personal desires, known as *"Wu Wei (无为)"*, to achieve a tranquil state of mind. In Chinese culture, there is a strong emphasis on living in harmony with the Tao, which encompasses a balanced lifestyle and the pursuit of meaningful experiences (Csikszentmihalyi & Ivanhoe, 1999). The concept of Tao connects individuals to broader patterns, processes, and rhythms of life, enabling them to transcend self-centered concerns. While transformative tourists in China embark on a journey seeking personal fulfillment and happiness, their understanding and perspectives on well-being are also deeply influenced by Taoism. For instance, their view on wealth and material desires differs from the Western pursuit of individual pleasure. The accumulation of material possessions is not their primary goal. Instead, they uphold a life philosophy that rejects being controlled by desires and becoming consumed by materialism.

However, it would be incorrect to suggest that Chinese individuals lack an ego. In comparison to Western societies, where personal happiness and enjoyment are often sought in a physical sense, Chinese individuals appear more dignified and introspective. They strive for a balanced way of life that integrates social constraints, social expectations, and social roles into their sense of well-being (Lu & Gilmour, 2006). Even transformative tourists, with their exploratory and individualistic qualities, cannot fully escape the influence of these traditional values. Many of them face obstacles in their work, career, and personal development, which leads to existential confusion. This confusion prompts them to engage in self-reflection within unconventional environments, such as through travel experiences.

Moreover, Taoism specifically encourages living in the present and not being distracted by external influences (Zeng & Guo, 2013). This aligns with interviewees' focus on their present circumstances, undisturbed by external factors such as digital devices or societal pressures. Taoist philosophy, as outlined by Laozi and Zhuangzi, speaks of the harmony of being and the interdependence of fortune and misfortune, proposing a worry-free utopia (Ho, 1995). This philosophy aligns well with the attitude of the respondents, suggesting a level of optimism and open-mindedness even in the face of life's challenges. Furthermore, a prevailing theme among the interviewees was the importance of not constantly comparing oneself to others who might appear more successful or better off. This is a testament to the traditional Chinese value of contentment – feeling satisfied with what one has, rather than constantly striving for more. Such a perspective also aligns with the lack of explicit endorsement of the pursuit of immediate happiness or pleasure in a materialistic sense within mainstream Chinese culture (Lu, 2008).

In addition, within the Chinese value system, well-being is viewed as a spiritual pursuit. It is more about the satisfaction of basic desires and the cultivation of one's inner self. Chinese individuals find joy and happiness by nurturing their spiritual well-being and achieving a higher level of self-cultivation. Well-being in Chinese culture is deeply influenced by the interplay between individuals and their environment, placing a greater emphasis on spiritual enrichment and satisfaction (Lu & Gilmour, 2004). This spiritual perspective on happiness finds its roots in Buddhist philosophy. Buddhism emphasizes the tranquility and harmony of the individual mind, considering happiness as inner peace to be attained through practice and understanding. Zen Buddhism, in particular, offers profound insights into the transient nature of life and the opportunities it presents (Li, 2005). Moreover, Buddhism highlights the significance of altruistic actions and the joy that comes from transcending oneself through helping others (Huang, 1991). In Buddhist teachings, physical and mental practices, acts of giving, and the elimination of desires contribute to an individual's journey towards achieving the state of Nirvana, which represents eternal happiness.

These concepts resonate with transformative tourists who repeatedly mention inner peace and personal growth as key outcomes of their experiences. The entire transformative tourism journey resembles the practice and understanding advocated by Buddhism. The practice involves overcoming pre-trip challenges and the dilemmas encountered during the journey, while the comprehension stems from the process of self-reflection. Attaining a sense of inner peace becomes one of the positive outcomes derived from transformative experiences.

Together, it demonstrates the profound influence of traditional value systems on individuals' experiences and perceptions of well-being in transformative tourism.

7.1.2 Effects of Western ideology

Values, beliefs, and behaviors undergo transformations alongside political and economic changes. Over the past decades, China has experienced rapid growth, becoming the fastest-growing country globally since the implementation of its "open-door" policy in 1978. This period of development has witnessed a significant influx of Western concepts, technologies, cultures, and lifestyles, exerting a profound impact on contemporary Chinese society and culture. China's modernization process has brought about significant changes in societal values. With the rise of a market-oriented economy, extensive rural and urban restructuring, and increased exposure to the internet, materialistic pursuits and the desire for success and wealth have become more prominent among the Chinese population (Dion & Dion, 2001). As the country has undergone rapid economic development, urbanization, and exposure to Western influences, traditional values rooted in collectivism, family-centeredness, and adherence to social norms have undergone a transformation (Wang et al., 2020). With the rise of individualism and the pursuit of personal autonomy, there has been a noticeable shift towards self-focused aspirations and the pursuit of material wealth and consumption (Sun & Wang, 2010).

