The Pursuit of Freedom and Its Risks: The Dreams and Dilemmas of Young Chinese Backpackers

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To my family

Abstract

This study examines how backpacking, an activity originating from Western societies, is perceived and practised by the post-1980s generation in China. By locating backpackers' travel experiences within the context of the circumstances of their life and relating it to wider society, this study not only illustrates the changes and diversity of backpacker culture by providing empirical evidence from China, but also shows how the younger generation living through substantial social transformation reflect on themselves and wider society.

This research employs qualitative methods, exploring Chinese backpackers' characters and life choices, as well as the emergence of backpacking within China. There are two key questions for this study: firstly, how is backpacking perceived and practised by young Chinese people? Secondly, are there any differences among young backpackers regarding travel motivations and life attitudes? Yunnan Province is the primary fieldwork site, and two field trips were conducted there in 2014 and 2015. Thirty semi-structured in-depth interviews with backpackers were conducted in order to examine young backpackers' travel experiences, as well as their personal life attitudes. Participant observation was also employed as a way to investigate backpackers' interaction and travel behaviours. Six focus groups, made up of non-backpackers, offer comparative perspectives regarding backpacking from young people who share similar social circumstances and cultural context with travellers.

This study reveals that the popularity of backpacking can be understood as primarily due to how the activity represents 'freedom' and 'independence' within the context of China. Backpacking is not merely a consumption-led mobility, but also widely employed as a process of reflexive awareness by young Chinese people. Four types of backpackers, namely the amateur, the dreamer, the escaper and the alternative seeker, are identified by this study, indicating the diversity of backpacking in China. The amateur and the dreamer acknowledge the vital role of home and consistent and stable employment in their lives; as a result, backpacking is adopted as a way to escape from the daily routine and find self-fulfilment through a meaningful activity. However, the escaper and the alternative seeker tend to question mainstream values and the traditional expectations and conventions; accordingly, their journeys seek to examine the self and help find a personal way to measure success and

happiness in lives. Particularly, alternative seekers find life on the road more interesting than a stable life in a city. Accordingly, they extend backpacking to a way of living and develop their own individual routines.

Backpacking becomes a debate amongst young people regarding the norms and values of a worthwhile life, and reflects the profound cultural and social change taking place within contemporary China. Traditional expectations and conventions, namely stages within one's life, such as getting a job, settling down in a city, getting married and having children, are questioned and challenged. Most participants in this study are understood to possess respect for backpackers who pursue freedom and their dreams, as 'freedom' is perceived to represent strong individual capabilities and critical thinking. However, they also realise that anxiety consistently accompanies this freedom, particularly within an individualised society such as China's. In general, the conflict between individual interests/desires and the family/social obligations is highlighted by participants. As a result, the term 'staged individualism' is coined by this study, demonstrating how the Chinese path of individualism may force the young generation to separate their lives into different stages, defining different purposes for each stage, as a way to balance individual interests/desires and family/social obligations.

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Authors declaration

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow.

Signature:

Printed Name Jia Xie

Abbreviations

B&Bs	Bed and Breakfast
BBS	Bulletin Board System
COO	The Chief Operating Officer
CPC	Communist Party of China
GBP	British Pound
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HI	Hostelling International
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
ISTC	International Student Travel Confederation
IYHF	International Youth Hostel Federation
SOE	State-Owned Enterprises
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNWTO	United Nations World Tourism Organization
WeChat	The popular messaging app in China
Weibo	Sina Weibo, a Chinese microblogging website
YHA China	Youth Hostel Association of China

1. Introduction

1.1. Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to examine and understand the popularity of backpacking among the post-1980s generation in China. During recent years, backpacking has gained increasing popularity among young Chinese people, whilst consistently presented as a primarily Western phenomenon. Thus, it is not surprising that the experience of Chinese backpackers, and the growing backpacker culture in China, have not been fully addressed by academics and researchers alike.

This thesis seeks to contribute to academic knowledge, through an investigation into how this activity - originating from Western societies - is perceived and practised in contemporary China. In addition, this thesis explores how the popularity of backpacking in China may reflect the changing generational character(s) of the younger generations inhabiting a society undergoing a transformation. This thesis adopts a comparative perspective of backpackers and non-backpackers; this has never been used in previous research on the subject, making the work crucial to developing understandings of the focus. By comparing backpackers' experiences and life choices to those of their contemporaries, the research is able to gain a comprehensive understanding of backpacker culture in China, whilst examining the extent to which backpacking can be considered as an alternative way of living to Chinese conventions. In doing so, the research aims to provide an original ethnographic report on contemporary China, through the eyes of the post-80s generation.

This chapter provides an overview of the research topic. The first section presents the research context of the work, including three distinct parts. The first part introduces the emergence of a backpacker culture in China; the second illustrates the relevant changes that have occurred in Chinese society, since the late 1980s. The third part presents the distinguished characteristics of the young generation in China. Following the research context, the second section of the chapter states the research objectives and outlines the contributions the research makes to the topic. The third section outlines the organisation of the remaining chapters in the thesis.

1.2. Research background

1.2.1 The emergence of a backpacker culture in China

> *Half a century after western hippies began backpacking from Europe to Asia on the old Silk Road, young Chinese backpackers are discovering the joys of hitting the road.*
>
> (Cottrell, 2014)

This is the beginning of Christopher Cottrell's article *Young Chinese backpackers hit the road*, which was published on 11th October 2014 by *The Guardian*. The article suggests that there has been an emergence of a young backpacking generation in China, who seek to take long-term, independent trips to foreign countries. The article introduced a 33-year-old Chinese woman, who backpacked across China and India after deciding to leave her office job. Three days later, *China Daily*, the official English-language newspaper published by the central Chinese government, republished the article on its website (China Daily, 2014). Later in 2016, *China News Service*, the second largest state-owned news agency in China, published its report (in English) on young Chinese backpackers, stating that 'budget traveling-- whether it be hitchhiking, couchsurfing or camping and eating simple -- has become a trend for the younger generation of Chinese travellers' (Mo, 2016). The author of the report interviewed two backpackers: Xu Jing, who had previously quit her nine-to-five office job and travelled to Africa on a budget, with an average daily expense of less than 60 yuan. [1] Wu Fangzhou, a university student, travelled through 13 Chinese provinces in 50 days, spending only 4000 yuan. In 2016, *People's Daily* - the largest national newspaper in China - published a commentary arguing that budget travellers 'get ready before setting off' (Xu, 2016); in the article, the author noted how budget travel has become extremely popular among young people, in particular college students. However, the author warned that dangers such as safety issues and food poisoning, as well as conflicts caused by cultural differences, might be a risk if travellers are not well prepared.

[1] This is approximately 7 GBP, with an exchange rate of 8.6. Unless stated, the number of Chinese yuan will not be converted into British pounds in the following sections.

The emergence of backpacker tourism in China is not new. Since the late 1990s, backpacking has become popular among the urban middle class, emerging alongside a large number of outdoor adventure clubs that have appeared in major cities in China (Zhu, 2007). However, the new development of backpacker tourism can be understood to expand beyond the urban middle class, as greater numbers of young people becoming involved with the activity and lifestyle. In 2010, 450 questionnaires were distributed in youth hostels across China. Among 416 respondents, the majority of Chinese backpackers sat in the age group of 21 to 35 years old (78.6%) (Chen et al., 2014). In 2012, Yu (2012) received 449 questionnaires answered by Chinese backpackers; the results showed that the 21 to 25 age group held the largest number of Chinese backpackers (35. 9%), followed by the age group of 26 to 30 (27.8%). In the meantime, countries such as New Zealand (in 2008) and Australia (in 2015) agreed on the Working Holiday Visa with the Chinese government,[2] subsequently allowing thousands of young Chinese citizens between 18 and 30 years old – and possessing tertiary education and English language skills – to experience a working holiday in New Zealand and Australia. As a result, travel books on backpacking have become bestsellers in China, and concepts such as the 'gap year' have been introduced into the Chinese language (Wu, 2015). It is noteworthy that the majority of young backpackers can be seen to be the *'baling hou'* (八零后, the post-1980s generation), who have grown up with, and responded to, the abrupt social changes incurred by the Reform and Opening-Up Policy (Lian, 2014). According to the aforementioned article by *China News Service*, there were more than 77 million independent Chinese outbound tourists in 2014, and 62.4 per cent were found to be aged between 21 and 30.

The second development of backpacker tourism is the popularity of budget travel. Independent travellers jostle for cheap beds in hostels, hitchhiking as a means to travel, whilst eating street food. The term *'qiong you'* (穷游, budget travel) has become fashionable in recent years; the term is a combination of *'qiong'* (poor) and *'you'* (travel), promoting an idea that *'qiong yi ke you'* (穷亦可游, anyone can travel - despite being economically poor). The essence of *'qiong you'* is to spend as little money as possible when travelling. For example, the news reported by *China News Service* (Mo, 2016) – mentioned above – indicates how a *'qiong youer'* (穷游

[2] It is a special visa scheme launched by Australia and New Zealand to encourage young travellers from all over the world to immerse in a new country and spend a year or two working there.

者，budget traveller) spent around 7 GBP per day when travelling in Africa. The term '*qiong youer'* is often used to refer to long-term independent budget travellers, who are distinguished from outdoor enthusiasts - the pioneering backpackers in China - although both are recognised as backpackers. The tourism consultant website Qyer.com (穷游网) plays an important role in the development of budget travel, as the founder of the term in China. In 2004, a Chinese student, who had previously studied in Germany, founded the company, seeking to cater for China's outbound tourists desiring self-organised travel in Europe. Qyer.com self-identifies as a kind of *Lonely Planet*, the world's iconic travel guides, during the Internet age (Xiang, 2013).

Furthermore, one recent study (Xu and Wu, 2016) found the emergence of lifestyle entrepreneurs and working tourists in China. Together with retired 'snowbirds'[3], they were recognised as undertaking 'lifestyle mobility' in China. The majority of lifestyle entrepreneurs and working tourists in the study were young and well-educated, moving from the most developed areas of China to Yunnan, a world famous backpacking destination (Lonely Planet, 2017). In contrast, lifestyle entrepreneurs were generally older and had previously held white-collar jobs; subsequently, they moved to Yunnan and opened small businesses, seeking a slower pace of life. In the study, working tourists were generally university students and long-term backpackers; they sometimes worked for lifestyle entrepreneurs. The two groups were interdependent, forming their own communities in Yunnan.

The continually changing profile of Chinese backpackers in recent years not only indicates a growing number of young backpackers in the country, but also demonstrates an emerging diversity and increasing heterogeneity of backpacker tourism. As seen, backpackers prefer different modes of transportation, accommodation, destination, and activities; they travel for different reasons. In fact, these changes are consistent with global trends (Hannam et al., 2010; Richards, 2015). However, previous research focusing on Chinese backpackers primarily focused on their demographic and behavioural characteristics through studies employing quantitative methods, but arguably paid little attention to the reasons responsible for the identified increase in young backpackers and budget travellers in China. The relationship between social, cultural and technological changes occurring in recent years, and the development of backpacker tourism in China, has remained unexplored within the academic

[3] It refers to 'retired people migrating south to enjoy the sunshine along the beach while seeking recreational opportunities' (Xu and Wu, 2016, p.512).

research. As this study aims to examine the popularity of backpacking as a social phenomenon, it is necessary to examine the dramatic social changes that have taken place in China since the 1980s.

1.2.2 Age of ambition and age of confusion: A changing society

The development of backpacker tourism in China has been influenced by a variety of different elements, explored here. The most important background relates to economic reform beginning in China in the 1980s.The booming leisure industry and rising consumer culture demonstrate how the Chinese population – in particular the recently developing middle class – have gained greater amounts of disposable income. As China's cities grow more prosperous, diverse lifestyles have begun to proliferate. The Internet not only introduces a global culture, but also encourages social groups to be formed and sustained in a new way. The Chinese population create online communities based on individual interest; in turn, individuals enjoy greater space to pursue what they want – however, they also face fierce competition within the country's labour market. Although China has developed rapidly during the post-reform era, social conflicts also have intensified over the last decade; these challenges have resulted in a significant amount of the Chinese population expressing criticism of the consequences of this reform.

To conclude, when the institutional mechanisms in a centrally-planned society break down and transform, the whole population is affected. This part of this thesis subsequently discusses four aspects that are most relevant to the research topic: (1) economic reform in regard to the neo-liberal approach; (2) globalisation and the popularity of the Internet; (3) an emerging middle class and consumer culture; (4) social problems generated by dramatic social change.

After the founding of The People's Republic of China, the central government adopted a planned economy that tightly controlled production and distribution from the top. The Communist Party of China (CPC) governed the nation through its monopoly of both political and economic power. All social institutions, such as factories and local governments, were all approached as parts of the whole state. Individuals were supposed to sacrifice personal

interests in exchange for proposed collective interests. As Yan concludes, the state 'fixed the individual into an almost immutable position with a standard biography' (2010, p.492), with state socialism and nationalism as the primarily promoted ideologies. As a result, China's population became heavily dependent on the state in regard to all aspects of social, political and economic life – thus affecting individuals and groups on both a micro and macro scale.

However, the situation was transformed by the market-oriented reform that began in the 1980s. CPC; this was led by Deng Xiaoping, who decided to implement the Reform and Opening-Up Policy. The policy sought to develop the economy by introducing a free market into the planned economy, as well as to 'open' China to the outside world and international stage (Xu, 2011). In rural areas of the country, all collective property - except for farmland - was privatised as a result. Individual villagers were allowed to sell their surplus agricultural products in cities, and find part-time jobs in towns during the slack season.

Since the mid-1990s, productivity levels have increased in rural areas, resulting in larger numbers of surplus labour, while the demand for labour has increased rapidly in urban areas, due to the development of private sectors, such as manufacturing companies and real estate. Therefore, millions of villagers left their homes to find jobs in cities; as a result, they became migrant workers – possessing a larger income than peasants who relied solely on farming. According to China's National Bureau of Statistics (2013), the number of migrant workers was approximately 236 million in 2013. Significantly, since 2010, post-80s migrant workers have made up more than the half of the migrant worker population in China. These young migrant workers are better educated than their parents, and have been increasingly exposed to television, mobile phones, and the Internet (Ngai and Lu, 2010). As a result, they have arguably been profoundly influenced by city life and globalised cultures.

In urban areas, state-owned enterprises (SOE) were provided with greater freedoms from the tightly controlled system, and managers were able to plan from a local perspective. In addition, changes were made to the ownership structure of some SOEs; numerous small or inefficient SOEs were privatised, divested, or closed. As a result, extremely large numbers of workers lost their jobs. Meanwhile, local governments began to compete for development through the support of the private sector and attracting investments, in particular from overseas firms. Speeding up the marketisation of the service sector, such as the tourism industry, also brought

large financial profits to local authorities. In the late 1990s, the state launched three major reform projects: the privatisation of housing, the marketisation of education, and the marketisation of medical care. As the thesis outlines, these elements crucial to welfare reform have had a large and significant impact on the lives of the Chinese population.

China's reform, represented by processes of privatisation, deregulation and marketisation, coincided with the expansion of neoliberalism in the Western world. When the interventionist approach of the Keynesian welfare state faced challenges in the 1970s, the United Kingdom – led then by Margaret Thatcher - and the United States, led then by Ronald Reagan, turned to neoliberalism as an alternative. Subsequently, they each called for the free movement of goods, services, capital, and money across national borders. Neoliberalism later became a global ideology with the support of the Washington Consensus[4] (Ren, 2010). China's 2001 accession to the World Trade Organisation was regarded as a milestone in the nation's path to modernisation and globalisation; the 2008 Beijing Olympics further announced the nation's commitment to globalisation and participation within the international community (Clark, 2012).

The Chinese population - in particular young people - have been substantially exposed to Western culture through globalised, multinational companies (Zhang, 2005), fast food restaurants (Yan, 2000), foreign films, novels, television programs, popular music (Clark, 2012) and numerous foreign brand advertisements (Wang, 2008). In particular, as more and more people in China become regularly connected to the Internet, the population is increasingly able to access the rest of the world online. Since the mid-1990s, the government has promoted public access to the Internet; however, the Chinese government continues to control and censor the Internet. Up until the end of 2014, the number of Chinese Internet users was approximately 649 million, which is close to the half of the national population. The ratio of male to female users was estimated to be 1.27. The largest age group was 20-29, occupying 31.5% overall (CNNIC, 2015). Evidently, the proliferating use of the Internet in China has permeated people's daily lives through aspects such as communication, the acquisition and

[4] The phrase is invented by John Williamson in 1990. Originally, it describes a list of ten reforms that agreed in Washington, aiming to reform Latin American countries in the post-Cold War era. The reform primarily focuses on privatisation, deregulation and trade liberalisation. Reforms also happened in regions such as Sub-Saharan Africa and Eastern Europe (Rodrik and World Bank, 2006).

distribution of information, and public engagement in regard to entertainment and consumption.

Under the circumstances, a vast range of online subculture communities has formed, exemplified by the birth of 'donkey friends' in China (驴友, outdoor adventure tourists) (Lim, 2009). Influenced by Western backpacker culture, Chinese independent travellers - particularly outdoor enthusiasts - began to organise their trips independently, with the help of the Internet. Through many platforms, they shared relevant information and found travel companions in the cyber-world. They frequently used a bulletin board system (BBS) and blogs to organise their trips; subsequently, leading figures in online communities became celebrities, who excelled in self-organised travel and promoted the lifestyles associated with it. Donkey friends became a term used by certain groups of travellers, to distinguish themselves from other bloggers (Kristensen, 2013).

As mentioned earlier, the economic reform also resulted in the transformation of social classes in China. Cadres, managers and entrepreneurs[5] – advantaged groups in the pre-reform period – remained superior afterwards, due to their close relationship with the ruling party. Goodman (1996) labelled them 'the new rich'. Simultaneously, a new group emerged, resulting primarily from economic reform and the expansion of higher education, including salaried professionals, technical and administrative employees - now referred to as the new middle class. Accordingly, China's middle class is made up of white-collar workers, well-educated professionals, and those at the top of the social hierarchy in terms of wealth (Yang, 2010). The middle class benefits from this social reform, and thus tends to support the authorities. They are often criticised as being politically conservative; however, they are considered to be the pioneers of consumption in China (Zhou and Qin, 2010). Distinguished from the elder generation who possess memories of past scarcity, and are influenced by asceticism, the middle class in China does not hesitate to spend money on luxury goods and leisure activities. Furthermore, it is contended that they approach consumption as a way to show personal ability, create individual identity, and sustain and develop privileged social status (Wang, 2008; Goodman and Zang, 2008).

[5] According to Goodman, the state created certain managerial and professional occupations in the 1950s for administration and developing economy, although they were not regarded as middle class according to Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought (Goodman, 2008).

The development of consumption in China has been remarkable over the past decades. The Chinese population now has greater disposable income, whilst the central government continues to enact policies encouraging private, personal consumption - in order to stimulate the economy. For example, in 1995, a 40-hour work-week was launched, ensuring a two-day weekend for all workers. Beginning in 1999, three weeklong holidays - known as the *'huangjin zhou'* (黄金周, 'Golden Weeks') - were established. The Golden Weeks have contributed greatly to the expansion of the domestic tourism market. The Chinese people's enthusiasm for leisure travel is considered to be astonishing; for example, in 2008, one of the three Golden Weeks had to be cancelled due to overcrowding at tourist attractions, and vast traffic congestion across the country.

Thus, the thesis contends that the transformation of consumption culture is noteworthy. During the period of a socialist planned economy in China, the state promoted asceticism and egalitarianism, given the fact that the majority of the population struggled to secure food and clothing. Private consumption was stigmatised as 'bourgeois liberalisation' during the pre-reform era (Wang, 2012). However, within post-reform China, increased consumption led to the rise of a tangible consumer culture in China; this transformation is described as 'the consumer revolution' (Davis, 2000). It refers to the fact that ordinary citizens could nurture dreams and social networks that challenged official discourse and conventions through millions of daily commercial transactions. Yan (2010) argues that the market-oriented reforms put in place brought an awareness of individual rights, eventually leading to various forms of rights assertion behaviour, exemplified by consumer protection. It is noteworthy that the Internet has also played a crucial role in these activities; for example, fighting for consumer rights - such as the 'cracking down on fake goods' campaigns launched by individuals - was one of the primary forms of online citizen activism, when ordinary Chinese citizens began to get access to the Internet in the mid-1990s (Yang, 2009).

However, the thesis questions how liberated this revolution could actually be, given the significant distinction between economic and political activity in China. Although economic reform in China takes a neo-liberal approach, CPC never allows for a liberal approach regarding politics. Furthermore, the middle class in China is primarily politically conservative, as mentioned above. At the same time, critiques of consumerism, such as its promotion of money worship, and the commodification of social relations, have emerged over the last two

decades. This thesis argues that the situation generates anxiety and discontentment in contemporary Chinese society; this will be discussed next.

First of all, as the state and the Communist Party continue to control the economy and the majority of resources, a monopoly has resulted in vast inequality and corruption. Li (2005) uses an inverted 'T' to describe the situation wherein a large low-income population sits at the bottom, while a small minority, who occupies disproportionately large amounts of wealth, sits at the top. Sociologists at Tsinghua University (2012) argue that China is in a 'transition trap', in which the energy and impetus to push ahead with necessary reforms are lost. The powerful vested interests obstructed further reforms in order to maximise their own benefits. In this case, greater numbers of people have called for social equality and social justice, rather than an overall rapid economic development. According to the *Blue Book of China's Society,* an annual report of a national survey issued by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, the issue of income inequality was the Chinese public's primary concern in 2013 (Li et al., 2013).

At the same time, the increasing price of commodities and the privatisation of the public sector has made life more difficult from 2005 onwards (Wang, 2008). Urban middle class families are 'stumbling on the rocky road' (Yang, 2010), due to the high costs of housing loans and child education. Peasants in rural areas and migrant workers in the city are experiencing relative deprivation. The gap of annual per capita disposable income between those living in rural and urban areas has continued to widen from 2000 onwards (Jacka et al., 2013). Migrant workers are consistently discriminated by the state through the household registration system, receiving far less social welfare, and are marginalised in cities with poor living and working conditions (Zhou and Cai, 2007; Ngai and Lu, 2010). Due to unprecedented levels of urbanisation, vast overcrowding, poor sanitation, unsafe construction, air and water pollution, as well as a lack of open space, were all serious problems for residents (Logan and Fainstein, 2007). From 1949 to 2011, the population in urban areas increased from 58 million to 691 million, and the number of cities increased from about 130 in 1949 to over 650 in 2010 (Zhang, 2014, p.9).

The end of communist society, and growing cultural diversity, greatly transformed the population's lifestyles and values. Moral panic over the cultural consequences of market transition has long existed in public discourse since the reform. In the 1990s, young women

who ate the 'rice bowl of youth' (Zhang, 1999, p.95) received widespread public attention. A booming service industry, in areas such as advertising, real estate, travel agencies and modelling, creates many job opportunities. However, these occupations are considered as a *'qingchun fan'* (青春饭, rice bowl of youth), fetishising appearance and ephemerality (Zhang, 1999). Studies on dating and marriage patterns also highlight the commodification of intimate relationships, resulting in continual tensions and conflicts between partners (Farrer, 2002; Wang and Nehring, 2014). Moral panic can be regarded in relation to other aspects of daily life, such as social distrust (Yan, 2009a) and the food safety scares (Duggan, 2015). According to the *Blue Book of China's Society*, since 2010 'moral bankruptcy' has consistently sat in the top ten social problems within the national survey (Li and Chen, 2010; Li et al., 2013). A new set of cultural values has not yet been established, while the past tended to disappear or 'melt into the air' (Berman, 1982).

To conclude, China has been changed significantly by the reform. What was once considered to be a poor, Communist, 'backwards' country, by 2011 became the world's second-largest economy (McCurry and Kollewe, 2011). However, a large number of social problems also resulted from processes of development. Moreover, the dramatic social change has evidently created a generational shift. In China, the old structure overlaps and coexists with the new, as well as the social norms and values. Growing up against the background of this dramatic social change, and as the product of the 'only-child' policy, the post-80s generation is a generation in transition. Their characteristics provide a clue to understanding the choices and lives of this study's young backpackers.

1.2.3 A generation in transition: Rise and struggle of the post-80s

The term *'baling hou'* (八零后, the post-1980s generation), first coined by the mass media, is now widely used within academia; it refers to approximately 200 million Chinese people who were born between 1980 and 1989 (Rosen, 2009). A similar term, *'jiuling hou'* (九零后, the post-90s generation), was subsequently employed to refer to those who were born between 1990 and 1999. According to the 2010 nationwide population census, there were 403 million people in China who were born between 1980 and 1999, constituting around 30% of the entire

population (National Bureau of Statistics, 2010). The Western equivalent of the post-80s and post-90s generations are known as millennials, born between the early 1980s and mid-1990s. Most millennials have reached young adulthood by the early 21st century. The young people in the study are primarily part of the post-80s and post-90s generations. For the sake of convenience, they are referred to as the post-80s generation unless noted otherwise.

As a generation born in the first decade of economic reform, the grown-ups of the post-80s generation mirror China's economic reform and social transformation over the last three decades. Firstly, economic reform since the 1980s has provided a relatively affluent life for this generation; they experienced the development of society and enjoyed its rich achievements. The majority of this generation, particularly in urban areas, had little memory of extreme poverty or financial deficiency, at least in their childhood and adolescence. The rise of consumer culture in the 1990s synchronised with this generation's adolescence. The consumer culture has thus largely influenced the generation's behaviours and values. This is why former generations believe that the post-80s youth are superficial and materialistic (Rosen, 2009). Furthermore, the post-80s generation is the only-child generation, due to the one-child policy that prevailed in China during their youth. Accordingly, as a generation growing up in a relatively open and affluent society, with extensive love and care from parents, the post-80s generation was always compared to 'little emperors' by their parents and the media during childhood (Fong, 2004; Yan, 2006; Cockain, 2012b). Considering how traditional Chinese society valued the elderly most (Fei, 1992), the post-80s generation gained unprecedented high status as children.

However, images and understandings of the post-80s in China have changed over the past two decades; some of these images are even self-contradictory. For example, on the one hand, they have been long characterised as self-centred, individualistic and rebellious (Rosen, 2009). As Yan suggested, 'it is my choice to do whatever I want and go where I want' had been the motto of this young generation (Yan, 2006). On the other hand, they were found to rely heavily on their parents, unable to overcome the gap between ambition and reality, or bear the hardships of the real world. Accordingly, they were referred to as 'frail pragmatists' (Yan, 2006), part of a 'strawberry generation' (Lian, 2014). In addition, on the one hand, their individualistic and pragmatic attitudes towards life were regarded as cynical and apolitical, while possessing a 'lack of idealism' (Yan, 2013). The post-80s who graduated from leading universities were

referred to as 'sophisticated egoists' by the famous Professor Qian Liqun from Peking University. He contended that higher education in China lacked humanism, and that students were educated to be selfish and reckless with greed (He, 2012). On the other hand, the Sichuan earthquake in 2008 seemingly challenged this statement, as tens of thousands of the post-80s generation – then in their twenties – went to the disaster areas as volunteers. Most of these volunteer groups were initiated through the Internet and from the bottom-up (Rosen, 2009). In addition, the World Value Survey revealed that the post-80s generation indeed possesses a more diversified value system compared to the previous, and that the young generation is less likely to work with the sole motivation of money (Lian, 2014). Therefore, it is necessary to take a more in-depth look at the lives of the post-80s generation, in order to better understand these contradicting statements.

The first issue focuses on the post-80s' relationships with their parents. As mentioned above, the post-80s generation have been widely criticised as self-centred, because they have been used to being the sole receivers of love and investments from parents and grandparents (Fong, 2004; Yan, 2006). However, while they received this intensive love and care from parents and grandparents, they were also put under huge pressure by their families. As Fong (2004) highlights in her research on China's only-child generation, the previously identified processes of privatisation - relating to social welfare - forced Chinese parents to view their children as a form of retirement insurance. Therefore, raised with extreme care and high expectations, the only way for these children to fulfil their filial duties was to achieve academic and employment success. However, parents' expectations could often put pressure on the child, which eventually resulted in intergenerational tensions (Fong, 2004). Even after attending college, the pressure of 'moving up' may never disappear for the child. By pursuing a postgraduate degree or studying abroad, the young generation was striving to fulfil middle class aspirations: a big house, a car, a stable family, and disposable income for leisure activities (Liu, 2006). However, this dream is not easy to realise, due to the widening gap between ambition and opportunity during which post-80s enter adulthood, which will be discussed later.

The second issue focuses on the expansion of higher education. The implementation of a nine-year compulsory education system in the 1980s, as well as the expansion of higher education in the 1990s, meant that the post-80s generation has a better educational background than

generations before. The proportion of people born after 1980 and obtaining a university-preparatory type education or a university degree is more than double of those in the pre-1980 era (Lian, 2014). However, one consequence of the expansion of higher education was it destroyed the idea of a graduate elite. For the younger post-80s and post-90s generation who entered the labour market in the 2010s, 2013 was considered to be the 'hardest job-hunting season' (China Economic Website, 2013), with the largest population of college graduates in history at 69.9 million, and even less possessing proposed job positions. Sociologist Lian Si coined the term *'yizu'* (蚁族, ant tribe) in 2009, referring to college graduates who lived on low income or desperately searched for jobs in big cities, living in high-density areas with poor conditions in order to save money. The estimated population of this group was around 3 million, the majority being post-80s in their twenties with humble family backgrounds (Lian, 2009). Presently, the 'ant tribe' is growing year by year, and has expanded to elite university graduates, postgraduates and people in their thirties (Xinhua News, 2011).

While a number of college graduates from underprivileged families became the 'ant tribe', children from families with privileged backgrounds were sent abroad to obtain a college degree from countries perceived to be economically developed. According to the Chinese Ministry of Education, in 1998, there were only 11,000 students who left China on a self-financing basis, but the number increased eleven fold, to 117,000 in 2002. In 2007, self-financing students made up 90% of all student migrants: 129,000 out of 144,000 (Xiang and Shen, 2009). Accordingly, currently in post-reform China, the opportunities for young people are not equally distributed, due to the reproduction and stratification of social classes (Xiang and Shen, 2009).

The third issue focuses on the post-80s' relationship with their country. Although the post-80s are deeply influenced by Western culture, this does not necessarily mean that they are pro-West. For example, one study of Chinese students who had lived in the UK revealed that the experience abroad generated processes of critical reflection on the nature of both Chinese and Western societies (Philo, 2010). Witnessing the 'coming back' of Hong Kong and Macau in the 1990s, and the success of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, this generation has experienced China's prosperity and its rising influence within international society first-hand. The post-80s thus tends to be more critical of the West than previous generations (Rosen, 2009).

The cosmopolitan view of the post-80s generation is not only nourished by travelling abroad, but also by using the Internet. As mentioned earlier, up until the end of 2014, the largest age group of Chinese Internet users was 20-29 (CNNIC, 2015). For the post-80s generation, the Internet has replaced mass media forms such as newspapers and television, serving as the primary media source of news and information, since they were teenagers. In particular, the Internet is a virtual world of relative freedom for young people, whilst other media is more easily controlled by authoritative figures. Young Internet users find creative ways to work around official manipulation and form a range of connections with others, with the support of the bulletin board system, blogs and microblogs (Clark, 2012). As aforementioned, most of the pioneering Chinese backpackers - namely the donkey friends - were part of the well-educated urban middle class who had formed online communities (Zhu, 2007). Living in a traditional society organised by consanguinity and regionalism (Fei, 1992), the post-80s generation grew up with a new spirit: finding like-minded people across the world, through the Internet.

The fourth issue focuses on the changes of value regarding career choices and life attitudes. The social change did produce marked contrasts between the life experiences and views of young people and older generations, evidenced by a number of surveys in different areas within the country (Whyte, 2005; Sun and Wang, 2010; Lian, 2014; Chen and Lian, 2015). For example, the World Values Survey (2005–2008 Wave) (Lian, 2014) conducted research on how Chinese citizens - at different ages - choose their work in relation to the following aspects: 1) a good income; 2) a stable job with no risk; 3) working with people you like; 4) undertaking an important job. Although participants agreed that a good income was the most important factor in life, there were two distinct differences between the pre-80s and post-80s, as discussed next in the thesis.

Firstly, there exists a difference regarding job security. The proportion of those within previous generations who cared about job security was approximately 35 percent, while the percentage for post-80s was only 23 percent. It was possible for people who lived in pre-reform China to sustain the same job with the same firm or institution throughout their entire adult lives until retirement. However, their children grew up in an entirely different world. The privatisation process has been accompanied by the change of value; subjects are requested to submit themselves to self-optimisation and pursue a range of self-managing goals in daily life (Ong and Zhang, 2008; Liu, 2008). The ‘emancipated individual’ (Bauman, 2001) must take

responsibility for one's own life. For the post-80s generation, the changing nature of the labour market makes it difficult to maintain the same job throughout one's entire life. At the same time, they do not necessarily value the idea that a permanent contract is a good contract.

Secondly, the post-80s generation believed that working with people you like (20 percent) and doing a meaningful job (21 percent) were of great significance. For former generations, these two factors were only approximately 10 percent each. When compared with their parents, the post-80s generation can be understood to hold a more individualistic attitude towards work. They value a significant work-life balance and a respectful office environment. Another survey based on a sample, including 1201 post-80s, showed that privacy, responsibility, interdependence, achievement and belongings (in sequence) were the top five factors valued by the generation (Song et al., 2009). The post-80s generation tends to judge their jobs and lives based on dimensions other than solely financial capital; this is in turn crucial to the emergence of an alternative lifestyle such as backpacking. Moreover, their primary considerations of responsibility, interdependence, achievement and belonging, can explain how they became proactive volunteers in the aftermath of the Sichuan Earthquake.

To summarise these surveys (Whyte, 2005; Sun and Wang, 2010; Lian, 2014; Chen and Lian, 2015), the previous generation – greatly influenced by socialism and communism – expressed more support for public property and comradeship than privacy and friendship. The younger generation - influenced more by marketisation - tended to believe that self-development is much more important than making contributions to the country. Furthermore, younger generations are more likely to live according to their own lifestyles, regardless of what others think or hold. Thus, the young were thought less likely to follow traditional collective ideology; clearly, these value differences between generations may result in potential conflicts within a family containing different priorities, as later demonstrated in this work.

From 2010, as the post-80s generation began to enter adulthood, they have faced many difficulties resulting from class closure, as stated earlier. Within public discourse, the tension between '*fuerdai'*, *'guanerdai'* (富二代，官二代, the second generation of the rich, the second generation of the cadre) and *'qiongerdai'* (穷二代, the second generation of the poor) intensified. This tension echoes the reproduction and stratification of social classes in current Chinese society (Xiang and Shen, 2009). The Chinese population have found that the

possibility of mobilising into a higher social class was much smaller in 2010, when compared to the 1990s. There is a widening gap between aspirations and opportunities for young people. The older of the post-80s have entered their late twenties or early thirties today. As a result, the pressures of work and family life were great, due to buying a house, raising children, supporting parents (as an only child) - even if some post-80s had successfully become part of the professional middle class (Yang, 2010). For the younger post-80s, who had just entered the labour market in the 2010s, it was difficult to find a professional job, as stated above.

Accordingly, recent studies highlight how young Chinese people became pragmatic in job hunting. College graduates sometimes sacrificed intrinsic interests and marginalised personal interests for the sake of instrumental purposes (Hoffman, 2008). Many scholars noticed that this younger generation eagerly applied to be party members of CPC, and took the Civil Servants' Examination, although they sometimes criticised the party and government harshly on the Internet. Instead of patriotism, their motivation was pragmatic: to live a better life by entering the public sector (Rosen, 2004; Yan, 2006; Liu, 2008). In this case, some young people put 'working with people you like' and 'doing an important job' aside, and chose 'a stable job with no risk'. They were struggling between their ideals and reality, attempting to balance individual ambitions and the limited opportunities available to them.