The growing emphasis on materialistic goals in China's modern society has implications for people's happiness. Studies have shown that the pursuit of material wealth and status can initially contribute to subjective well-being. However, in the long term, the excessive focus on materialism may lead to decreased life satisfaction and increased psychological distress (Dittmar et al., 2014). This suggests that while economic advancements provide opportunities for improved living standards, the relentless pursuit of materialistic aspirations may not necessarily result in lasting happiness. Tourists in this study, similar to many others, exhibited a strong preoccupation with individualistic success and experienced confusion when it came to achieving socially recognized milestones such as monetary fame, marriage, having children, obtaining a Ph.D., and accumulating wealth. This phenomenon reflects the profound impact and influence of individual values within China's modernization process. Despite their

attempts to reconcile personal, societal, and familial expectations through travel, the Western ideals of individualism, hedonism, and success continue to deeply influence them.

The impact of China's modernization on people's values has also led to the diversification of views on personal well-being. The shift reflects the complex interplay between traditional values and the influences of modernization. The evolving perspectives on happiness highlight the ongoing negotiation between individual aspirations and societal expectations in the changing Chinese context. The coexistence of traditional values and contemporary social forces has resulted in seemingly paradoxical behavior patterns among the Chinese. While they may adhere to traditional norms and values in certain areas of life, they may exhibit competitive and self-serving behavior in others (Fang & Faure, 2011). This clash between personal desires and societal norms is particularly evident in the transformative tourism experience, where individuals engage in heightened self-reflection. On one hand, they strive to adhere to the traditional Chinese values of desire elimination, while on the other hand, they pursue the individualistic success demanded by a rapidly developing society. As a result, individuals find themselves torn between these conflicting values, and the process of inner reflection and transcendence during their journey serves as a tangible manifestation of this internal struggle.

Additionally, studies indicate the emergence of a dual-cultural self-system in China, encompassing both an independent self and an interdependent self, with the interdependent self being of greater importance (Lei, 2017). When the interdependent self is threatened, individuals tend to prioritize relationships with parents to restore balance within their self-system, while validating personal values may be less effective. Despite these changes, Chinese society continues to uphold traditional cultural values such as a willingness to sacrifice personal interests for the family, acceptance of hierarchies, and a focus on harmonious interpersonal relationships (Leung, 2008).

China's modernization process has had a profound impact on people's values and their perceptions of happiness. The shift towards individualism and materialism has presented both opportunities and challenges for subjective well-being. While the pursuit of material wealth can initially contribute to happiness, the long-term implications may be more nuanced. Traditional values rooted in harmonious relationships and social harmony continue to shape people's understanding of happiness. The diversification of views on happiness reflects the ongoing interplay between traditional values and the influences of modernization. The

transformative tourists' experiences reveal a notable trend wherein many of them have ultimately achieved a sense of balance. This inner revolution is characterized by a profound shift in perspective and a reevaluation of priorities. Through the process of transformative travel, individuals have been able to detach themselves from societal expectations and external influences, allowing them to explore their inner landscapes with greater clarity and depth. As they embark on their journeys, they undergo introspection, self-discovery, and personal growth. Drawing upon the principles of traditional Chinese cultures such as Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, they have discovered inner peace and a harmonious alignment with their authentic selves. Despite the persistent societal pressures for personal success and family happiness, these individuals have managed to establish a method of preserving inner order, embracing resilience, and, most significantly, remaining steadfastly loyal to their own values. This transformation is the result of an internal revolution instigated by their transformative travel experiences.

7.2 Existential Transformation

Existentialism provides valuable insights to further understand transformative tourism experiences (Kirillova et al., 2017c). Existential authenticity involves living in alignment with one's true self, embracing personal values, and taking responsibility for one's choices and actions (Wang, 1999). In the context of transformative tourism, existential authenticity highlights the profound contemplations, questioning of purpose and values, and the pursuit of unique experiences that characterize the transformative tourist's journey (Kirillova et al., 2017c).

The transformative tourists in the study transcend the conventional notions of travel and adventure. Their experiences extend beyond the surface-level exploration of new places and engage in existential contemplations. This aligns with the essence of existential authenticity, which emphasizes the search for meaning and the pursuit of a purposeful existence (Wood et al., 2008). The transformative tourists view themselves as distinct from ordinary travelers, driven by an innate impulse for exploration and discovery. This primitive impulse can be understood as an authentic expression of their desires and values, reflecting their true selves.