Significantly, although young Chinese are often believed to be individualistic, this does not necessarily mean that they are isolated from families. On the contrary, as the singleton generation, the relationships formed between parents and children are often contended to be closer. The two parties must be interdependent on one another, because of the receding role of the state in individuals' lives, although there is always intergenerational tension due to cultural change, as suggested above, and parents' high expectations (Barbalet, 2016). Filial piety is reinterpreted and re-negotiated in today's Chinese family (Cockain, 2012a; Shen, 2016; Qi, 2016). In particular, as Qi (2016) suggests, today's filial relations are less concerned with authority, and more directed to financial and emotional support. As a result, the once unconditional duty of a son to obey and support his parents has fundamentally changed. Nowadays, parents' support of their children has become a precondition to some degree of children's' filial behaviour; as the thesis contends, this change has greatly affected young people's lives.

Accordingly, the post-80s generation struggles with many aspects, particularly as they are raised with such high expectations. However, opportunities are not equally distributed; post-80s recognise the importance of money, but their attitudes towards work and life are more diversified. They are individualistic compared to former generations, who have been taught to sacrifice the individual for greater society. They both conform to and challenge the social norm of filial obligations. The popularity of one novel, *Shanghai Baby*, among Chinese youth since its publication illustrates well the dilemma that young people in the country face: how to balance the conflict of one's individualistic values of materialism and progress with the family's interests of stability and security (Weber, 2002). In the study, Chinese backpackers constantly refer to this dilemma; thus, it will be discussed in the following chapters.

To conclude, the post-80s generation is in essence ambivalent. They are mobile subjects who are not forced to choose between modern and tradition approaches, living in an identified 'post-traditional' order (Giddens, 1991). In China, the old structure overlaps and coexists with the new, as well as the social norms and values. The younger generation lives somewhere in between, constructing a functional coexistence of individualistic and collectivist value systems (Weber, 2002). According to Cockain (2012c), the character of negotiation and the reflexive self is at the core of the post-80s generation; this is demonstrated through his observations:

> *Youths do ai guo (love their country) but they would not necessarily be prepared to die for it; youth do ai jia (love their families) but they would not necessarily marry or forsake marrying someone solely due to the wishes of their family; youth try to do well at school but do not imbue teachers with inherent status; and youths, though admiring people in media and popular culture, do not unquestioningly imbue them with hero status.*
>
> (Cockain, 2012c, p.166)

In addition, the post-reform generation has benefited from rapid economic growth and social development since the 1990s. However, they are also paying a heavy price for the unintended consequences of the Chinese approach to modernisation and individualisation, such as social inequality, moral bankruptcy and the environmental crisis. The post-80s generation, who are now entering adulthood, struggle in this social change. The popularity of backpacking among

the post-80s is placed in this social context. After introducing the social backgrounds and the characteristics of this generation, the next section will draw out the objectives and primary contributions of this study.

1.3. Research objectives and primary contributions

Dean MacCannel states that his study on modern tourists, 'with seriousness and respect', served 'as a new kind of ethnographic report on modern society' (1999, p.xv). He believes that by understanding the modern tourist, we gain access to understanding 'the process by which modernity, modernization, modern *culture* was establishing its empire on a global basis' (1999, p.xv). The objective of this study is to provide a new kind of ethnographic report on contemporary China, through the eyes of the post-80s generation. Although the number of backpackers is small compared to the whole population, backpackers serve as an indicator group in many aspects. The motivations, behaviours, as well as the experiences of young Chinese backpackers, are thought to reflect the unique social and cultural change taking place within contemporary China.

Firstly, by investigating how an activity originating from Western societies is perceived and practised within the context of China, the study aims to depict the individual's life choice in the broader context of individualisation and self-identity (Giddens, 1991; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Yan, 2009b; Elliott and Lemert, 2009). The choices and struggles of backpackers provide a window to more deeply understanding how the young generation reflects on themselves and wider society. In particular, this study focuses on young people who are in their transition period of life, such as entering the labour market and entering the marriage. Therefore, it provides a unique observation of how individuals establish themselves as independent adults. Young Chinese backpackers thus serve as an indicator to understanding individuals living through social transformation.

Secondly, backpacking has consistently been presented as a Western phenomenon over past decades, and the experience of Chinese backpackers and backpacker culture in China have not been fully addressed. The study aims to fill this gap, by scrutinising the profile, motivation,

behaviour and life experiences of Chinese backpackers via in-depth interviews and participant observation. Moreover, by exploring the differences between backpackers and non-backpackers, as well as the differences among backpackers themselves, this study tends to examine the diversity of backpacker culture and the differentiation of the post-80s generation in China. This study further illustrates the changes and diversity of backpacker culture by providing empirical evidence from China. As an activity perceived to originate from Western societies, backpacking has gained in popularity worldwide over the last few decades. Backpacker culture, to some extent, is a product of cross-cultural communication in the age of globalisation. However, because studies on non-western backpackers are rare, it is difficult to examine how backpacker culture changes, as it has expanded to other regions of the world. This study explores the characteristics of Chinese backpackers specifically, identifying the relevant social and cultural factors.

In extension, the research method design of this study contributes to tourism studies. The study employs qualitative methods in order to explore backpackers' life experiences and how they are influenced by these backpacking experiences, which has rarely examined by previous studies on Chinese backpackers. Moreover, it employs focus groups to examine how non-backpackers perceive backpackers, which is innovative in regard to the study of backpacker culture. In doing so, it provides a comparative perspective to explore the similarities and differences between the views of backpackers and non-backpackers, in regard to backpacking. By comparing backpackers' experiences and life choices to those of their contemporaries, this research is able to gain a comprehensive understanding of backpacker culture in China, and examine to what extent backpacking can be considered an alternative lifestyle, in both the individual's reality, and from the perspectives of others.

To conclude, by revealing the underlying reasons for the popularity of backpacking among the younger generation in China, this research aims to reveal the characteristics of the post-80s generation, and to further indicate how individuals' life attitudes and life chances are influenced by social transitions continually taking place in China. The study aims to explore how young people's views of life are shaped by a convergence of traditional culture, rising individualism, cross-culture communication and new technologies. In addition, the differences between backpackers and non-backpackers, as well as the differences among backpackers, reflect the differentiation of contemporary Chinese society over recent years, in particular

regarding education and occupation. Therefore, this study provides access to understanding the younger generation in China and contemporary Chinese society more broadly, as their backpacking activities can be understood as directly related to their beliefs, values and motivations.

1.4. Structure of the thesis

This thesis consists of eight chapters. Firstly, the Introductory Chapter, Chapter Two and Chapter Three illustrate the research background, relevant theories, and methods of this study. Chapter Two reviews literature from different disciplines surrounding backpacking on a global scale. Section 2.2 outlines the emergence and development of backpacking in China and highlights contentious issues within existing literature. Section 2.3 turns to Western academia, in an effort to reveal the development of backpacking within Western societies. Section 2.4 illustrates two critical perspectives when comparing the backpacking phenomenon in China and the West. Section 2.5 outlines the theory of authenticity and discusses how it helps to explain the popularity of backpacking within modern societies. Section 2.6 examines the theory of individualism within the context of China and further discusses whether the motivation of the 'search for the self' is appropriate when examining Chinese backpackers.

Chapter Three introduces the research questions, methods and samples of the study. Section 3.2 outlines the research questions. Section 3.3 discusses how semi-structured in-depth interviews, focus groups and participant observation are employed as the research methods. The selection criteria, recruitment and data collection procedure are introduced in Section 3.4. This section also shows the demographic information of interviewed backpackers and participating non-backpackers, as well as information regarding surveyed youth hostels. Section 3.5 explains why Yunnan Province has been chosen as the fieldwork site, and Beijing, Shanghai and Jiangsu Province have been chosen as the locations of focus group discussions. Section 3.6 illustrates the research ethics and reflections of the researcher.

Chapters Four, Five, Six and Seven detail the results of data analyses, presenting and discussing the empirical data collected from in-depth interviews, focus groups and participant

observation. Chapter Four aims to illustrate how backpacking and backpackers are interpreted within the wider social context, based on the understandings and attitudes of non-backpackers. Section 4.2 examines in which ways young professionals and college students from focus groups become familiar with backpackers. Section 4.3 demonstrates how 'the pursuit of freedom' is perceived by non-backpackers as the essential characteristic a backpacker. In Section 4.4, focus group participants reveal their attitudes towards backpacking as a way of travelling and a way of living.

Chapter Five examines how Chinese backpackers identify themselves and reveals that 'independence' can be considered the core characteristic. Section 5.2 section examines student backpackers who have attempted to become independent from their parents, discussing why financial independence is so often perceived as the precondition of freedom. Section 5.3 examines backpackers' perception of freedom and loneliness, as travelling alone is perceived as one distinct characteristic of backpackers. Section 5.4 illustrates the travel philosophy of backpackers and discusses how it is influenced by the identities put forward by backpackers.

Chapter Six provides a critical view in regard to the analysis of backpackers' independence, by examining which factors, beyond 'the individual', enable their independence. Section 6.2 analyses the role that youth hostels play in the formation of backpacker culture in China. Section 6.3 focuses on backpackers' use of smartphones and mobile Internet. The new technological context changes backpackers' experiences of 'being away from home' and 'being alone'. Section 6.4 examines a particular type of backpacker identified by the study: alternative seekers, who refuse to find a stable job or settle down in big cities, rather exploring backpacking as a long-term approach to living. Significantly, as extremely individualistic travellers, they form a type of community in the city of Dali in China, living together when they are not on the road.

Chapter Seven proposes a new classification of the backpacker, which not only identifies Chinese backpackers' various travel motivations, but also examines how backpackers' backgrounds and attitudes towards society affect the way in which they perceive the role backpacking plays within their lives. Section 7.2 explains this new classification of the backpacker. The following four sections illustrates four types of backpackers identified by the classification, namely: the amateur (Section 7.3), the dreamer (Section 7.4), the escaper

(Section 7.5), and the alternative seeker (Section 7.6). Section 7.7 illustrates why one's social background, travelling experiences and life stage at the time of the activity are important when analysing the role of backpacking within people's lives.

Chapter Eight is the conclusion, addressing how the objectives of this thesis have been met, and drawing out the implications of the study's findings within the context of broader academic literature and social circumstance. Section 8.2 summarises four significant findings of this study, and further analyses how these findings contribute to the study of Chinese backpackers and backpacker culture. Section 8.3 discusses the implications of the findings of this study: firstly, the emphasis by young Chinese citizens on freedom results from the individualisation of Chinese society; this study reveals that other than the enterprising self, there is a 'self' associated with increasing reflexivity developed by the younger generation. Secondly, this thesis contends that there are always risks for pursuing an alternative lifestyle within the context of China. As a result, young Chinese backpackers develop 'staged individualism', a term coined by this study, in order to balance individual interests/desires and wider social obligations. Section 8.4 illustrates three potential future research directions of this study.

2. Literature review

2.1. Introduction

This chapter examines existing studies on backpacking within tourism and sociological literature. There are two purposes to the chapter: firstly, it aims to position the development of backpacking in China within China's historical and social context; secondly, it is necessary to investigate how relevant Western theories contribute to examining the backpacking phenomenon in China.

The first section outlines the emergence and development of backpacking in China. It also reviews studies on Chinese backpackers, which mostly come from the area of tourism management, and highlights contentious issues within existing literature. The second section of the chapter turns to Western literature, in an effort to reveal the development of backpacking in Western societies. Furthermore, analyses of how social change has influenced the backpacking phenomenon are presented.

The third section compares existing studies on Chinese backpackers with those of Western-focused studies. It highlights that existing studies on Chinese backpackers fail to consider how China's cultural tradition and social structure interact with the 'imported' lifestyle, and fail to examine whether the cultural tradition and social conditions in China challenge the relevant theories of travellers that have originated in the West.

The fourth section of the chapter outlines the theory of authenticity and discusses how it helps to explain the popularity of backpacking in modern societies. It also presents criticisms of authenticity theory and explains how the distinct travel culture in China may challenge the theory. However, despite criticism, 'the quest for authenticity' contributes to gaining a more comprehensive understanding of Chinese backpackers. The fifth section examines the theory of individualism within the context of China and discusses if the motivation of the 'search for self' is appropriate when analysing Chinese backpackers.

2.2. *'Lv you'* (donkey friends) and *'qiong you'* (budget travel): A review of backpacker tourism in China and existing studies on Chinese backpackers

2.2.1. From political activity to the leisure industry: The rise of the 'tourist'

Before the economic reform in China, tourism had long been considered as one form of diplomatic and political activity, lacking commercial purposes. In the Mao era, tourism was employed to attract foreigners, promoting a positive image of Communist China within the international community. In general, people's mobility was strictly controlled by the government, as individuals could not make a journey without permission from their *'danwei'* (单位, work units) or collective farms (Yan, 2009b).[6] Moreover, travelling for pleasure and recreation was considered to be contrary to the asceticism and communism endorsed by the state (Wang, 2012; Zhang, 2003).

Following the Reform and Opening-Up, the government realised that tourism could play a positive role in economic growth. The state thus played a crucial role in the development of the tourism industry. The restrictions of free domestic movement were gradually removed from the 1980s onwards (Yan, 2009b). In 1997, outbound tourism was further approved by the central government as a commercial business, although travel agencies still required a special licence - authorised by the Chinese government - in order to do relevant business (Wang, 2004). Mass tourism in contemporary China – in the form of the standardised, commercialised, pleasure-seeking and sightseeing packaged tours – have developed rapidly, despite emerging over one hundred years later than Western Europe. Accordingly, within official discourse, tourism has been transformed from a 'public institution' to 'cultural entrepreneurship' (Ren, 2013). In Chinese, *wenhua chanye* is translated into 'Cultural entrepreneurship', indicating that 'culture' can be transformed into an industry.

Over the last decade, the central Chinese government has further loosened restrictions on the outbound tourism market, and the monopoly of the packaged group tour has become fragmented. At the same time, self-organised, independent outbound tourists have emerged as

[6] A work unit is the name given to a place of employment in China. When the Chinese economy was heavily socialist before the 1980s, the term danwei was used to refer state-owned enterprises and collective-owned enterprises. It remains in use today as the communism's legacy, since people refer any place they work as danwei.

a growing and flourishing group (Xiang, 2013). In 2009, demonstrating how the tourism industry has become increasingly important in China, the State Council's No. 41 Document highlighted how tourism was as a 'strategic pillar industry' (Zhang, 2011b).

The emergence and increase of Chinese tourists are remarkable. According to a national survey conducted in 1999, more than half of the Chinese population participated in a certain kind of domestic tourism, with their expenditures accounting for 71% of China's total tourism-based income (Xiao, 2003). In 2015, United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) reported that China possessed the largest population of overseas tourists, who spent the largest amount of money when compared to tourists in any other country across the world (Ma, 2016). As stated in the last chapter of this work, the asceticism ideology was discarded, while increased consumption led to 'the rise of [the] consumer' (Wang, 2012). Perspectives on tourism now differ from the past; tourists in the 1980s primarily travelled for pragmatic purposes - such as visiting friends and family, or for education and healthcare. However, the Chinese population in the late 1990s - particularly urban residents - had already 'accepted the commercialization of leisure travel and the idea that tourism is worthy of pursuit in its own right' (Wang, 2004, p.53).

2.2.2. The Internet, outdoor clubs and the middle classes: The emergence of 'donkey friends'

The term 'donkey friend' was coined in the 1990s by a specific group of Chinese travellers, used to identify and distinguish their distinct travel behaviours, alongside, and in contrast to, the rapid development of mass tourism (Zhang, 2008). In Mandarin, the term has a very similar pronunciation to the word 'tourism'; however, it has a very different meaning. The word 'donkey' emphasises that these travellers are as friendly, perseverant and endurable as donkeys; the word 'friend' indicates that these travellers identify as a group of friends (Luo et al., 2014). Donkey friends were no longer content to participate in the standardised and packaged tours provided by travel agencies. Distinguishing themselves from mass tourists, they organised their trips independently and pursued risk and adventure during trips (Lim, 2009). Self-identified 'donkey friends' were widely understood as Chinese backpackers, as

they were found to have similar behavioural characteristics to Western backpackers (Luo et al., 2014; Chen et al., 2014; Zhu, 2007; Zhang, 2008; Lim, 2009; Shepherd, 2009; Chen and Weiler, 2014).

As discussed in the last chapter, Internet communities have played the most important role in the emergence and development of donkey friends. During different stages of their self-organised trips, they consistently rely on local news-based BBS and travel-based communities, in order to exchange information and build cooperation (Zhang, 2008). Unique in-group communication is also developed through the creation of relevant terms; for example, 'old/head donkey' refers to these experienced travellers, whilst 'the mill' points to physical or virtual gathering spaces (Lim, 2009). Most often, organisers are travel enthusiasts and work as volunteers to design plans and arrange activities (Kristensen, 2013). These communities, primarily formed the urban middle classes, also encourage members to engage in various voluntary projects based on free association and self-regulation, seeking to practise democratic values and resolve various social problems (Zhang, 2008). Accordingly, researchers such as Zhang (2008) and Lim (2009) argue that the emergence of donkey friends indicated an early form of civil society in China, based on the Internet.

However, these studies tend to overlook the role that business interests have played in the expansion of the donkey friends' movement; this point was highlighted in 2007 by Zhu in her seminal work on Chinese backpackers. By reviewing the history of international backpacker tourism, as well as tracing its history in China, Zhu suggests that the emergence of backpacker tourism in China is unique. Lacking a history of the Grand Tour or the hippie culture, China's backpacker culture has been largely initiated by the popularity of outdoor activity. In the 1990s, a few outdoor product companies sponsored outdoor activity clubs in order to attract new urban middle class consumers; this led to the flourishing of relevant clubs in big cities. Activities such as mountaineering, hiking and biking were portrayed as cool and fashionable, and as a result, urban middle classes participated in outdoor activity with the aim of pursuing adventure and novelty (Zhu, 2007, p.55).