Despite physical limitations, transformative tourists maintain an unwavering yearning to

witness more of the world's wonders. This fervent desire resonates with the context of *Dasein* (existing-in-the-world), as it involves embracing one's genuine aspirations and pursuing experiences that align with one's innermost nature. It involves the process of actively choosing among various possibilities and living in alignment with an internally derived value system. It also entails the act of self-making, wherein individuals shape their identities and lives by actively selecting and embracing choices that resonate with their internal values (Kernis & Goldman, 2006).

Despite experiencing pain, entanglement, and contradictions along the way, transformative tourists find themselves in a paradoxical situation. They acknowledge that no one, including their parents, has compelled them at gunpoint to embark on their journeys. The decision to pursue transformative travel stems from their own inner desire, which they themselves sometimes find difficult to understand. They acknowledge the contradictory nature of their choices, questioning why they have chosen this path despite the challenges and uncertainties it presents. These existential dilemmas and concerns prompt tourists to think the meaning in life and reformulate their self-concept and self-values.

The paradoxical nature of the transformative tourist's journey also aligns with the complexities inherent in existential authenticity. They acknowledge that their choices are not influenced by external forces or societal expectations but stem from their own inner desire. This self-driven motivation reflects the existential struggle to make authentic choices in the face of contradictions and uncertainties. The transformative tourists' ability to navigate these challenges and remain committed to their chosen path demonstrates their dedication to living authentically.

Therefore, beyond the realms of love and primitive impulse, what matters to transformative tourists is their unique perspective of being in the world *(Dasein)*. As one respondent described, *"It's like I am observing the world from one corner in the world. (Interviewee T13)"* The choice of getting transformed reflects their personal choices. While both internal and external factors play a role in their decision-making, they perceive internal factors as being more influential. This perspective underscores their commitment to exploring places they deem worth visiting, seeking extreme locations, and immersing themselves in experiences they believe are essential for personal growth and self-discovery.

Until now, the transformative tourists find it difficult to articulate the full meaning of their experiences. They don't approach their travels with a checklist of accomplishments or a predetermined set of goals. Instead, they remain connected to their original impulse, an unwavering desire to climb higher and explore further. This mirrors the existential concept of continually striving to climb higher and seek new horizons. The transformative power lies in their unwavering commitment to their passions, the pursuit of meaningful experiences, and the fulfillment derived from embracing their unconventional worldview. Their transformative journeys reflect their commitment to living in alignment with their true selves, embracing personal values, and finding fulfillment through unique, meaningful, and significant travel experiences.

Furthermore, the experiences of transformative tourists provide insights into the profound impact of existential courage on their transformative change. Existential courage, as defined by Peterson and Seligman (2004) in the list of character strengths, encompasses the capacity and willingness to confront the fundamental challenges and uncertainties inherent in human existence. It involves grappling with existential dilemmas, such as the search for meaning, the experience of anxiety, the awareness of mortality, and the exercise of freedom in a complex and unpredictable world.

Existential courage extends beyond mere fearlessness or bold actions; it encompasses a deeper exploration of one's existence and a willingness to confront the existential dilemmas arising from the human condition. It involves embracing the existential void and embracing the challenges and paradoxes that accompany it. The transformative journeys undertaken by the tourists can be seen as a continuous process. Initially, these journeys were motivated by various challenges in their lives, which led them to experience a sense of hitting rock bottom and encountering setbacks. In response, the tourists embarked on a quest to explore their thoughts and seek answers, viewing these challenges as indicators of personal issues.

This introspective search eventually led them to explore spiritual aspects and engage in mental development. Their transformative experiences involved pushing themselves beyond their comfort zones, venturing out alone for the first time, and venturing into adventure destinations that tested their physical limits. They also delved into psychological concepts such as hypnosis and quantum hypnosis, which proved immensely helpful in resolving major problems and

facilitating the release of pent-up emotions. As a result of their transformative journeys, the tourists developed a sense of bravery that eradicated any previously experienced fears.

From the perspectives of the transformative tourists in this study, the concept of "strength" encompasses various dimensions. Specifically, they identified courage as one crucial aspect of strength. The transformative journey played a unique role in instilling courage within the respondents, empowering them to boldly confront the challenges of life and providing them with an ongoing experience of problem-solving.

CHAPTER 8 CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

This chapter provides an overview of the main findings of this study, revisits the research aims and objectives, reflects on its contributions and implications.

8.1 Discussions

This study aims to comprehend tourists' well-being in transformative experiences through the lens of embodiment. It investigates tourists' active engagement with the surrounding environment and their internal reflection. The use of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), a renowned qualitative method in psychology, is highly suitable for this study as it allows for a detailed exploration of personal life experiences and subjective phenomena encountered by individuals (Smith, 2011). By employing IPA, this research aims to delve into individual tourists' self-reflection and subjective perspectives on well-being within the context of transformative tourism experiences. Building upon the theory of embodied experience, this study explores the impact of transformative tourism experiences on individuals' attitudes, values, behaviors, and the changes in perceptions of well-being.

The findings of this study revealed that tourists engage in reflective processes, where they reflect on themselves and their experiences through bodily perceptions. These bodily perceptions play a significant role in shaping their transformative journeys and influencing their inner transformations. The embodiment perspective provided a valuable framework for understanding the intricate connections between tourists' physical experiences, self-reflection, and personal growth. Transformative tourism experiences involve a dynamic interplay between the physical body, cognitive processes, and the environment. The tourists' engagement with different tourism scenarios triggered embodied responses and transformations, leading to shifts in their perspectives, emotions, and behaviors. This highlights the intricate relationship between the embodied self and the tourism context, shedding light on the complex nature of personal transformation in the tourism context.

What's more, transformative tourism experiences have a significant impact on tourists' eudaimonic well-being. Through the process of inner transformation, tourists experienced a shift in their perception of life's purpose and meaning, leading to enhanced life satisfaction,

self-fulfillment, and a deeper sense of happiness. The transformative experiences provided opportunities for personal growth, self-discovery, and the cultivation of positive attitudes and values. It acts as a catalyst for individuals' well-being by providing transformative experiences that enable personal growth, self-reflection, and positive attitudinal and behavioral changes. The pathways to well-being encompassed various elements, including self-awareness, self-reflection, engagement with the tourism context, and the integration of transformative insights into everyday life. This holistic understanding of the formation pathways contributes to the theoretical foundation of eudaimonic experiences in the transformative tourism context.

In conclusion, the perception of well-being through transformative experience is a multifaceted process involving the intricate interaction between individuals and the environment in tourism. It encompasses the activation of multiple senses and the assimilation of diverse environmental information. This process entails the integration of contextual stimuli with the bodily and psychological reactions of tourists, giving rise to a broad spectrum of cognitive, emotional, attitudinal, and evaluative responses (Paul et al., 2009). Within this process, three key groups of interplays hold significant importance.

The first crucial relationship is the interplay between sensory experiences, physical responses, and emotions. This connection forms the foundation for understanding how certain sensory stimuli and environmental cues can trigger transformative moments for individuals. By examining and expanding upon this relationship, this study sheds light on the specific times and spaces within tourism where transformation occurs. Moreover, it emphasizes the significance of sensory experiences in facilitating bodily sensations and emotional responses that contribute to the overall transformative process. Engaging the senses, such as sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell, allows tourists to immerse themselves in the present moment and create a deeper connection with their surroundings. These sensory encounters can occur during various stages of the travel journey, ranging from exploring natural landscapes to engaging in cultural activities. For example, the awe-inspiring sight of a majestic mountain range may evoke a sense of wonder and humility, leading to a heightened emotional state. Similarly, the aroma of local cuisine can evoke feelings of relaxation and contentment. These bodily and emotional responses contribute to the transformative nature of the experience, as they shape the way individuals perceive themselves, their surroundings, and their overall well-being.

The second important relationship is the interplay between perceived well-being, emotions, and personal transformations. It is widely acknowledged that the perception of well-being is closely linked to the experience of positive emotions. The relationship between perceived well-being and emotions is reciprocal and mutually reinforcing, which serves as a foundation for understanding the transformative potential of tourism experiences. When individuals perceive a higher level of well-being during their travels, it creates a fertile ground for personal growth, self-reflection, and transformative changes. This perception is influenced by a combination of external factors, such as the physical environment, social interactions, and cultural immersion, as well as internal factors, including personal attitudes, beliefs, and values. Emotions play a crucial role in this relationship, as they serve as a bridge between perceived well-being and personal transformations. Positive emotions, such as joy, awe, gratitude, and serenity, contribute to a sense of well-being and enhance the transformative potential of tourism experiences. These emotions can be elicited by various stimuli, both from the environment and one's own behaviors. For instance, witnessing a breathtaking sunset over a pristine beach or participating in a meaningful cultural exchange can evoke feelings of joy and gratitude, leading to a heightened sense of well-being and personal growth.