As one of the first scholars to study backpacker tourism in China, Zhu conducted the first ever large-scale survey on Chinese backpackers around 2006; her work was published in 2007. Based on 127 questionnaires, Zhu outlined the demographic characteristics of Chinese

backpackers. Questionnaires were distributed through the author's social network, youth hostels and backpacker-based websites, and answered by both overseas and domestic Chinese backpackers. In regard to gender, respondents were almost equally male or female. The average educational level of Chinese backpackers was extremely high: 97.2% respondents had completed college-level education, and 30.6% had earned a master's degree or a PhD. 52.5% respondents earned at least 48000 yuan a year. In line with the factors of income and occupation, the majority of respondents were middle class, living in the first-tier cities (2007, pp.99–101). In terms of age, 35.5% respondents were aged between 26 and 30, followed by 31 and 35 (26.2%).

Furthermore, Zhu found that there existed a smaller number of young Chinese citizens (under 25) who were conducting this type of travel; this contrasted with how young people under 25 were the most common group to undertake backpacking in Western countries. She suggested that there were several factors preventing Chinese youngsters from backpacking (2007, pp. 114–115). The first was argued to be due to traditional Chinese culture: *'fumu zai, bu yuanyou, you bi you fang'* (父母在, 不远游, 游必有方). This phrase translates as: 'when his parents are alive, a son should not go far away; if he does, he must let them know where he goes.' As *'xiao'* (孝), which translates as 'filial piety', is an essential value of Confucianism, leaving home means that one cannot accompany or take care of their parents. Moreover, Zhu indicated that 18-25 is the age that most Chinese citizens are busy studying or preparing for a career. There would be potential losses relating to opportunities, as young adults may be able to instead participate in after-class tutorials or internships that might be helpful to their future career. China does not possess the 'gap year' culture that is prevalent in the Western world or the Grand Tour tradition. Moreover, one consequence of the 'Only Child' policy is that Chinese teenagers are well protected by their families, and backpacking is often perceived as dangerous. As a result, few young people follow the old proverb, *'du wanjuan shu, xing wanli lu'* (读万卷书, 行万里路), which translates as 'read ten thousand books and travel ten thousand miles'.

However, Zhu overlooks the changes of social structure within China over past decades, so she fails to explain why or how traditional Chinese culture continues to greatly impact contemporary Chinese society, while the influence of another traditional idea *'du wanjuan shu, xing wanli lu'* had been significantly weakened.

Zhu concludes that the Internet and outdoor companies directly contribute to the emergence of backpacker tourism in China. Moreover, the underlying reason for the popularity of backpacking in China is that urban middle classes were largely influenced by Western postmodern culture (Zhu, 2007, p.79). According to Zhu, affluent urban Chinese were undergoing a spiritual crisis, resulting from the transition within China from a traditional society to an information society. Postmodern Western culture, as a critique of modern culture, sought to challenge both itself and authorities (Zhu, 2007, p.79). Under the circumstances, backpacking - influenced by the hippie countercultural movement - emphasises perseverance and hardworking spirit, and thus it was regarded as part of a postmodern lifestyle (Zhu, 2007, p.181). Affluent urban Chinese thus employed the risky and exploratory travel activities as a way to resist the dullness of routine, as well as to escape from an increasingly institutionalised modern world. To conclude, urbanisation and modernisation, as the pillars of a broader social context, along with the influence of postmodern Western culture, backpacking emerged in China as an innovative experience in the 1990s, quickly becoming popular among the urban middle classes (Zhu, 2007, p.58).

Although Zhu's study contributes substantially to the study of Chinese backpackers, she arguably oversimplifies the backpacking phenomenon in the Western world, to an extent, misinterpreting postmodern culture. For example, backpacker tourism is not merely influenced by the hippie movement. Furthermore, it is questionable as to whether postmodern culture aims to challenge itself and appreciate perseverance. Moreover, it is questionable as to whether Chinese society can be considered as 'late modern'; the most significant challenge to this is that, the claim that backpacking trips of the middle classes are motivated by a spiritual crisis, is not supported by sufficient evidence. The only evidence can be found in how some surveyed backpackers stated that their motivation was to escape temporarily from routine. There was no evidence that these backpackers resisted city life or their middle class status.

2.2.3. An analysis of the popularity of backpacking among the post-80s

It is significant to note how the profile of Chinese backpackers has changed dramatically over the last five years. In 2010, a nationwide survey containing 450 questionnaires was conducted

throughout youth hostels in China (Chen et al., 2014). Among 416 respondents, 78.6% were aged between 21-35. It is also noteworthy that 25.6% of backpacker respondents were students. Nearly one-third stated that their monthly income was between 1,500 yuan and 3,000 yuan, far below the income of the middle classes. However, nevertheless, nearly one-third of backpackers were found to be middle class. In 2012, Yu conducted the largest survey on Chinese backpackers thus far (2012). Based on 449 valid questionnaires, the 21-25 age range has become the largest group of backpackers (35. 9%), followed by the age group of 26 to 30 (27.8%). 70.3% respondents were studying at college, or had already obtained a college-level degree. In terms of occupation, the majority were students (22.5%). 55.8% stated that they earned at least 3000 yuan per month, and that 20% earned more than 6000 yuan. The majority lived in cities (94.9%).

These two surveys, alongside Zhu's (2007) research together, provide the most relevant and credible surveys on Chinese backpackers up to the present study. Although they are different in size and sampling, the results are of great significance and use. As noted in the last chapter, the most notable trend is the increasing number of youngsters, particularly student backpackers, over the last five years. The majority are part of the post-80s and post-90s generations. A decade ago, Zhu highlighted how there existed several barriers to young Chinese citizens undertaking backpacking travelling. However, at present, the situation appears to have transformed. Moreover, a recent qualitative study highlighted how there emerged different types of 'lifestyle mobility' (Xu and Wu, 2016) in China, represented by retired snowbirds, lifestyle entrepreneurs and working tourists. Lifestyle entrepreneurs and working tourists were also young and well-educated, searching for their own ways of life.

However, there existed little qualitative research on these young adult backpackers, although the authors of the 2010 survey suggested that the phenomenon was linked to the broader social transformation of China. Chen and his colleagues aruged that the younger generation in China felt confused, anxious and doubtful in this fast-changing and uncertain society. Accordingly, the Chinese youth made demands for self-cognition (knowing oneself better and testing oneself), self-improvement (improving personal skills and developing personal capacities), and social interaction. It can be contended that backpacking became popular among young people because it seeks to substantially meet these demands (Chen et al., 2014).

Similar to Zhu's earlier discussions of postmodern culture and the emergence of backpacking, Chen and his colleagues also noted how the popularity of backpacking among young Chinese citizens has resulted from the dramatic social change continuing to occur in China. However, none of these scholars provided substantial evidence to support this argument, such as in-depth interviews with the youngsters. Furthermore, the scholars tended to generalise young backpackers based on their ages. This study focuses on these young backpackers, employing a qualitative approach. Accordingly, it contributes to further work examining the relationship between the backpacking phenomenon and social change occurring in China.

The second significant finding based on previous studies regarding Chinese backpackers (Zhu, 2007; Yu, 2012; Chen et al., 2014) sits in relation to their social status. The urban middle classes, ageing from their late twenties to late thirties, have been the dominant group of backpackers in China since the 2000s. As Zhu suggested, backpacking in China originated from outdoor activities; therefore, only the middle classes or upper classes could afford the expensive outdoor equipment, training courses, membership fees, and so on. 'Backpacking, as an alternative lifestyle for urban middle classes, is burning up money' (Zhu, 2007, p.115). Chinese backpackers were also found to be well educated, as the majority in the three surveys were college graduates. Zhu employed the concept of 'cultural self-confidence', first initiated by Graburn (1983), who outlined how cultural self-confidence is more a matter of class than income. In particular, the middle classes, often those with a college education, possess a high level of cultural self-confidence, because they not only learn about the rest of the world through books and television, but also have the first-hand experience from travelling themselves.

People who possess high cultural self-confidence are able to travel more confidently out of their familiar surroundings (Graburn, 1983). Backpackers often travel independently and involve themselves in engagements with the local community; thus, they are considered to possess high cultural self-confidence. A 2010 survey (Chen et al., 2014) revealed how socio-demographic characteristics significantly influenced backpackers' motivations for travelling. The study employed cluster analysis to classify Chinese backpackers according to their travel motivations and related demographics. Three types of Chinese backpackers were identified by their major travel motivations: self-actualisers, who were primarily driven by an inherent desire for self-actualisation; destination experiencers, who were motivated by the desire to

learn about the destination's culture, history and society; and, social seekers, who primarily pursued social interactions during the trip. More importantly, significant differences were found among the three clusters regarding age, education level, and personal monthly income. In particular, social seekers tended to be younger, less educated, and less wealthy than the other two groups.

Thirdly, it was long contended that Chinese backpackers were less concerned about financial budgets when compared with their Western counterparts (Cottrell, 2014), as most of them have been part of the affluent urban middle classes in China. However, this image was challenged by the aforementioned 2010 and 2012 surveys, as well as a more recent survey on independent outbound tourists in China (Xiang, 2013). These studies demonstrate that there were, and might still be, an increasing number of backpackers who have a relatively low income when compared to the middle classes. A substantial number of the group of backpackers were students; the rest were working-class, self-employed, or unemployed. According to media reports discussed in the last chapter of this work, *'qiong you'* (budget travel) has become extremely popular over the past five years, meaning that some Chinese backpackers were travelling on a shoestring. However, little academic research has examined why and how more people with less privileged social backgrounds became involved in backpacking; thus, this study emphasises the examination of backpackers possessing different social backgrounds.

The fourth noteworthy character of Chinese backpackers is indicated by the research methods of most studies. As pointed out earlier in this work, online communities served as the most important virtual gathering space for backpackers, while the crucial physical gathering space for backpackers were youth hostels (Zhu, 2007). Accordingly, previous studies on Chinese backpacking relied heavily on these two channels.

2.2.4. A critique of previous studies on Chinese backpackers

There exist several identified problems with the existing literature on Chinese backpackers. Firstly, most studies are quantitative and industry-oriented. Although quantitative studies

indicate the trend that of an increasing number of youngsters and non-middle classes among backpackers, they lack the sufficient materials to explain why this trend has happened, and how these changes meant relate to China's broader patterns of social change. Moreover, when comparing Chinese backpackers to Westerners, previous studies use phrases such as 'postmodernism' and 'late modern society', without considering its cultural and social context.

Secondly, Chinese scholars consistently perceive backpackers as a specific type of tourist, as most of the scholars were from tourism management. In doing so, they overlooked the fact that backpackers' experiences were situated regarding their wider life experiences. Accordingly, the implication of the backpacking experience on the individual has remained unexplored in mainland China, while it is a significant topic within Western academia. Moreover, their assumption that backpackers were 'special' tourists has meant that researchers limit their discussion to tourism studies, and thus neglect to consider the popularity of backpacking as a broader social phenomenon.

Thirdly, although online backpacker communities and youth hostels are important channels in which to approach backpackers, there exists a danger of excluding backpackers who are not active in online communities or youth hostels. It is insufficient to generalise the characteristics of Chinese backpackers solely based on samples generated from established communities. Accordingly, this study employs various sampling methods, seeking to better understand the diversity of Chinese backpackers.

2.3 Drifters, backpackers and post-backpackers: A review of backpacker tourism in the West and studies on Western backpackers

2.3.1. The 'Hippie Trail' and drifters: Alternatives to mass tourism

The roots of backpacking can be traced historically to a number of modes of travel (O'Reilly, 2006; Adler, 1985). One is the Grand Tour, conducted by the British aristocratic youth in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. These young people intended to gain an education and achieve personal growth by taking a long, explorative trip that spanned the Europe. However,

only the upper class could afford such trip (Withey, 1998). Another relevant tradition is tramping, a well-institutionalised travel pattern of working class youth (Adler, 1985). The primary purpose of tramping was to find employment, but it also had touristic components. In the nineteenth century, the middle class youth romanticised and adopted it for touristic purposes (Adler, 1985). Thus, the Grand Tour and tramping were regarded as important modes of travelling before the emergence of mass tourism in the nineteenth century.

Great Britain was the first nation to develop a mass tourism industry, in part resulting from the expansion of railways, the growth of the industrial working classes, and the birth of travel agents (Boorstin, 1964; Buzard, 1993; Withey, 1998; Urry and Larsen, 2012). Urry and Larsen suggest that the birth of the 'tourist gaze', a core component of Western modernity, emerged around 1840, when there was a 'peculiar combining together of the means of collective travel, the desire for travel and the techniques of photographic reproduction[7]' (2011b, p.14). The tourism industry continued to develop in the twentieth century, due to the economic boom post World War II, the democratisation of Western societies, convenient transportation (private cars, highways and the invention of the aeroplane), as well as strong support from governments. Mass tourists travelled globally in the 1970s, particularly those from affluent countries such as Western Europe, North America and Japan (Boorstin, 1964; Cohen, 1972).

The 1960s not only witnessed the rapid development of mass tourism (Boorstin, 1964), but also the emergence of an alternative method of travelling: the Hippie Trail (Oliver, 2014). It is widely believed that contemporary Western backpackers are significantly influenced by 1960's hippie counterculture movement (Cohen, 1972, 1973; O'Reilly, 2006; Ateljevic and Doorne, 2004; Zhu, 2007; Zhang, 2008; Cohen, 2011; Paris, 2012). Hippies, primarily the young people of the industrial West who had sought simplicity and naturalness (MacCannell, 1973), launched the 'Hippie Trail' to the East during the 1960s and 1970s. At that time, 'it was *de rigueur* for young people to follow the "Hippie Trail" to India, travelling as cheaply as possible, stereotypically in an ancient campervan painted with psychedelic colours (Oliver, 2014, p.143). Erik Cohen, one of the most influential sociologists studying tourism at the time, referred to these travellers as 'drifters' (Cohen, 1972, 1973, 1979a). Drifters tended to travel independently and take odd-jobs to maintain their extended trips. They lived with local people

[7] The techniques of photographic reproduction refers to the popularity of Kodak camera which made tourism become leisurely family-centred performance, concerning on sightseeing and pleasure (Urry and Larsen, 2012).

and immersed themselves in the local community. Furthermore, their trips did not have a fixed itinerary or clear goals (Cohen, 1972). Thus, drifters' lifestyles can be seen to have initiated and helped build contemporary concepts of backpacking and budget travel.

Cohen suggested that alienation from mainstream society played a crucial role in drifters' aimless travels, and that the drug culture served as a further impetus. Drifters travelled to seek an alternative spiritual centre, which they could substitute for that of their home society (Cohen, 1979a, 1979b). He further indicated that there existed cultural, economic and political factors that drove young people to participate in drifter subculture. As for the culture, drifting fit well with the desires of the counterculture movement: a primitive way of life. As Cohen notes, 'The loosening of ties and obligations, the abandonment of accepted standards and conventional ways of life, the voluntary abnegation of the comforts of modern technological society, along with the search for sensual and emotional experiences' (Cohen, 1973, p.93); this motivated young people in 'developed' Western countries to travel to the 'natural' and 'authentic' East.

The economic reasons for drifting were that some people intended to avoid the routine of work that conventionally followed immediately after school. As Western society became relatively affluent in the 1960s, the competition for employment also became less challenging. These young adults may not have been able to afford a comfortable trip independently, while drifting became - economically – the most suitable way of travelling. For drifters from the United States, there were also political reasons: they were protesting against the Vietnam War, as well as the political system in general, which many felt disillusioned with. These frustrations made them seek personal redemption elsewhere, as they failed to achieve social salvation at home (Cohen, 1973).

The overland journey from Europe to Asia flourished from the late 1950s until the late 1970s, with the highlight of the Beatles' 1968 trip to India. In 1978, the route was closed due to civil unrest and military conflict in Afghanistan and Iran, along with the renewed hostilities of the Cold War (Ireland and Gemie, 2016; O'Reilly, 2006). In addition, young people's job opportunities and life choices were greatly affected by the economic recession and large levels of unemployment in many Western countries (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007, p.36). Accordingly, the 1980s witnessed a rapid decline of drifters (Riley, 1988; Cohen, 2003). However, the

legacy of drifting cannot be underestimated, as drifters initiated a new form of travelling that continues to resist sightseeing and pleasure-seeking tourism, as well as mass consumption.

2.3.2. Budget travellers and the institutionalisation of backpacking

Following the Hippie Trail movement, budget travellers replaced drifters, becoming the principal group of independent travellers who conducted long-term transnational journeys. In the mid-1980s, Riley conducted an empirical study on international budget travellers, based on participant observation and a survey of independent travellers in South and Southeast Asia, Australia, and New Zealand (Riley, 1988). The study revealed that travellers preferred to identify themselves as 'budget travellers' rather than 'drifters'. In addition, the study showed that the average traveller was educated, European, middle class and single, and obsessively concerned with budgeting his/her money (Riley, 1988). As budget travellers, they valued the hardship and non-touristic experiences during the journey and competed to 'get the best value'. At the time of the work, it appeared that only young people with privileged backgrounds could afford long-term transnational travel; this may have been closely related to the economic recession and huge unemployment taking place, as noted earlier in this work.

Riley highlighted how the travellers in the study did not identify as 'heroes' nor 'deviants'; instead, they considered the trip to be 'time-out' from ordinary life. Many respondents were recent college graduates who wanted to delay the transition to taking on the responsibilities associated with adulthood, while some took leave in between jobs. More recently, Cohen (2003) argued that the emergence of postmodernism made it implausible to connect backpacking with alienation. However, Cohen's argument can be understood as problematic, as the relationship between postmodernism and backpacking is more complex, which will be further discussed later in this work.

Aside from political and cultural change, the growing interests in these travellers from the tourism industry have also resulted in the marketisation of the activity. After reviewing existing studies on backpackers over the last three decades, Ateljevic and Doorne (2004) concluded that the 1980s witnessed a shift of backpacking tourism from a de-marketing to a

marketing concept. They stated that 'the dominance of global markets and consumerism changed the guise of the "hippie" drifter in favour of budget-oriented independent travellers seeking lifestyle enhancement and travel as an agent of personal growth' (2004, p.74).

In 1983, the term 'backpacker' began to be used by the tourism industry, marked by the opening of an Australian hostel that was named 'Backpacker Inn' (McCulloch, 1991). This new segment of the tourism industry has expanded rapidly in Australia since the mid-1980s, made up of 'inexpensive transportation systems, low-priced hotels and youth hostels surrounded by psychedelic shops, nightclubs, and coffee houses, guidebooks for the counterculture and an increasing flow of word-of-mouth information from experienced travellers to newcomers' (Loker-Murphy and Pearce, 1995, p.824). The tourism industry in Australia, as well as in New Zealand, played a proactive role in the creation of backpacker markets, as both the private and public sector generated business strategies to attract young, long-haul travellers (Richards and Wilson, 2004c).

Against this background, Loker-Murphy and Pearce (1995) conducted a survey with young budget travellers visiting Australia in 1992. Based on 686 answered questionnaires, they proposed a definition of 'backpacker' regarding behavioural characteristics, which are: (1) a preference for budget accommodation; (2) an emphasis on meeting other people; (3) an independently organised and flexible travel schedule; (4) longer rather than brief holidays; (5) and, an emphasis on informal and participatory holiday activities. This definition and the term 'backpacker' have been widely employed in academic literature since the 1990s (Richards and Wilson, 2004). Moreover, the majority of backpacker respondents in Loker-Murphy and Pearce's study were from the UK, Ireland, Germany and other countries within Europe, with a smaller number from Japan, other parts of Asia, and New Zealand. By 2001, according to Welk's (2004) study on backpacker tourism in Australia, backpacking had developed into a sub-industry bringing in a good profit margin for the wider tourism industry, due to backpackers' overall high amount of spending.

As backpacking has become increasingly commoditised, one common theme within contemporary studies on backpacking reveals the institutionalisation, or 'mainstreaming' (O'Reilly, 2006), of backpacking. Existing studies show that there has been a growing interest in backpacking among young people on a global scale since the 1990s, although the majority

of backpackers remain middle class and white. For example, the idea of a 'gap year' post-study has become common in the UK and Ireland (Snee, 2014), and the 'overseas experience' is regarded as a necessary rite of passage by Australians and New Zealanders (Wilson et al., 2009). In addition, a growing number of young Israelis undertake backpacking after their obligatory military service (Maoz, 2004). Research on Asian backpacker travel also began to appear from the early 2000s onwards (Teo and Leong, 2006; Ku, 2005; Zhu, 2007).

Based on interview and Internet materials, as well as ethnographic field research conducted around 2002, O'Reilly analysed young people's socioeconomic and cultural incitements to travel in the new millennium (2006). O'Reilly asserts that Western countries have become relatively affluent over the past fifteen years, which has subsequently resulted in greater financial support for long-haul travel undertaken by citizens. Significantly, post-Fordist working conditions favour flexibility, with an end to life-long jobs. Although the new conditions brought a sense of insecurity and uncertainty, it benefited those who wanted to delay entry into the job market, or who would like to take a career break. Moreover, the falling price of international airfares further promoted travelling (O'Reilly, 2006). In addition, the emerging 'culture of imagination', resulting from 'time/space compression' (Harvey, 1989) in late modernity, also served as a motivator for travel. The imagination, facilitated by advanced technologies, was central to all forms of activities, including travel; people were drawn by their imagining of places and cultures far away (O'Reilly, 2006). However, O'Reilly overlooked the possibility that people's desire to travel may reduce, as their desires become increasingly fulfilled by numerous media products and virtual travels through advanced technologies.

O'Reilly further noted how backpacking serves as a potentially status-enhancing activity, as the symbolic and cultural value associated with the backpacking experience is able to reinforce cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Although interviewed backpackers did not directly point it out, they stated that the experience had a positive effect on their career opportunities and/or identity. Based on the interviewed backpackers in the study, there was evidence of upward social mobility regarding education and occupation, particularly in relation to parents' occupations. Heath's (2007) study of the Western pre-university gap year revealed that activity became a new way for the middle classes to distinguish themselves from others, as a response to the expansion of higher education in Britain and an increase in the admittance of

the working classes to university. Within mainstream discourse, people undergoing gap years were assumed to gain 'soft skills, greater maturity, enhanced self-awareness and increased independence' (Heath, 2007, p.100).

In addition, backpacking was regarded as a key element in the reflexive project regarding identity, which was central to the late modern condition (Desforges, 2000; O'Reilly, 2006; Maoz, 2008; Cohen, 2011; Snee, 2014). Accordingly, the trip can be portrayed in the context of personal development. This statement is consistent with the above discussion, stating that backpacking has been transformed from a counterculture activity to a form of lifestyle enhancement, or an opportunity for personal growth (Ateljevic and Doorne, 2004).

2.3.3. Post-backpacking: Diversity and change

The transformation of backpacker culture, as indicated by O'Reilly (2006), was supported by the first and biggest transnational survey of independent travellers, conducted in 2002 (Richards and Wilson, 2004). The Backpacker Research Group (BRG) of the Association for Tourism and Leisure Education, in collaboration with International Student Travel Confederation (ISTC), launched an international survey on independent travellers that focused on their profiles, motivations and activities. In order to approach a wide range of backpackers, the survey relied on mailing lists, provided by travel company members of ISTC that came from eight different countries and areas. In total, 2,300 respondents - originating from 42 different nations and areas - got involved. The survey data supported the aforementioned definition proposed by Loker-Murphy and Pearce (1995), as these behavioural characters were still recognised as an essential feature of being a backpacker. However, the study found there had been significant changes within backpacker culture: although the vast majority of the young travellers surveyed could be classified as 'backpackers' according to their behaviours, over half of the sample chose the label 'traveller', compared with almost a third who called themselves 'backpackers'. There was also less than twenty percent who considered themselves to be 'tourists' (Richards and Wilson, 2004, p.18). From this, it can be understood that the new generation of young travellers in the millennium may be less likely to identify with the term 'backpacker'.

The BRG then employed Q methodology to examine why many individuals have refused the label ‘backpacker’. Interviews with travellers revealed that there had been a strong movement against the traditional portrayal of backpackers as hippies. Statements such as ‘backpackers never wash’, ‘backpackers are all the same’, ‘backpackers do not use guidebooks’, ‘backpackers do not visit museums and galleries’, and ‘backpacking is more fun if you take drugs’, were rejected by most interviewed travellers in the study. Thus, it can be understood that younger generations might tend to reject negative portrayals and connotations related to backpackers, while seeking to portray backpacking as a cheap and creative form of travel (Richards and Wilson, 2004).

I suggest that there exist several reasons for the ‘de-backpacking’ among young travellers in the 21st century. First of all, the change is rooted in the change to the perceived purposes of travel. As noted earlier, the majority of contemporary young travellers regard backpacking as a time-out from ordinary life, and thus they are likely return to home after backpacking (O’Reilly, 2006; Tomazos, 2016). The negative image of hippies in contemporary society might affect their return; thus, ‘de-backpacking’ is necessary.

Moreover, numerous studies have found that backpackers are not as homogenous as they first appear (Elsrud, 2001; Cohen, 2003; O’Reilly, 2006; Cohen, 2011); therefore, the label ‘backpacker’ is not effective in demonstrating this diversity. Accordingly, new terms emerged to replace ‘backpacker’. For example, Sørensen noted that there was a rapid growth in ‘short-term backpackers’ (2003, p.861), who behaved like backpackers while travelling within the time limits of cyclical holiday patterns. Affluent and tech-savvy backpackers are identified as ‘flashpackers’ (Paris, 2012). ‘Global nomads’ (Kannisto, 2014), or ‘extreme mobilities’ (Kannisto, 2016), refer to independent travellers who stay away from ‘home’ for long periods of time. More importantly, this group was made up of travellers who marginalised themselves - expatriates who generally rejected the ideology of settled, conventional society. Scott Cohen employed the term ‘lifestyle travellers’ to refer to ‘individuals who repeatedly return to long-term travel and consider travel to be their way of life’ (Cohen, 2009, p.4). It is noteworthy that the terms ‘global nomads’, ‘extreme mobilities’ and ‘lifestyle travellers’ refer to a very small group of travellers, when compared to mass tourists and backpackers. However, this small group is regarded as the ‘ideal’ backpacker, as they radically resist the commodification of backpacker tourism.

The third reason for ‘de-backpacking’ is due to the derogation of the status of backpacking as an alternative lifestyle or unusually daring activity. The reason why backpacking has been recognised as a form of status enhancement is primarily because only privileged groups within society can afford it. As backpacking has become more common and accessible to a wider range of people, its privileged status is diminishing (O’Reilly, 2006). Moreover, backpacker-oriented tour companies and relevant profit-seeking sectors tend to institutionalise backpacker tourism by designing risk and adventure, and thus ‘mass backpackers appear to be more easily taken in by the apparently credible images conjured up for them by the establishments serving this market segment, which presents itself as an alternative to the mainstream tourist industry’ (Cohen, 2003, p.100).

Previously, anti-tourism was a vital element of a backpacker’s identity (Welk, 2004). However, as some forms of backpacking have become more similar to traditional tourism, the differences between backpackers and mass tourists have constantly been questioned by travellers and researchers (Larsen et al., 2011). Accordingly, travellers who resist the commercialisation of travelling may also refuse the identity of ‘backpacker’.

To summarise the development of backpacker tourism in Western countries, the most notable change is that this activity is increasingly commoditised. However, the reason I use ‘and’ as the conjunction in the subtitle of this section (drifters, backpackers and post-backpackers) is because drifters, backpackers and post-backpackers (such as flashpackers or nomads) co-exist in the contemporary society. There is no sign that the development of backpacker culture is linear. On the contrary, as backpacking culture is influenced by a variety of factors as it develops, contemporary travellers undergo this activity with different purposes, perceiving their experiences in distinct ways.

2.4 Critical perspectives when comparing the backpacking phenomenon in China and the West

When comparing the history of backpacking in China and the West, Chinese backpackers appear to be primarily influenced by Westerners and consumerism, and backpacking is

interpreted as a fashionable Westernised lifestyle. There were no 'hippies/drifters' in China; the same can be stated in regard to the trend of 'de-backpacking', so popular in the West. Significantly, Western backpackers were found to be influenced by a variety of values and traditions, such as the Grand Tour, tramping, and the hippie counterculture movement. In contrast, on the surface, Chinese backpackers are thought to be followers of Western backpackers.

However, the analysis above oversimplifies the backpacking phenomenon in China, as it fails to consider how China's social structure and cultural tradition interact with the 'imported' lifestyle. It is noteworthy that theories and concepts that originated in the West such as individualism, late modernity, postmodernism cannot be directly transposed onto China. Moreover, it is vital to indicate that Chinese backpackers are also influenced by China's own cultural tradition and social condition.

Although reviewing Western theories on contemporary society such as individualism (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002), self-identity (Giddens, 1991) and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) can inspire the study of backpacking phenomenon in China, it is vital to ask if China's path to modernisation and individualisation is the same as that of Europe's. This thesis contends that there exist factors specific to contemporary Chinese society that drive the younger generations to undertake backpacking. These specific factors include not only these unique traditions and travel culture which will be discussed in the following paragraphs, but also the dramatic social change resulted from economic reform and one child policy. In China, the old structure overlaps and coexists with the new, as well as the social norms and values. Young people's ways of living, as well as their life choices are affected by current social condition. Therefore, it is necessary to notice the differences between Western societies and China when employs Western theories to analyse Chinese society.

Furthermore, this study contends that China's unique travel culture has a great impact on people's travel behaviour, motivation and their perceptions of travelling. For example, many traditional festivals possess folk customs relating to excursion, which is still maintained today, such as viewing flowers in the spring during the Tomb Sweeping Festival, and climbing hills in the fall during the Double Ninth Festival. According to one core concept of Daoism, which is *tian ren heyi* (天人合一， heaven-and-human oneness), these activities are thought to be

good for one's health, family bonding and a sense of beauty (Shen, 2002). Confucianism also believes that travelling can be regarded as a matter of self-cultivation. The old proverb, *du wanjuan shu, xing wanly lu* (读万卷书行万里路，to read ten thousand books and travel ten thousand miles), has emphasized the education function of travelling. Moreover, it is important to point out that some ancient scholars who were discontent with authority would choose retreat into nature as resistance. They are identified as *yinshi* (隐士，recluse) and thought to be noble in history. Another group of alternative travellers is called *youxia* (游侠, knight-errant), literally means 'wandering vigilante'. They have Kungfu and always help the common people in need (Liu, 1967). Existing studies on Chinese backpackers neglect these traditions and relevant travel culture, while this study notice that contemporary young backpackers are influenced by the tradition, which will be discussed in following chapters.

Moreover, 'long-haul' and 'low budget' are regarded as two essential characters of backpacking. However, traditionally, long-haul trips are not supported by the family in most situations, due to the need to fulfil the filial piety. As noted earlier in this work, *fumu zai, bu yuanyou, you bi you fang* (When his parents are alive, a son should not go far away; if he does, he must let them know where he goes) (Zhu, 2007). Also, the idea of *'qiongjia fulu'* (穷家富路. One should make every penny count at home, but should treat oneself well when travelling) is influential. Therefore, it is necessary to examine how young backpackers perceive these traditional ideas and if these traditional ideas change due to the change in society. In the following section 2.5.2 and 2.6.4, I examine how Chinese traditions and social conditions challenge the theory of authenticity and individualism.

2.5 The quest for authenticity and its critique

2.5.1 The quest for authenticity and its analysis of backpackers

The nature of leisure travel has changed fundamentally with the advent of industrial society. Before this, 'travel was expected to play a key role in the cognitive and perceptual education of the male English upper class'(Urry and Larsen, 2011b, p.6). Due to the development of the tourism industry in the nineteenth and twentieth century, leisure travel became affordable,

useful and agreeable for a broader range of the population. As a reflection of the Fordism idea of mass production-mass consumption, mass tourists who bought packaged tours were treated as a homogeneous mass with common tastes and characteristics, receiving the same service within a socially differentiated site (Urry and Larsen, 2011a). As a result, leisure travel became a mass-produced commodity (Boorstin, 1964).

Moreover, by concentrating primarily on pleasure seeking and sightseeing, mass tourists are differentiated from old travellers who favour risk and adventure (Boorstin, 1964; Buzard, 1993). In this case, mass tourists have been criticised by scholars such as Boorstin (1964), as disregarding reality and passively remaining in safety net created by travel agencies. Tourists were thought to enjoy the pseudo-events, and have come to 'expect both more strangeness and more familiarity than the world naturally offers' (Boorstin, 1964, p.79).

Boorstin's opinion is challenged by the sociologist MacCannell (1973, 1992, 1999), through his theory of authenticity regarding travel. MacCannell suggests that, as the consequence of a highly differentiated and industrialised society, individuals feel alienated within everyday life. In order to gain the unity between the self and societal institutions, modern tourists like the religious pilgrimage in ancient times, travel to search for 'authenticity' (MacCannell, 1973). Authenticity refers to the primitive, the natural untouched by modernity, as well as the intimate and real social relationships (MacCannell, 1973).

However, MacCannell also points out that it is very difficult for modern tourists to achieve the goal, because 'the deep structure of modernity is a totalizing idea, a modern mentality that sets modern society in opposition both to its own past and to those societies of the present that are premodern or un(der)developed' (1992, p.8). Therefore, the primitive and the natural, the seemingly different from modern society, have been structured based on an evolutional ideology according to the modern values, and have thus become tourist attractions. Places such as museums and the theme parks in the USA well illustrate the meaning of 'staged authenticity'. Accordingly, the 'authenticity' tourists gained is 'staged', in line with the intimacy and closeness they perceive when allowed to visit the back stages of destinations (MacCannell, 1999, 1973).

Tourists often easily and mistakenly perceive 'staged authenticity' as actual authenticity, as the alienation resulting from high differentiation seems to be relieved by 'staged authenticity'. On the stage, there exists a well organised semiotic system that represents the structure of society as a whole, which is supported by the totalising idea of modernity (MacCannell, 1999).

Upon first look, it seems that Boorstin held an opposing opinion to MacCannell, as he makes the criticism that tourists prefer to disregard reality and to stay in the environmental bubbles[8], rather than to interact with the host society (Boorstin, 1964). In other words, they enjoy 'pseudo-events' rather than real authenticity. On the contrary, MacCannell (1973) argues that the tourist's motivation is similar to that of a pilgrimage: the quest for authentic experiences. However, both scholars criticise commodification processes and the othering of culture taking place in modern society. The primary difference between the two scholars is that Boorstin perceives this as consumers' fault, while MacCannell contends that the problem is due to the tourism industry more broadly. Furthermore, MacCannell offers one reason as to why modern tourists often fail to find the 'real' or 'authentic', contending that this is not because they are superficial, but rather is due to the nature of totalised modernity, and the commodification of culture within modern society (1992, 1999). Significantly, he notes how totalised modernity is Western-centered, as non-Western culture is consistently interpreted as primitive (MacCannell, 1992).

MacCannell's theory of authenticity helps us to understand the motivation of backpackers in greater depth. As noted earlier, the hippie movement is regarded as a young generation's radical, countercultural critique of modern Western society. Backpackers are considered to be dissatisfied with the superficial experiences provided by the well-established tourism industry, and are instead working hard to grasp the authenticity of a destination in person. This is precisely why features such as 'spontaneity' and 'go with the flow' are widely recognised as the essential characters of backpackers (O'Reilly, 2006). Within the discourse of backpacking, non-travellers at home, who 'just work, consume and stay unhappy', and just live a 'normal life', are perceived to be directly related to materialism, consumerism and superficiality (Binder, 2004, p.99–100, 104). Although drifters were thought to have been transformed into 'mass backpackers' over the past few decades, the critique of the tourism industry and the

[8] It refers a space in which tourists' accustomed environment and native culture are transposed to foreign soil (Cohen, 1972).

differentiated and industrialised society still plays a crucial role in the backpacker culture (Welk, 2004; Kannisto, 2014). A 2002 transnational survey serves as an example , as most respondents noted that the search for 'authentic experiences' was a crucial element of backpacking (Richards and Wilson, 2004, p.36); however, according to MacCannell (1973, 1992), the possibility of being deceived by 'staged authenticity' always existed.