The third crucial relationship is the intricate interplay between individual differences, personal transformations, and well-being within the context of transformative tourism. Transformative tourism experiences have the potential to facilitate positive changes in individuals' personalities and enhance their overall sense of well-being. However, it is important to recognize that the outcomes of transformative tourism can vary significantly among individuals due to their unique characteristics, cultural backgrounds, and perspectives. Each individual brings a distinct set of personal traits, values, beliefs, and life experiences to their transformative tourism journey. These individual differences play a significant role in shaping their perceptions, interpretations, and responses to the transformative elements of their travel experiences. Besides, the outcomes of transformative tourism experiences are not uniform across all individuals. Factors such as personality traits, cultural background, socioeconomic status, and personal motivations can influence how individuals perceive and respond to the transformative elements of their travel experiences. For example, individuals with a more open and adaptable personality may be more receptive to personal transformations and experience a greater sense of well-being compared to those with a more rigid mindset.

Chinese traditional culture and the process of modernization in China play a significant role in shaping the perspectives and behaviors of these tourists. The influence of traditional culture, with its emphasis on harmony, collectivism, and the interconnectedness of individuals with their surroundings, provides a foundation for understanding the values and reflections of Chinese transformative tourists. Moreover, the modernization process in China has brought about societal changes, urbanization, and increased exposure to diverse cultures and lifestyles. This has created a desire among Chinese tourists to seek transformative experiences that allow for material wealth, career development, and other individualism success. Transformative tourism serves as a catalyst for existential shifts, enabling tourists to question their existing beliefs, values, and attitudes, and leading to a swing of perceptions and a reevaluation of their priorities in life.

Through transformative tourism, tourists have the opportunity to confront existential dilemmas, search for meaning, and explore their own identity and purpose. This process of self-reflection and existential changes contributes to a sense of well-being, as individuals gain a deeper understanding of themselves, their values, and their aspirations. It provides a platform for self-discovery, cultural exchange, and the exploration of individual values. By participating in transformative tourism experiences, Chinese tourists can navigate the complexities of modern life, reconcile traditional cultural values with contemporary realities, and find a sense of balance and harmony within themselves and the world around them. It allows them to align their actions and behaviors with their inner values, leading to a more fulfilling and meaningful life.

8.2 Implications

8.2.1 Theoretical implications

This study offers theoretical contributions to transformative tourism and well-being in tourism in five key areas. First, this study expands the scope of research on transformative tourism by adopting an existentialist perspective. This study explores the lived experience of transformative tourists from four dimensions, namely, lived time, lived space, lived body, and lived relationships (van Manen, 2016), and examines the antecedents, processes, and outcomes of transformative tourism experience using an embodied approach. This study sheds light on the intricate relationship between the physical, sensory, and emotional dimensions of the

experience. It recognizes the significance of the body as a central vehicle for transformation, emphasizing how tourists' embodied encounters with time, space, and relationships shape their transformative journeys. This embodied approach offers valuable insights into the dynamic interplay between the external environment and the internal transformations experienced by individuals during their travels. Furthermore, the findings provide a unique perspective on the relationship between transformative tourism and well-being and highlight the importance of well-being pursuits for travelers seeking transformative experiences. It reveals how transformative tourism serves as a catalyst for personal growth, self-reflection, and the cultivation of well-being among travelers. By expanding the understanding of transformative tourism and its impact on well-being, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on the intersection between tourism and personal growth. By adopting an existentialist perspective and focusing on the embodied aspects of transformative experiences, the study offers fresh insights into the transformative potential of tourism and its impact on individual well-being.

Secondly, this study contributes to the application of well-being in tourism research. While current research has predominantly viewed hedonia and eudaimonia as the end results of transformative tourism encounters, the majority of these studies typically initiate their investigations from the standpoint of tourism activities. They subsequently delve into the hedonic and eudaimonic aspects associated with various types of these activities. In contrast, this study seeks to depart from the nature of the transformative tourism experience itself, investigating how this experience's inherent qualities influence both hedonic and eudaimonic dimensions. By centering on the process of transformative tourism, this research endeavors to unveil the manner in which such experiences contribute to both hedonia and eudaimonia. Furthermore, this study goes beyond merely mapping hedonia and eudaimonia outcomes, delving into the intricate mechanics and progression of transitioning from hedonia to eudaimonia within the context of transformative tourism. By examining this transition, the study aims to uncover the underlying mechanisms that drive this transformative journey, offering a more comprehensive understanding of how these dimensions intertwine and evolve over the course of such experiences. Traditionally, hedonism has been associated with the pursuit of immediate pleasure and gratification, while eudaimonia has been linked to deeper, long-lasting fulfillment and personal growth. However, this study demonstrates that transformative tourists engage in experiences that encompass both hedonistic and eudaimonic elements, allowing for a more comprehensive and multifaceted approach to well-being. The

findings of this study highlight that transformative tourism experiences have long-lasting effects on individuals, aligning with the principles of eudaimonia. The transformative nature of these experiences extends beyond the duration of the trip and has a profound impact on tourists' well-being even after they return to their daily lives. The sense of personal growth, self-reflection, and meaning derived from transformative tourism contributes to a sustained sense of fulfillment and overall well-being. Additionally, the study recognizes the significance of hedonism in the pursuit of well-being, particularly among younger generations of transformative tourists. It acknowledges that the enjoyment of pleasurable and sensory experiences during the trip is an integral part of the overall well-being equation. By engaging in enjoyable activities, indulging in novel sensations, and embracing moments of leisure and relaxation, tourists derive immediate happiness and satisfaction, which further enhances their overall well-being.