2.5.2 Critical perspectives on the quest for authenticity

The theory of authenticity also possesses significant complexities and challenges. First of all, scholars question the nature of authenticity, as represented by Cohen (1988) and Wang (1999). Distinct from MacCannell's opinion that 'authenticity' is absolute and is 'given' to tourists, Cohen suggests that it is in fact 'negotiable' (1988, p.374). For example, in regard to ethnic tourism, the original meaning of craftwork might be changed due to commodification; however, it gained new meaning when produced as a commodity and purchased by tourists. It is very likely that 'authenticity' means different things to different people; it is a subjective term. Wang (1999) argues that the authenticity referred to by MacCannell is objective, and that the negotiable approached proposed by Cohen is constructive. Accordingly, there is a third type of authenticity: existential authenticity; this refers to 'a potential existential state of Being[9] that is to be activated by tourist activities' '(Wang, 1999, p.352). Existential authenticity originates from the liminal process of tourism, and is unrelated to the authenticity of toured objects. Furthermore, Wang (1999) contends that existential authenticity is germane to the explanation of a greater variety of tourist experiences in postmodern conditions, particularly when compared to the two former types of authenticity.

The second challenge to the theory is relevant to its implied social status. By tracing the emergence of a modern concordat on 'cultural authenticity' in the British upper and middle classes, Buzard (1993) concludes that the significance of authenticity results from 'modern liberal democracies' making efforts to reinforce existing privileges and social status, by constructing tourism as 'an exemplary cultural practice' (1993, p.6). Cohen also contends that MacCannell's idea of the tourist is 'implicitly the "post-modern" young American traveller,

[9] Wang used the capital 'B' in the original text as an emphasis.

who has been prevalent in the turbulent times' (1979b, p.21) – namely – the 1960s and 1970s. For Cohen, these people were not ordinary tourists, but predominantly the Western middle classes. This thesis agrees that it is likely that the quest for authenticity is relevant to social status, as tourists with different backgrounds travel for different purposes. For example, Urry (1995) suggests that the emphasis on solitude, privacy and the personal relationship within the tourism industry is the 'romantic gaze' most favoured by the middle classes; thus, the criticism that mass tourists have destroyed attractions and natural beauty is, in fact, an illusion, due to elitism.

Thirdly, although Western centricity is precisely what MacCannell (1999, 1992) criticizes, one concern regarding the theory of authenticity is that it appears to be Western-centered. The theory fails to consider how travel culture and traditional values within different societies may influence the distinct way in which people travel and their perceptions of travel, regardless of processes of modernity and globalisation. Furthermore, the type of modernity criticised by MacCannell (1999, 1992) may not be the only type of modernity within the world (Chang, 2010; Beck and Grande, 2010; Han and Shim, 2010). It is problematic if one simply applies the theory of authenticity to them without considering the surrounding cultural and social context.

In a study on ethnic tourism in China, Oakes (1998) notes that, when compared to the Americans and Europeans who searched for the 'real' and 'authentic' China, Chinese tourists appear excited for the prepared ethnic performance by ethnic groups and content with this type of entertainment. Contextually, Americans and Europeans regarded the ethnic troupe dance performance as 'staged authenticity', while the Chinese might think that it is real. Oakes suggested that Chinese tourists are superficial, and are not searching for real authenticity. However, this thesis contends that travel culture in China consistently places emphasis on 'fun' rather than 'authenticity'. It is possible that Chinese tourists are not concerned with whether the performance is authentic or not, as long as the performance is fun and entertaining. Chines tourists put emphasis on the recreational function of tourism, as evidenced by an array of empirical studies.

Initiating several surveys conducted in different regions of China in the late 1990s, Xiao (2003) highlights how Chinese tourists then possessed distinctive characteristics. Firstly, short-haul

travel (a duration of three days or less and a visit to no more than two cities) dominated the tourism market. Secondly, in terms of motivations, most tourists referred to leisure and recreation-related expectations, rarely mentioning adventure, novelty or knowledge seeking. Another survey shows how the majority of Chinese people liked to travels in a group, and were against the idea of sharing a room with strangers (Yang, 2005). Therefore, the youth hostel - as a place providing cheap, often shared, accommodation - is fairly new to Chinese travellers. Zhu's (2007) survey of Chinese backpackers also revealed that the top three travel motivations (in sequence) were: enjoying the splendid landscape, experiencing different cultures, and escaping from trivial things in life (2007 p.104). However, it is worth noting that, to experience different cultures and the desire to escape, were also highlighted by Chinese backpackers; accordingly, it is possible to employ the theory of authenticity to analyse this group.

Although the theory of authenticity has several problems, this thesis contends that it is still of great importance. MacCannell (1999, 1992) is one pioneer who notes how tourists are not only consumers, but are also modern people who feel alienated in the highly differentiated and industrialised society. As a result, the motives for tourism are deeply rooted in the nature of modern society. Moreover, tourists' quests for authenticity and its failure reflect the problematic nature of Western-centered modernity. Therefore, the theory of authenticity nevertheless contributes to an analysis of contemporary travellers, although this thesis suggests that it is important to consider the impact of travel culture and traditional Chinese values.

There is little discussion of Chinese backpackers' attitudes towards authenticity and the modern society in previous academic work. Perhaps backpackers rarely mentioned it, or perhaps the topic has been neglected by scholars, as backpackers are consistently perceived as a certain type of consumers. However, backpacker culture emerged in China at the turn of the century, possessing distinct characteristics, and has become more and more popular among the younger generations. By examining if Chinese backpackers are concerned with the topic of authenticity, it is relevant to answer considerations regarding whether the popularity of backpacking is relevant to resistance to feelings of alienation, resulting from modernity. However, this thesis notes how China's travel culture and traditions influence the way in which people travel, and their own perceptions of travel. Furthermore, this thesis also

recognises the negotiable meaning of authenticity, and the specific social status the theory represents.

2.6 The search for the self and its critique

As demonstrated earlier, the 1980s witnessed a decrease in the number of drifters and an increase in budget travellers. The 1980s is also known as the era that late modernity became 'fully established' as a social process in the West (Dawson, 2011, p.7). Moreover, it is not until the 1990s that backpacking became part of a globalised culture. Accordingly, the transition from modernity to late modernity[10] is crucial to understanding transformations within backpacker culture. As mentioned above, the studies on Chinese backpackers also refers to postmodern and individualism (Zhu, 2007; Yu, 2012; Luo et al., 2014). Therefore, a review of the theories of late modernity regarding travel is necessary, as is an examination of whether the analysis of late modernity is appropriate when examining the social conditions in contemporary China.

2.6.1 Individualisation and its consequences

Late modernity - as a sociological topic - emerged in the West in the early 1990s, while as an unfolding social process it began in the 1950/60s, becoming fully established in the 1980s, concerning crucial factors such as the welfare state, individualisation, and the post-traditional order (Dawson, 2011). Contemporary sociologists employ different terms to describe the profound social changes taking place in society, such as 'high modernity' or 'late modernity', as used by Giddens (1990, 1991); 'liquid modernity' and 'individualised society' as employed by Bauman (2000; 2001); as well as 'second modernity' and 'reflexive modernization' as proposed by Beck and his colleagues (Beck and Grande, 2010), as they tended to emphasise

[10] Different sociologists hold different opinions about how to interpret and to understand this process. For example, rather than a transition from modernity to late modernity, Habermas suggested modernity was 'the unfinished project' (D'Entrèves and Benhabib, 1996). In this thesis, I employ the idea of Beck (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Beck and Grande, 2010) and Giddens (1990, 1991), referring there is a change within modernity.

different aspects of these social changes. Among them, the analyses of individualisation (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002) and self-identity (Giddens, 1991) are of great significance in understanding backpackers within late modern society in any depth. First of all, the most essential characteristic of an individualised society is outlined by Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002), who state:

> *We live in an age in which the social order of the national state, class, ethnicity and the traditional family is in decline. The ethic of individual self-fulfilment and achievement is the most powerful current in modern society. The choosing, deciding, shaping human being who aspires to be the author his or her own life. The creator of an individual identity, is the central character of our time.*
>
> (2002, pp.22–23)

Elements such as nation state, social class, ethnicity and family – all which previously played essential roles in identifying individuals within the simple modern society – have gradually lost value. Furthermore, there exists no new, overarching authority to whom one might turn to (Giddens, 1991). As Beck and Beck-Gernsheim conclude, 'individualisation' means 'dis-embedding without re-embedding' (2002, p.xxii). Therefore, individuals are forced to live in a world that full of risk and change. The image of the autarkic human self is thus widely believed in, in an individualised society. This image 'assumes that individuals alone can master the whole of their lives, that they derive and renew their capacity for action from within themselves' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, p.xxi). As a result, the self and self-reflexivity become unprecedentedly prominent. For an individual who adjusts to these ever-changing social conditions, to reflect and look back on the self, the one they have been inhabiting, is the only way to progress (Elliott and Lemert, 2009). Individuals have to identify themselves by themselves, and self-identity becomes a reflexively organised endeavour (Giddens, 1991).

There are two poles, or consequences, of individualisation: autonomy and anomie (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, p.7). Autonomy refers to the way in which an individual is allowed to live a life of one's own, which means that one has a greater choice about what to do and who to be. Traditional categories of identification such as gender, class, nationality and ethnicity

are open to questioning. As Giddens suggested, 'lifestyle…is "adopted" rather than "handed down". The more post-traditional the settings in which an individual moves, the more lifestyle concerns the very core of self-identity, its making and remaking' (1991, p.81).

As for anomie, 'the darker side of freedom and choice may be that it brings higher anxiety, feelings of individual responsibility, and even depression. The life course becomes an increasingly experimental process that is the responsibility of the individual. When she fails, she can no longer call upon or even blame her family, friends, and the state' (Mills, 2007, p.73). Significantly, although traditional categories of identification such as gender and class are open to questioning in regard to the individualised society, as stated above, sociological work consistently reminds us that status and class still have a substantial impact on our lives; as Mills notes, 'the distribution of choice and freedom and the ability to engage in a reflexive biography is uneven and unequal' (2007, p.74). Accordingly, there is always a gap between individual ambition and actual achievements; Furlong and Cartmel refer this as an 'epistemological fallacy' (2007). Individuals believe that they are able to control their fate and life, but they usually fail because the powers of social structures are overlooked. However, the individual is to blame for the failure.

> *In this context, we have seen that some of the problems faced by young people in modern societies stem from an attempt to negotiate difficulties on an individual level. Blind to the existence of powerful chains of interdependency, young people frequently attempt to resolve collective problems through individual action and hold themselves responsible for their inevitable failure.*
>
> (Furlong and Cartmel, 2007, p.144)

To conclude, the self and self-reflexivity are both significant in an individualised society. However, the outcomes of 'individual endeavour' are nevertheless strongly affected by the surrounding social structures. In this case, this thesis asks: how do social conditions and culture in late modern societies influence backpacker culture?

2.6.2 The backpacker's search for self in late modernity

The most notable phenomenon is that backpacking is found to be particularly related to the need to 'find oneself', alongside the development of a strong sense of self since the 2000s (Noy, 2004; O'Reilly, 2006; Cohen, 2009). As Mills notes, 'the growth in leisure time in many western countries, coupled with the focus on self-actualisation, provides individuals with more time to ponder their existence and life choices as opposed to just "getting on with it"' (Mills, 2007, pp.73–74). Thus, the theme of 'searching for self' is both prominent and significant within backpacking studies.

However, why is backpacking - or explorative travel - particularly popular? Giddens (1991) suggests that those who proactively pursue risks when travelling are indeed not irrational. As leisure trips have been regularised and have subsequently become safer, travellers feel less excited during their journeys. In this case, backpackers may deliberately expose themselves to uncertainty through spontaneity and 'going with the flow'. Accordingly, the 'mastery of such dangers is an act of self-vindication and a demonstration, to the self and to others, that under difficult circumstances one can come through' (Giddens, 1991, p.133).

The perception of 'self-actualisation' also implies that backpacking can be a basis for success in later life. As Richards and Wilson indicate, 'the ability to deal with uncertainty and change are arguably the very qualities required to operate effectively in postmodern societies. Backpackers might be expected to be more successful than their contemporaries who have not abandoned the security of their own society or culture' (2004a, p.6). From this perspective, the creation of risk is continually crucial to the identity of an extraordinary traveller pushing the boundaries of traditional travel (Elsrud, 2001).

If a sense of autonomy drives backpackers to 'actualise' themselves through travelling, alienation can be considered as the feeling that drives them to 're/identify' themselves through the journey. Contemporary feelings of alienation are regarded as an important reason for tourism in general, as discussed above (MacCannell, 1973; Cohen, 1972). However, within late modern society, anomie is more individualised and intensified, due to the 'epistemological fallacy' discussed above. Individuals increasingly seek solutions for problems by themselves, although people's life chances remain highly structured within contemporary society.

Accordingly, backpacking is also known to play an important role in the construction of and search for identity, particularly when individuals experience life crises or transitions (Desforges, 2000; Maoz, 2008; Noy and Cohen, 2012). Referred as fateful moments by Giddens (1991), life crises and transitions open up existential questions regarding the sense of ontological security that emerges and bothers individuals. Accordingly, how to live through these moments has a great impact on the individual's own future and self-identity[11]. In these moments, according to Giddens (1991), people either 'seek refuge in pre-established beliefs and in familiar modes of activity', or 'reskilling and empowerment' (p.142).

Elsrud (1998) suggests that backpacking offers a 'time frame' free of social obligations, within which backpackers are able to 'create' their own time, and which thus helps to further processes of personal growth, development or change. For example, one study on female Israeli backpackers in their mid-40s and 50s (Maoz, 2008) revealed that these women portrayed their journeys in India as a transition, which allowed them to escape from former identities, to construct a new one more deeply attached to their previously suppressed needs, desires and aspirations. The author of the study concludes that these female backpackers regarded their travel experiences as an inner journey that responded to their personal questions, needs and problems.

Furthermore, the search for authenticity was originally used to refer to the objective authenticity of culture and human relations (MacCannell, 1973). However, recent studies argue that the 'search for an authentic self' became the primary motivation of travellers in late modern societies (Wang, 1999; Reisinger and Steiner, 2006). As discussed in the last section, Wang suggests that most contemporary tourists search for a potential existential state of being, namely existential authenticity (Wang, 1999). The 'authentic self' as pursuing existential authenticity can be characterised through senses of nostalgia or romanticism. Regarding the former, during travels, postmodern tourists pursue 'a freer, more innocent, more spontaneous, purer, and truer self than usual' (Wang, 1999, p.360). As for the latter, they look for 'naturalness, sentiments, and feelings in response to the increasing self-constraints by reason

[11] There are vast studies about the concept of 'self' and 'identity'. For the purpose of this study, the thesis mainly refers to Giddens' analysis. 'self' focuses on an individual's subjective experience of 'who am I'. 'Self-identity' examines how an individual keeps a 'story' about the self going (Giddens, 1991, p.55). The 'story' told by one self, but it integrates events occurred in the external world and subject's interaction with others.

and rationality in modernity' (Wang, 1999, p.360). As a result, existential authenticity can also be interpreted as an attempt to 'search for (the authentic) self'.

2.6.3 Understanding Chinese backpackers in an individualised society

How do analyses of individualization, and the perspective of 'searching for the self', help to understand contemporary Chinese backpackers? First of all, as discussed in the introductory chapter, social reform – taking place since the 1980s – broke down a centrally-planned society to some extent, whilst emancipating many individuals (Jacka et al., 2013; Ren, 2013; Yan, 2010). On the one hand, the receding role of the state within the reform era has stimulated the economy and created more space for individuals to pursue what they want. Chinese citizens have arguably become more self-reliant, proactive, and self-disciplined. The emergence of migrant workers serves as a good example, as demonstrated in the introductory chapter. On the other hand, individuals have been forced to compete in a free employment market, as there exists no more *'tie fanwan'* (铁饭碗, iron rice bowl) [12]. Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim (2002) began their book on individualisation by referring a press release from Beijing in 1993, when numerous people were laid off from the SOEs and felt the resulting anxiety it triggered.

The younger generation, born after the reform, more strongly believed in the phrase, 'fate is in your own hands', as revealed in Liu's (2008) study on the life choices of Chinese college students. Moreover, as the surveys of values showed in the last chapter (Whyte, 2005; Sun and Wang, 2010; Lian, 2014; Chen and Lian, 2015), the younger generation place more importance on developing oneself than making contributions to the country, and are much more individualistic regarding life attitudes. Chang's study of women migrant workers also showed that these girls were motivated to leave villages and find work in cities in the 1990s and 2000s. They seized opportunities to learn, grow, and increase their value in urban cities, arguably transforming into independent women.

[12] *Tie fanwan* (铁饭碗) is a Chinese term refers to an occupation with guaranteed job security, as well as steady income and benefits.

Furthermore, Chang explored these transformations of perspectives on mobility taking place over the last few decades in China. Peasants in the 1980s and early 1990s travelling to cities for work - namely the first generation of the migrant worker - were considered to be unfortunate, as they did not like to leave their home. However, the second generation who left their hometowns in the early 2000s thought it was necessary and valuable (Chang, 2009). Apart from the social reform, the individualistic character of the younger generation is also believed to have been greatly affected by the one-child policy, as discussed in the last chapter. The post-80s were interpreted as the 'me generation'(Rosen, 2009) a group extensively concerned with individual interests, personal rights and self-development.