Third, this study utilizes embodied theory to examine the impact of transformative tourism on value shifts and perceptions of well-being. Scholars typically categorize the positive outcomes of transformative tourism into internal and external changes (Decrop et al., 2017; Pung et al., 2020). However, this study innovatively links transformative tourism to well-being, positing that the influence and changes resulting from transformative tourism affect individuals' experiences and perceptions of well-being. The findings of this study provide empirical support for this proposition. By adopting an embodied approach, this study recognizes that transformative tourism goes beyond mere cognitive or behavioral changes. It acknowledges that transformative experiences are deeply embodied and involve the integration of physical, emotional, and cognitive dimensions. The study reveals that these embodied experiences and the subsequent value shifts have a profound impact on individuals' perceptions of well-being. Through the lens of embodied theory, the study demonstrates how transformative tourism experiences can shape individuals' holistic well-being by influencing their thoughts, emotions, and bodily sensations. Moreover, this study delves deeper into the relationship between value shifts and perceptions of well-being. It explores how the transformation of attitudes, values, and worldviews resulting from transformative tourism can influence individuals' overall well-being. By examining the interplay between values and well-being, the study provides valuable insights into the complex dynamics at play. It highlights that shifts in values, such as a greater emphasis on personal growth, environmental sustainability, or cultural understanding, can lead to enhanced perceptions of well-being among transformative tourists. These transformed

values serve as guiding principles that shape individuals' experiences and evaluations of their own well-being in the context of transformative tourism.

Fourth, this study employs IPA to explore the lived experiences of transformative tourists and their perceptions of well-being. Unlike previous studies that focus on specific items or variables when assessing well-being, IPA is used in this study to explore how transformative tourism experiences can affect individuals' well-being by changing their internal and external aspects from a contextualist stance. This approach recognizes the importance of understanding the subjective meaning-making processes through which individuals construct their own sense of well-being within the transformative tourism context. Through the analysis of participants' stories, emotions, and interpretations, this study uncovers the multifaceted dimensions of well-being and the diverse ways in which transformative tourism can contribute to its formation. Given that transformative tourism experiences are inherently contingent on context, being influenced by cultural, personal, and situational factors, IPA's strength lies in its capacity to provide a comprehensive contextualization for each participant's journey, elucidating the synergistic interplay of these elements that contribute to their transformative path. Transformative tourism experiences often incite profound emotions and yield substantial impacts on individuals' subjective well-being. IPA excels in capturing the emotional tapestry of these experiences, unveiling how emotional responses intricately shape the overall trajectory of well-being transformation. This ability to grasp emotional dimensions adds a layer of insight that is essential for comprehending the holistic nature of these experiences and their influence on well-being. By adopting an exploratory and interpretive approach, this study goes beyond quantitative assessments of well-being and instead delves into the rich and subjective experiences of transformative tourists. It allows for a deeper understanding of the lived reality of individuals and the complex interplay between their transformative tourism experiences and their perceptions of well-being. This study unveils the unique insights, meanings, and transformations that individuals attribute to their well-being within the transformative tourism context by analyzing the rich qualitative data collected through IPA.

Finally, this study makes a valuable contribution to the transformative tourism and well-being literature by adopting an interdisciplinary approach that integrates social, psychological, and behavioral perspectives. Recognizing that transformative tourism experiences are influenced by a multitude of factors, this study goes beyond a singular disciplinary lens and embraces a holistic understanding of the complex dynamics at play. By conducting biographical in-depth

interviews, this study examines the underlying social, familial, and psychological mechanisms that drive transformative tourism and highlights their significance in shaping individuals' values and perceptions of well-being. The incorporation of social perspectives enables an exploration of how societal norms, cultural values, and interpersonal relationships influence individuals' motivations and choices regarding transformative tourism. By examining the social dimensions of transformative tourism, this study sheds light on how social interactions and collective experiences can contribute to individuals' well-being and transformative growth. In addition, the psychological perspective illuminates the internal processes and cognitive mechanisms underlying the transformative effects of tourism experiences. By delving into individuals' motivations, perceptions, and psychological responses, this study uncovers the psychological drivers that lead to transformative shifts in values, attitudes, and worldviews. Understanding the psychological aspects of transformative tourism enhances our comprehension of how individuals' internal dynamics intersect with external environmental factors to shape their well-being. Furthermore, the behavioral perspective allows for an examination of the practical implications and behavioral changes that result from transformative tourism experiences. By analyzing the post-tourism behaviors, habits, and choices of transformative tourists, this study elucidates how transformative experiences translate into tangible actions that promote well-being and personal growth.

8.2.2 Practical implications

From a practical perspective, this study offers valuable insights into the changing needs, pursuits, and desires of individual tourists and their perceptions toward travel and well-being. By examining the underlying interaction processes and transformational potential of tourism, ranging from emotional pleasure to the pursuit of eudaimonia, this study provides destination managers and tourism practitioners with a dynamic perspective for analyzing the complex tourism behaviors, values, and attitudes of transformative tourists. This study also highlights the importance of understanding the complex and dynamic nature of tourism experiences, which can have profound and lasting effects on individuals' perceptions of well-being and personal growth. Individual tourists seeking self-growth, personal discovery, and enhanced self-awareness could find transformative tourism to be a fitting option.

By providing a deeper understanding of the motivations and desires that drive transformative tourism, this study enables destination managers and tourism practitioners to develop products, services, and marketing strategies that meet the evolving needs and expectations of consumers. In particular, this study emphasizes the need for tourism practitioners to adopt a holistic perspective that takes into account the diverse factors that shape tourists' experiences, including their emotional states, relationships, and values. By doing so, practitioners can design tourism experiences that are meaningful and transformative for tourists, thereby enhancing their overall well-being. Workshops, retreats, or guided activities that align with the transformative aspiration can be designed to create a more impactful journey for visitors. The study reveals that transformative tourists value authentic interactions with local communities, practitioners can facilitate opportunities for cultural immersion, such as homestays, local workshops, or community engagement initiatives, thereby enriching the overall travel experience. Meanwhile, destination marketers can craft promotional materials and narratives that highlight the potential for self-exploration and inner transformation, resonating with their target audience. Furthermore, this study underscores the importance of ongoing research and innovation within the tourism industry to ensure that the industry remains responsive to the evolving needs and desires of transformative tourists from different generations. By developing a highly nuanced understanding of the transformative potential of tourism experiences and their impact on different generations' values and worldviews, practitioners can work toward creating highly sustainable and fulfilling tourism experiences for all.

This study also sheds light on the role of transformative tourism in enhancing mental health. Transformative tourism presents an opportunity for visitors to engage in inner transcendence, offering an alternative avenue for emotional healing. By examining the embodied transformation experiences of individual tourists, this study can deepen the present understanding of the psychological and emotional changes that occur during transformative tourism experiences, which may extend beyond the tourism industry. This research has significant implications for the fields of psychology and counseling by examining the processes and mechanisms that lead to inner transformation. By shedding light on how individuals can be healed and transformed outside the counselor's office, this study may offer new insights and avenues for supporting mental health and well-being. The potential for transformative tourism to serve as a complementary approach to traditional counseling and therapy holds promise for individuals seeking alternative paths toward healing and growth. This study also offers new insights into the potential of transformative tourism to support mental health and well-being

both within and beyond the tourism industry. For example, since this research indicates that individuals experience emotional relief and personal growth through immersive nature experiences, mental health practitioners might collaborate with tourism providers to organize guided wilderness retreats that combine therapeutic techniques with natural surroundings. The wellness centers and workshops could offer participants tools to manage stress, anxiety, and emotional challenges while enjoying a rejuvenating travel experience. Informed by the study, adventure therapy providers might develop structured programs that combine outdoor adventure with therapeutic processes. The retreats could be designed to facilitate personal growth, self-discovery, and healing through activities like rock climbing, hiking, and team-building exercises.

8.3 Limitations

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on global tourism, and this study was not immune to its effects because the data were collected during the height of the pandemic. Although the researcher exerted her best efforts in following the participants engaged in transformative tourism experiences, the travel restrictions at the time significantly restricted her ability to conduct the study as originally planned. The inability to travel or accompany multiple teams on different trips limited the scope and depth of this study, thereby making it difficult to draw robust conclusions about the longitudinal potential of transformative tourism experiences.

Moreover, the research sample was limited to Chinese tourists, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Chinese tourists have their unique values and perspectives, and these cultural factors could shape their experiences and perceptions toward transformative tourism differently from tourists from other cultures. Therefore, the importance of cultural differences should be considered, and diverse populations should be involved in future studies to gain a comprehensive understanding of the transformative potential of tourism. Future studies that include participants coming from different cultural backgrounds can provide a broader perspective and contribute to a highly nuanced understanding of the topic.