Under the circumstances, one recent doctoral research on Chinese backpackers, possessing the English title *'Research on backpackers' self-realization through tourist experiences'* (Yu, 2012), emphasised how Chinese backpackers' purpose of travel was understood as 'self-construction', as a contended important character of contemporary Chinese backpackers. However, there is arguably a substantial gap between the resources of the research and its conclusion, making the argument seems specious. In the study, the author posed a question to a backpacker online community, asking, 'why did you want to go backpacking?' Based on 487 relevant responses over a year, the author ranked the frequency of keywords. The word 'self', 'freedom', 'mind' possessed a relatively high frequency, as they were mentioned between 10 to 20 times (Yu, 2012, p.57).

However, first of all, the reliability of feedback from anonymous Internet users is low. Secondly, the meaning of 'self-actualisation' and 'self-construction' is vague and subjective, arguably dependent on context, the specificity of which is left out of the study. Thirdly, the self-reported answers to a single question is unable to inform readers of how these people actualise themselves through travelling, or if the motivation influences their travel behaviours and experiences. Other studies on Chinese backpackers also noted how 'self-actualisation' became an important travel motivation of backpackers (Zhu, 2007; Chen et al., 2014; Luo et al., 2014). However, as all of them employed a quantitative approach, the different understandings of the term greatly affected the operative definition within each study. To conclude, although researchers have highlighted how 'self-identity' and 'self-actualisation' might play an important role in Chinese backpackers' experiences - which is distinct from the traditional travel culture of 'travelling for fun' as stated above - it is still unclear as to why and

how Chinese citizens employ backpacking as a way with which to identify and develop themselves.

2.6.4 The Chinese path to individualisation: A critical perspective

Yan (2009b, 2010) notes that there exist significant differences between China's processes of individualisation and those of Europe; for example, China did not possess an institutionally secured framework founded on civil, political and social basic rights - something that Europe had achieved during the first modernity. In addition, China's state-sanctioned individualisation, as well as the process of liberation, remained exclusively within the domain of economic activities and private lifestyles. Yan (2010) further highlighted how, in China's case, the globalisation of the market economy and an ideology of consumerism made crucial contributions to the individualisation. Beck and Grande (2010) thus admitted that the assumed universal logic of individualisation was, in fact, a historically and culturally limited form specific to Western Europe.

Accordingly, one consequence of the Chinese model of individualisation is that individuals living in post-reform China are 'condemned to take their own initiatives—without the former social safety nets of Chinese state socialism' (Beck, 2013, p.97). For example, in the 1990s, urban retired residences who used to work in pre-reform China had pensions, subsidised public housing and medical insurance coverage; as a result, they did not need to be dependent on their adult children (Whyte, 2005). However, young people, who were born, educated, and worked in post-reform China faced the privatisation of housing, and the marketisation of education and medical care (Yan, 2010). Therefore, individualisation in China is arguably even more 'individualised' than in Western Europe.

Although Chinese citizens live in a society that promotes the autarkic human self, the state and CPC continue to play a vital role in society, as China's social reform is state-sanctioned. As a result, the resources and wealth were still concentrated within the party and the government. This is precisely why many post-1980s youngsters eagerly took the Civil Servants' Examination and wanted to become civil servants, as the jobs were considered to be much

more secure. At the same time, mobility between areas is still controlled by the *'hukou'* system (household registration system) (Chan and Buckingham, 2008). Furthermore, the family structure is greatly influenced by the national birth control policy (Whyte, 2005; Attané, 2016).

Significantly, after more than thirty years' of reform, the reproduction and stratification of social classes is currently underway, as the emergence of '*fuerdai'*, '*guanerdai'* showed - the second generation of the rich, the second generation of the cadre (Xiang and Shen, 2009). A lot of empirical studies also revealed that social class plays a vital role in structuring the opportunities and constraints contained within the lives of individuals, particularly in regard to education, occupation and income. For example, although Chinese college students widely believed in the maxim, 'fate is in your own hands', Liu (2008) concludes that they were trapped in this 'opportunity gap', without realising that the gap is socially constructed, as indicated by the 'epistemological fallacy' (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997).

It appears that Chinese citizens are living in a world lacking a well-established social safety net. Under the circumstances, sociologists have tried to find significant factors that are able to alleviate Chinese citizen's feelings of alienation and anxiety. Historically, Chinese citizen's social ties are primarily constructed by consanguinity and regionalism (Fei, 1992). Many empirical studies tend to indicate that, distinct from Western societies, the family continues to hold political, economic and emotional significance within contemporary Chinese society (Barbalet, 2016; Cockain, 2012a; Lu et al., 2004; Liu, 2008; Qi, 2016). As stated, 'It can be seen that the welfare system, law, economic reform, demographic change and policy in China all shape the continuing importance of family bonds and filial obligation. More importantly, Chinese individuals flexibly reinterpret and negotiate the meanings of filial obligation in the construction of their own lives' (Qi, 2016, p.45). For many young Chinese citizens, fulfilling family responsibilities and parents' expectations are still crucial. This is not only because they are influenced by traditional Chinese culture, but also because the singleton generation and their parents have to be financially and emotionally interdependent to reduce the risks. However, value differences among generations may cause conflict between parents and children; accordingly, it is necessary to investigate the role that family plays in young Chinese backpackers' life choices.

Moreover, sociologists from East Asia have argued that the risks embedded in areas such as Japan, South Korea and China are much broader and more confusing than those in Western societies, primarily due to the dual aspects of compressed modernity[13] (Han and Shim, 2010). Modernisation within these areas was led by bureaucratic–authoritarian states in a very condensed manner. On the one hand, it has 'produced positive outcomes such as economic growth, industrial systems, technological development, urbanization, educated work forces...On the other hand, however, [it] has produced numerous dangers and risks which threaten human security. The preoccupation with rapid modernization has destroyed the wisdom of balance…Thus, everyone has been driven to get more, to invest more, to get things done faster than planned, without properly addressing the issue of risks and their management' (Han and Shim, 2010, p.474).

This critical view of compressed modernity corresponds with the situation presented in the last chapter; due to rapid development, social conflicts in China have intensified over the last decade. Accordingly, people have become critical of the supposed achievements of modernisation, which has made the emergence of 'reflexive modernisation' (Han and Shim, 2010; Calhoun, 2010) possible in these areas. Therefore, it is necessary to examine if the popularity of backpacking among young Chinese citizens relates to the population's reflections on modernity and modernisation, as drifters did in the 1960s in the US.

To summarise, although previous studies on Chinese backpackers arguably oversimplify the relationship between individualism and Chinese backpackers, the analyses provided of late modernity and individualism remain useful, as China's social condition does have many similarities to that of contemporary Western societies. It is worthwhile to examine how Chinese backpackers perceive the self, and question if the search for self is a crucial motivation. However, the differences between Chinese and Westerners cannot be neglected; thus, it is of great importance to investigate how China's distinct culture and its path to individualism has influenced young Chinese backpackers.

[13] Compressed modernity is defined as 'a civilizational condition in which economic, political, social and/or cultural changes occur in an extremely condensed manner in respect to both time and space, and in which the dynamic coexistence of mutually disparate historical and social elements leads to the construction and reconstruction of a highly complex and fluid social system' (Chang, 2010, p.446).

2.7 Summary

In this chapter, I firstly reviewed the emergence and development of backpacking in China and Western societies, respectively. This demonstrated how Chinese backpackers have been primarily made up of the urban middle classes. However, over recent years, more and more students, as well as young people with non-privileged backgrounds, have participated in this activity. However, existing literature fails to explain why and how these changes have happened; in response, this is the focus of this study.

In the West, backpacking was transformed from a countercultural activity to a form of lifestyle enhancement and a way of constructing and exploring self-identity. The quest for authenticity and the search for self are two crucial perspectives required for understanding modern travellers and their motivations in greater depth. Rather than simply applying the theories to an analysis of Chinese backpackers, this thesis contends that it is important to examine how China's specific cultural traditions and social structures interact with this 'imported' Western lifestyle. Inspired by the two perspectives, the thesis seeks to investigate factors within contemporary Chinese society that drive the younger generation to backpack.

Examining whether Chinese backpackers are concerned with authenticity helps to answer the question of whether the popularity of backpacking is relevant to a resistance to the feeling of alienation, resulting from capitalism and the division of labour. In addition, this work notes how China's specific travel culture and traditions influence the way in which its citizens travel, and their perceptions of travel. Furthermore, by examining how Chinese backpackers perceive the self and the role of backpacking in their own lives, this study will examine the character of the younger generation living in an increasingly individualised country. Therefore, this thesis, contrary to the existing literature, seeks to place Chinese backpacking in its particular historical and cultural setting and understand the motivations of those who practice it.

3. Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research questions, methods, samples, reflections on my own subjectivity as a researcher, and an assessment of the methodology. It begins with a discussion of the research questions of this study. The second section of this chapter explains why and how qualitative methodology is employed in this study. In particular, it introduces the semi-structured in-depth interview, focus group and participant observation, which are the methods used for data collection within this work. The third section focuses on the recruitment and the data collection procedure, providing an explanation of the selection criteria for creating a purposive sample. In addition, the demographic background of interviewed backpackers and focus group participants, as well as the basic information of the selected youth hostels, are illustrated. The fourth part further introduces the locations of this study, explaining why Yunnan Province is an appropriate choice for fieldwork trips, and why all focus groups are conducted in the most developed areas of China. The final section reflects on some issues regarding methods, resulting from my subjective perspective and the language used. The chapter ends with a summary and an assessment of the methods used in this study.

3.2 Research questions

As Pearce (2008) concludes, there are two different approaches to studying the backpacker. The sociological and ethnological approach deals with conceptual analyses, such as rites of passage, identity markers and pilgrimage liminality. The managemental and economic approach focuses on topics such as market differentiation, product development and information influences. The former most often employs qualitative methods, while the latter primarily adopts quantitative methods. As noted in the previous chapter, tourism studies in China are generated by and developed with the industry; therefore, most studies on tourists take the second approach. Quantitative methods, from a statistical and numerical point of view,

are widely employed. However, this research uses the sociological and ethnological approach, focusing on Chinese backpackers' characters and life choices, as well as the emergence of backpacking within China. It aims to find out why backpacking has become increasingly popular among the post-80s generation in China. Accordingly, there are two key questions for the empirical study: firstly, how is backpacking perceived and practised by young Chinese people? Secondly, are there any differences among young backpackers regarding travel motivations and life attitudes? The first question focuses on the formation of backpacker culture in China, and its relationship to the broader social context in which it sits. The second question focuses on the diversity and heterogeneity of Chinese backpackers, which mirrors the differentiation of the post-80s generation from earlier generations.

The first question intends to analyse the essence of backpacker culture from the perspective of young Chinese people. As the popularity of backpacking is a social phenomenon, the question aims to examine to what extent backpacker culture challenges traditional and dominant values and culture in China, and thus reflects the spirit of the younger generation. In order to answer this research question, there are two sub-questions: firstly, who are the backpackers? Furthermore, secondly, how do they backpack? Both the experiences and opinions of backpackers and non-backpackers are examined, in order to compare the opinions of these two groups.

The second question concerns the differences among backpackers. It is important to note how the post-80s generation is not a homogeneous group, nor are young backpackers. Social backgrounds and life experiences distinguish backpackers from one another, and young people's life attitudes and lives are shaped by different cultural values. As discussed in the introductory chapter, the post-80s generation is mobile subject who attempts to reconcile the conflicts between contemporary and traditional life. Also, it is crucial to distinguish backpacking as a way of travelling, from backpacking as a free-wheeling lifestyle. To be specific, some travellers backpack during holidays, or they undergo backpacking as a once-in-a-lifetime experience. However, some travellers backpack for years, developing new routines to sustain their lifestyle. In order to answer the second question mentioned above, there are two additional sub-questions: firstly, why do young people backpack? Furthermore, secondly, how do the differences regarding travel motivations and life attitudes distinguish backpackers from one another?

To summarise, the objective of this study is to provide an ethnographic report on the contemporary China through the eyes of the post-80s generation, by examining why backpacking has become increasingly popular among the younger generation. There are two primary research questions; each has two sub-questions, stated as below:

(1) How is backpacking perceived and practised by young Chinese people?
    1.a. Who are the backpackers?
    1.b. How do they backpack?

(2) Are there any differences among young backpackers regarding travel motivations and life attitudes?
    2.a. Why do young people backpack?
    2.b. How do the differences regarding travel motivations and life attitudes distinguish backpackers from one another?

By addressing these four questions, this study not only tries to depict the characters, behaviours, and motivations of individual travellers, but also aims to explore how the motivations and life choices of individuals are deeply influenced by their social conditions and personal backgrounds. Accordingly, this study will demonstrate how the dreams and dilemmas of young Chinese backpackers result from the society they inhabit.

3.3 Qualitative methodology

This study aims to gain an in-depth understanding of how and why certain groups of people choose to undergo backpacking, against the background of China's broader social transformation. Therefore, this study is based on individual's experiences and personal interpretations, as well as people's feelings and opinions. In other words, it locates their travel experiences within the context of the conditions and circumstances of their life, relating it to wider society. In addition, the study examines how non-backpackers within society perceive and understand backpackers' choices to travel in a particular way.

Although the first research question is, 'who are the backpackers?', this study does not plan to answer the question through the launch of a survey. The primary purpose of this study is not to generalise a complete picture of Chinese backpackers regarding their demographic characteristics; instead, the 'who' question refers to backpackers' self-identification and non-backpackers' perceptions of backpackers. In other words, the question focuses on the personality of backpackers and the essential characteristics of backpacker culture. In addition, there exist several updated surveys on Chinese backpackers (Chen et al., 2014; Yu, 2012) as discussed in the last chapter; the findings of previous studies help this study to generate a purposive sample, reflecting the diversity of Chinese backpackers. With the purposive sample, this study is able to examine what makes an individual a backpacker.

Accordingly, this study adopts qualitative research methods, with an epistemological position of interpretivist, and an ontological position of constructionist. The qualitative approach tends to understand the social world 'through an examination of the interpretation of that world by its participants' (Bryman, 2012, p.380). This approach also supports the belief that 'social properties are outcomes of the interactions between individuals, rather than the phenomena "out there" and separate from those involved in its construction' (Bryman, 2012, p.380). This study design, as Denzin and Lincoln suggest, attempts to 'turn the world into a series of representations including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings and memos to the self' (2000, p.3). In this case, semi-structured in-depth interviews and focus groups are employed to collect data. In addition, photographs and fieldwork notes - collected through participant observation - are used for further analysis.

3.3.1 The semi-structured in-depth interview

As one of the primary qualitative methods, the in-depth interview is an effective way to gain a greater understanding of what people believe, how they think, and how this affects their lives. Compared to the fully-structured interview, based on detailed questions and precise measurements, the semi-structured interview possesses two advantages. Firstly, it allows the interviewer to prepare certain questions in advance, in order to ensure the dialogue concentrate on the topic of focus. Moreover, it is open to questions raised during the interview process,

with the purpose of exploring emerging themes and ideas. The semi-structured interview is also helpful when the interview is focused on life stories and personal experiences. This 'biographic-narrative interview' concerns interviewees' own rights and their ways of telling stories (Wengraf, 2001). Therefore, the semi-structured in-depth interview is an effective method to explore young backpacker's travel experience, as well as their personal life attitudes.

To allow participants to raise topics from their perspective is of great importance in this study. For example, interviewed backpackers often invited me to 'befriend' them on social networking sites, and to visit their online homepages. The photos and posts on social media platforms help them to recall travel experiences. A lot of interesting topics were unexpectedly generated in this process, such as how frequently they used social media platforms, and what photos were selected to post. Although I did not use any content from interviewees' social media pages in the study, the experience of visiting their social media site, and being connected to them through the Internet, did help me understand their character more deeply and holistically. However, to be friends with participants over the Internet also brought its own set of ethical dilemmas, which will be discussed later in this work.

As a result, one interview has several core questions, although participants can discuss these topics in an approach of their choosing, including: (1) under what circumstances did you choose to backpack for the first time? (2) What did you do when you were travelling? (3) Do you think the travel experience has changed your life? (4) What do you think is the relationship between travel and normal/routine life? (5) How do your parents and close friends understand your way of life? (6) How do you understand their way of life?

Additionally, the study includes semi-structured interviews with local people whose work is related to the tourism industry. The objective of these interviews is to learn more about the transformation of backpackers as a unique tourist group emerging over recent years, and its implications from a local perspective. Compared to the interviews with backpackers, the interviews with locals are more structured and information-oriented. Nevertheless, it allows interviewees to initiate and develop relevant topics that they might be interested in.

Although interviewing through the use of the telephone or the Internet is common within contemporary qualitative research (Holt, 2010; Deakin and Wakefield, 2014), I chose to

conduct face-to-face interviews specifically because the interview could then concentrate on individual life stories and personal feelings. As the respondents and myself were strangers before the meeting, it was vital to focus on building trust between the participants and researcher. The presence of the researcher made it easier for interviewees to ask questions and build this necessary trust; only when participants feel safe and comfortable are they able to reveal their life experiences more honestly to a stranger. Furthermore, the face-to-face interview also helped me – as the researcher – to respond quickly, and maintain a flexible and reflective conversation. As an earlier example demonstrates, some participants invited me to visit their 'Internet space', because they wanted to show me more when talking about a specific topic. Additionally, more information can be revealed through a face-to-face meeting; for example, both sides are able to learn the attitudes and feelings of the other, through body language and physical expression.

Although I was unable to meet with some participants who were recruited through the Internet, but were unable to arrange a face-to-face meeting, the overall quality of the interviews conducted was high. Interviews with backpackers lasted on average an hour and a half; the longest was four hours. Almost every interviewed backpacker was very willing to be contacted later if there were any following questions from myself. I found that interviewees discussed their life stories and travel experiences honestly and confidently. Some said that they felt very happy to have the opportunity to share opinions that they felt unable to discuss with parents and close friends.