The retrospective nature of the interviews in this study presents another limitation. These interviews relied on the self-reported experiences of the participants, which may be subject to

recall bias. Due to the existential authenticity of transformative tourism experiences, they produce long-lasting changes among tourists (Kirillova et al., 2017a). In-depth interviews are suitable for this research by helping the participants recall their memorable experiences and offering an immediate feedback dialogue for both the researcher and participants. Nevertheless, the interviews lacked direct sensory data related to in-transit bodily experiences that could have provided a highly nuanced understanding of the transformative potential of tourism. Future studies may incorporate highly robust data collection methods to complement retrospective interviews and to comprehensively understand transformative tourism experiences.

Appendix. Interview Protocols for In-depth Interviews

Please recall a travel experience that has influenced your outlook on the world, or even changed it.

请回忆对您产生深远影响，让您印象深刻的一次旅游体验。这次旅行可能影响甚至改变了您的人生态度和世界观。接下来的采访均是围绕您的旅行体验以及影响和改变而进行的。

Background:

1) Could you please share your story behind the photo with me? What are your feelings when you engaged in these activities or the trip? 可以请您分享这张照片/影像资料背后的故事吗？当您沉浸在这些旅行中的活动时，您有怎样的感受？

2) Does any special life event happen before this vacation? Could you talk about the important events in your life? 这次旅行之前您有什么特殊的人生大事发生吗？如有，您可以简单介绍一下吗？

3) What attracted you to go? 是什么吸引您去那里的？

4) What were some of the most powerful moments in the trip? 这次旅行中有哪些时刻令您印象深刻/震撼人心？

5) Apart from what you told, are there any other memorable experience? Could you tell more about these moments? 除了您刚讲述的这些，还有哪些难忘的经历吗？

6) What do you think are the possible reasons for the power of these experiences? 您认为是什么原因使得这趟旅行如此震撼人心，如此难以忘怀？

About transformation outcomes:

7) Did you learn anything from this trip? 这次旅行教会了您哪些/您从这次旅行中有学到些什么吗？

8) Have you developed any new understandings about yourself? Moreover, about the world around you? 通过这次旅行，您对自己有一些新的了解吗？或者，对您周围的一切，对这个世界有什么新的理解吗？

9) Have you gained any specific knowledge or skills from the trip? Please describe them to me. 通过这次旅行，您有获得一些新的知识或者技能吗？可以仔细描述一下吗？

10) Did you do anything differently after you came back home? 在您结束旅行返回以后，有没有做一些跟以往（旅行前）不一样的事情？

11) How did you feel about yourself after this travel experience? How has it affected your sense of independence? Self-esteem? 这次旅行之后，您对自己的感觉如何？这次旅行是如何影响您的自信心和自尊心的？

12) How did this travel experience impact your views of being happy? 这次旅行影响了您对待"快乐"的态度吗/这次旅行影响了您对"幸福感"的观念吗？

13) What else do you want to add that is also related to your life-changing journey? 关于您的人生之旅，您有什么想补充的吗？

About transformation processing:

14) As we discussed earlier, you have gained considerable positive outcomes from this trip. Have you ever thought of why you can gain these benefits? 正如我们前面探讨过的，这次旅行确实让您收获了一些积极的成果，您有没有想过为什么会有这些收获？

15) Did you experience any cultural shock or felt disoriented or uncomfortable at times? 这次旅行中，您是否经历过任何文化冲击，或有时感到茫然迷失或不舒服？

16) Is there anything you would like to share with us about your social contacts in the trip? How have these contacts contributed to the benefits you indicated earlier? 可以聊一聊您在旅行中的社会交往吗？这些交往对您之前指出的一些积极变化有促进作用吗？

17) How did you digest everything that occurred during your trip by engaging in self-reflection? (Hints: by writing a diary, engaging in discussion with other travelers) 您是如何通过自我反省来消化旅行中发生的一切的？(提示：写日记，与其他旅行者进行讨论）。

18) Have you gained any benefits that were highly relevant to your previous experience or own personal characteristics? If so, what are these personal attributes and how do they contribute to your positive changes? 您觉得这些影响或改变与您之前的经历或者自己的一些个人特征有关系吗？如果有，这些经历或者个人特征是什么，它们是如何促成您的积极变化的？

19) What would you like a friend to know if he or she was contemplating a trip similar to yours? 如果一个朋友正在考虑进行与您类似的旅行，您希望他或她了解什么？或者您想要告诉他或她什么？

20) Is there anything else that you would like to add, maybe something that I did not ask for but that you think is very important? 您还有什么需要补充的吗，也许是我没有问到的，但您认为非常重要的东西？尤其是关于您这次旅行以及您发生的改变。

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