3.3.2 The focus group

According to Morgan (1998), the focus group is a qualitative research method used for data collection through group discussion, guided by specific questions from the researcher. As with all qualitative methods, the focus group requires openness and flexibility. Distinct from one-to-one interviews, the interactive process of discussion in the focus group allows researchers to discover questions, themes and ideas that have not yet been considered. In doing so, the research is enriched. Moreover, the focus group creates a strong social context in which participants can not only share their opinion, but also listen and respond to the opinions of

others. During the discussions, participants may clarify, qualify or modify ideas. In this case, it inspires the researcher to explore how consensus and debates are shaped, and how language is used differently within certain contexts (Finch and Lewis, 2003). Thus, researchers can further identify the factors that affect different perceptions and opinions; in doing so, the focus group is able to provide greater collective understanding.

In general, a discussion guide is used by the moderator, in order to guide the discussion most effectively. However, there is no definitive or correct way to conduct focus group research, as long as it can produce high-quality data (Hennink, 2014). I have chosen to give the topic guide sheet to all participants after they finish their personal introduction. Participants are asked to read and consider the questions to be discussed later. If necessary, they can write down initial thoughts on the sheet. As soon as people are prepared, the questions were discussed one by one.

This process seems to differ from conventional approaches to the focus group, as most often people participate in the more free-flowing discussion. However, rather than preventing interactive discussion, the approach employed by this thesis has proved to be effective. First of all, the most important objective of this topic sheet is to provide participants with a clear understanding of the topics to be discussed. The primary function of the focus group in this study is not to discover topics that have not yet been considered, but to gather participants' opinions and feelings on backpacking and backpackers. Therefore, having a period of time to think about the topics carefully helps people to be able to express themselves clearly and develop their ideas in the discussion. Secondly, participants are not required to write anything if they do not want to. Moreover, they are told that they can discuss and debate with one another from the very beginning of the focus group; this means that they do not need to read things they write on the sheet. When guiding the discussion, I try to intervene as little as possible during the discussion of each specific topic. Thirdly, after referring to the guide books on focus group (Morgan, 1998; Hennink, 2014), the questions on the sheet have been designed to be clear, open and simple, in order to promote discussion, as shown below.

The questions asked in focus group discussions cover three sets of questions, as demonstrated in Appendix 4: (1) who are backpackers, and what image of a backpacker come to mind? (2) Do you think that backpacking is 'non-mainstream'? What is your reasoning? What is your

opinion of this form of travelling? (3) Do you like to travel? How often do you travel? What are your motivations for travelling? What are the barriers you come up against about travelling?

Within the context of this study, focus groups have been employed to learn how ordinary Chinese citizens, including college students and young professionals, perceive backpacking as a lifestyle. It aims to provide a broader social context of the popularity of backpacking among young Chinese. Focus group participants are not necessarily fond of travelling; they are the non-backpackers. However, as they share a similar social background with backpackers, their opinions provide alternative and additional ideas regarding travel, as well as lifestyle choices. Along with a discussion on backpackers and backpacking tourism, this also concerns non-backpackers' perspectives on travel and the relationship between travel/leisure and work/routine life more broadly.

3.3.3 Participant observation

Participant observation primarily refers to the process that the researcher immerses oneself in, within a group for a certain period of time, 'observing behaviour, listening to what is said in conversations both between others and with the fieldworker, and asking questions' (Bryman, 2012, p.432). Participant observation is widely used in backpacker studies, as it helps researchers to better investigate how backpackers have actually behaved during their travels (Graburn, 1983; Binder, 2004; Uriely et al., 2002; Sørensen, 2003; Muzaini, 2006).

During fieldwork in Yunnan, I stayed in several youth hostels and in the city of Dali to conduct participant observation. Firstly, in order to explore how the spaces of youth hostels are designed and used, photos were taken to illustrate the features of Chinese youth hostels. These photos, as well as interviews with hostel owners and managers as stated above, aim to contribute to revealing the development of the youth hostel in China, and its role in the popularity of backpacking over recent years. As discussed in the last chapter, the public space - such as the lobby, café bar, bar and self-catering kitchen - are the 'soul' (Zhou, 2013, p.28) of youth hostels. Accordingly, I took photos to illustrate the decorations and equipment of these places.

Secondly, youth hostels are the primary place to meet solo travellers and build friendships. I wrote field notes as supplements, focusing on how people were perceived interact with one another in the youth hostels I encounter. There is no fixed time to my stay in the youth hostel. However, I remained in the public space – in particular the lobby – when I was not conducting interviews. On occasion, I spoke with people who also stayed in the lobby; sometimes I observed how people used the facilities in the public space. For example, questioning, if they knew each other before playing snooker together? Did they buy meals or drinks from the café? Did they talk to strangers in the lobby?

Many long-haul backpackers were found to gather in the city of Dali. Backpackers who run out of money whilst travelling undertook all kinds of work there, such as receptionists in hostels, selling craftwork to tourists, and teaching Chinese to foreigners. As a result, places such as Dali is regarded as a base city of backpackers. Therefore, I stayed in the city for several days, exploring the lives of the backpackers who lived there. I took photos of the streets in the city of Dali, as backpackers gathered in these areas. Most often, they would set up street stalls there, selling all kinds of souvenirs to tourists to make money. In doing so, they prolonged their trips. I wrote field notes when staying in Dali, to record all that I observed, and the informal conversations I overheard.

In this study, the information gathered from these observations and informal talks are of great importance in examining and validating the findings of the formal interviews conducted. Interviews, to some extent, are materials examining self-presentation, while participant observation in the field offers an additional perspective, to evaluate and reflect on the interviewing material. For example, people talked a lot about their unforgettable experiences in youth hostels; my observation provided supplemental materials of how people were making friends there. More importantly, sometimes what I observed came into conflict with what backpackers stated in interviews. For example, I found that most of the time, people were staying alone, such as surfing the Internet, instead of talking to strangers in the lobby. Accordingly, these findings made me reflect on the interviewing materials. More details on the relevant topic will be discussed in Chapter Five.

3.4 Sample

3.4.1 The selection criteria

Differing from quantitative sampling that aims to produce a statistical representative sample, the goal of qualitative sampling is to attain a symbolically representative sample. That is to say, units are deliberately selected to reflect particular features or characteristics of the parent population (Ritchie et al., 2003). In this study, the purposive sampling method is used for symbolic representation. As Bryman (2012) suggests, by choosing cases/participants strategically, the researcher can gain a sample that ensures a good deal of variety. In addition, the sample includes members that are different from one another, regarding key characteristics relevant to research questions. It is essential for purposive sampling to locate a sample's variations that might differ in regard to the outcome.

The first step of the sampling process for this study was to refer to the prominent definition of backpackers, as proposed by Pearce and Murphy (1995) and highlighted in the Section 2.3.2 of the previous chapter. Based on this definition, I took into account previous studies on Chinese backpackers (Zhu, 2007; Yu, 2012; Chen et al., 2014). For example, since public and paid holidays in China are relatively fewer than those in 'developed' countries such as Australia and Germany, the question of how far and how long one is required to travel in order to be a considered a 'backpacker' necessitates further inquiry (Chen et al., 2014).

Accordingly, the selection criteria for a 'young Chinese backpacker' in this study are: (1) a preference for independent, flexible schedule and budget travel; (2) and, experience of at least one travel trip lasting for more than fifteen days. In addition, because this study focuses on the popularity of backpacking among young people in recent years, it also requires travellers who are (3) in the age range of 20 to 35; (4) as well as, born and raised in China. Also, in the sample of independent and budget travellers, gender and age are important factors that might affect interviewing results. Therefore, a selective sample requires both male and female participants of different ages.

The objective of the focus group is to learn of comparative opinions from non-backpackers who share similar social circumstances and cultural context with travellers. Therefore, the

selection criteria of participants in focus groups included: (1) people aged from 20 to 35; (2) both male and female participants in every focus group, with an assumption that there is a gendered difference in regard to travel and lifestyle preferences. Moreover, as the financial situation has a great impact on people's participation in leisure activities such as travel, focus groups include both college students who have not yet achieved financial independence, and young professionals who have stable jobs and income. The reason for choosing college students and young professionals is because backpacking is long been seen as a 'middle-class activity' in China (Zhu, 2007), and there are more and more college students participating in the activity over recent years (Yu, 2012; Chen et al., 2014). College students and young professionals are regarded as the prospective middle class in China.

In order to explore the development and feature of youth hostels in China, I also carefully selected a range of youth hostels as sites in which it was possible to undertake participant observation. A selective sample includes: (1) youth hostels with a relatively long history and good reputation in the area; (2) and, hostels designed with distinguishing features for different types of guests. In addition, I chose to interview local people or managers who have been engaged in the backpacker tourism business for a long time, and are familiar with the industry.

3.4.2 Recruitment, the data collection procedure and data analysis

Travellers were recruited in various ways in order to get in touch with people who had travelled to different places. The majority of interviewed backpackers (21 out of 30) were interviewed during my field trips in Yunnan Province, China. The first trip was in May and June of 2014; the second was in January and February of 2015. More details on Yunnan will be introduced in the following section.

During the field trips, I searched for potential interviewees in several ways. Firstly, I posted a recruitment notice on the bulletin board in the youth hostel, letting people who were interested in participating in this study contact me freely. Secondly, I talked to people in public spaces such as the lobby, café, or open kitchen, asking if they were interested in the research. Thirdly, I talked to people who shared a dorm with me (female backpackers) in the youth hostels,

asking if they would like to be interviewed. Fourth, I talked to the manager of the youth hostel, and they introduce anyone who was a possible participant. The third and fourth methods turned out to be very useful, while no participant was recruited through the first approach, as nobody contacted me initiatively.

When meeting potential participants during the trips, I introduced myself first. After briefly introducing the study, the traveller was welcomed to participate and raise any questions. The consent form and the plain language statement for this study were given to the potential participant. Copies of the consent form (in both Chinese and English) and the plain language statement (in both Chinese and English) are attached as Appendix 1 and Appendix 2.

Before an interview, I noted ethical issues, such as they would be given pseudonyms in the thesis in order to ensure the anonymity and confidentiality. I also got permission to record the interview. Most often, the conversation began with the first question listed in Section 3.3.1, namely 'under what circumstance did you choose to backpack for the first time?' Once the interviewee began to talk, I let the participant lead the conversation. They were allowed to talk about travel experiences and life stories in their preferred way. I paid attention if the main interview questions listed in Section 3.3.1 were covered when they talked. When all the research questions were answered, and the interviewee felt that there was nothing more to share, the interview was considered to be finished.

In addition to on-site recruiting, there was a second approach of snowballing. More interviewees were generated from former interviews, given the fact that backpacking is an interest group, and that travellers constantly make friends with like-minded people during the journey. After the interview, I asked every interviewee to recommend someone else for me to contact. Almost half agreed and recommended their travel friends to me. I asked for contact information such as phone number, QQ account[14], WeChat account, and so on. Although not all of their 'friends' responded to my request, snowballing still turned out to be an effective method in this study, and several participants were successfully recruited through this method.

A few of the participants were also recruited through personal connections. I asked my friends and relatives if any of them knew people who were backpackers. This process is similar to

[14] It is the most widely used instant messaging application in China.

snowballing, since I was introduced to the participant by a mutual acquaintance/friend they had. Following the self-introduction, the plain language statement and the consent form were given to participants. Similarly, relevant ethical issues were noted.

In order to produce a diverse, wide and rich sample, I also recruited participants through the Internet. I searched online for people who identified themselves as a 'backpacker' through three types of websites: (1) popular social networking service websites such as *Douban*; (2) popular backpacking-oriented tour websites such as Qyer.com; (3) and, the most influential Chinese microblogging platform *Sina Weibo*. I wrote messages to approximately ten travellers, stating the purpose of the study. Three people responded, but it was not convenient for two to arrange a face-to-face meeting at that time. The interview was designed to be face-to-face, so only one participant was recruited successfully through this method.

To summarise, the majority of interviews were conducted during field trips, when both the participants and I were travellers. However, some interviews are retrospective, which means that the traveller had finished the journey when they were interviewed. All interviews were conducted at a social site often used for networking, such as a cafe, teahouse, hostel or restaurant. The interviewee and I had either tea/coffee or a meal together. There was no payment for the interview, so I usually suggested paying for the beverage or food for the interviewee, to show my gratitude for their participation.

Focus group members were recruited either through personal connections or the snowballing method. Firstly, I contacted friends and relatives who were potentially interested in the research topic. Some of them studied at the university, whilst some worked in cities. I sent the plain language statement to them and explained that they would be given pseudonyms in the thesis to ensure the anonymity and confidentiality. I asked them if they were able to recruit more focus group members. I also explained that, although the topic of this discussion was ‘backpacking’, participants did not need to possess relevant experience. The most important thing was that they were able to attend and were willing to share their opinions in the group discussion.

As for college students, once a few college students were recruited through personal connections; more were generated through classmate networks. Young professionals were

mainly recruited through alumnus and friends. All focus group participants had at least one acquaintance/friend in the same group, so they felt comfortable and confident when participated in the group discussion.

I, also as the moderator of the focus groups, introduced myself first. After briefly introducing the study, I often introduced the focus group as a research method and noted its purpose. The plain language statement and the consent form for this study were given to all participants. The plain language statement for focus group participants (in both Chinese and English) is attached as Appendix 3. Participants were then welcomed to ask questions and introduce themselves to the other people present. A topic guide sheet was given to all to facilitate the discussion, as argued in the earlier discussion. I guided the discussion from one question to the next, but tried to intervene as little as possible during the discussions.

Focus groups were carried out in either a restaurant or cafe/tea house, with a preference for the use of a round table. There was no payment for the focus group discussion, so I paid for beverages and food to show my gratitude for their participation. Before entering into the discussion, participants would eat or drink, along with their self-introductions. People became relaxed and familiar with each other in a more casual way; this process of warming up often facilitated the discussion later.

Youth hostel managers were regarded as people who frequently contacted backpackers, so it was also important to understand their opinions regarding backpacker tourism. They were recruited and interviewed on-site during the two field trips. I firstly searched the Internet for well-known backpacker-gathering hostels, and then went to the hostel. If the owners or managers accepted to be interviewed after learning the study's purposes, I would conduct the interviews and take photos of the hostel with their permission. Before the formal interview, the plain language statement and the consent form for this study were also given to the hostel owners/managers. I also got permission to record the interview (Appendix 1 and 2).

All interviews and focus groups were conducted in Chinese, which was the mother tongue of all participants, as well as my own. All Interviews and focus group discussions were taped with consent, and then transcribed by myself at a later date. The transcripts were sent to participants if requested. Because all of the interviews and focus group discussions were

conducted in Chinese, the transcripts were written in Chinese. I later translated them into English.

The qualitative data analysis computer software package NVivo 10 was used to organise and analyse the texts. As one interview included various themes and different people discussing the topics in their preferred way, it was difficult to find people's responses to a certain topic. The software helped to classify and arrange information across different interviewees based on themes. In doing so, distinct themes such as 'backpackers' self-identification', 'travel behaviours', 'travel motivations', 'backpackers' family' were generated. Furthermore, different themes were found to answer the primary research questions listed in Section 3.2.

3.4.3 The nature of the sample

The final sample involved 68 participants, including: (1) 30 long-haul independent budget travellers; (2) and, 6 focus groups that included 35 participants. In addition, 4 youth hostels are explored and 3 youth hostel managers/owners are interviewed.

The majority of the interviewees were travelling alone, except four individuals, Beibei, Zang, Peng and Liao, who were travelling in a group. Interviewed backpackers' demographic information and backpacking-related information are listed in the following Table 3.1. In total, there are 12 female backpackers and 18 male backpackers. More detailed information of interviewed backpackers is attached as Appendix 5.

Table 3.1 Interviewed Backpackers

Name	Gender	Age	Education	Marital status	Year of first backpacking	Time duration for the longest travel	International or domestic traveller
Fong	M	35	BA	Unmarried	2010	One month	International traveller
Ting	M	40	BA	Unmarried	2011	Five months	International traveller
Jin	F	29	BA	Married, no child	2014	Two months	Domestic traveller
Zhao	M	29	BA	Unmarried	2009	Six months	Domestic traveller
Shen	M	25	BA	Unmarried	2010	Three months	Domestic traveller
Meng	F	25	BA	Unmarried	2012	Nine months	International traveller
Beibei	F	25	Vocational High School	Unmarried	2014	Two months	Domestic traveller
Zang	F	26	Vocational High School	Unmarried	2014	Three months	Domestic traveller
Peng	M	28	Junior High School	Divorced, had a 4 years old son	2014	Two months	Domestic traveller
Liao	M	25	BA	Unmarried	2014	Three months	Domestic traveller
Zu	M	26	Postgraduate student	Unmarried	2010	One year	International traveller
Yuan	M	26	Postgraduate student	Unmarried	2011	19 days	Domestic traveller
Ruan	M	26	BA	Unmarried	2010	Six months	International traveller
Chi	M	29	BA	Unmarried	2013	Three months	Domestic traveller
Bao	M	28	College drop-out	Unmarried	2008	One month	Domestic traveller
Xiao	F	34	BA	Divorced, no child	2009	40 days	Domestic traveller
Long	M	20	College drop-out	Unmarried	2014	Six months	Domestic traveller
Di	F	26	Vocational High School	Unmarried	2013	Two years	International traveller
Nao	F	21	College drop-out	Unmarried	2014	Six months	International traveller
Li	M	23	Undergraduate student	Unmarried	2012	One month	Domestic traveller
Che	M	29	BA	Divorced, no child	2010	Six months	International traveller
Lv	M	25	BA	Unmarried	2012	Three months	Domestic traveller
Ming	F	24	High School	Unmarried	2014	Three months	Domestic traveller
Zhimi	M	24	BA	Unmarried	2011	Five months	Domestic traveller
Ji	F	34	BA	Married, no child	2005	Five months	Domestic traveller

Ning	F	27	Junior High School	Unmarried	2010	Seven months	International traveller
Fanqi	F	27	MA	Unmarried	2011	One month	International traveller
Ke	M	27	BA	Unmarried	2010	20 days	Domestic traveller
Pengyi	F	31	MA	Unmarried	2006	20 days	International traveller
Zhi	M	23	Undergraduate student	Unmarried	2013	One month	Domestic traveller

Furthermore, the following Figure 3.1 demonstrates detailed information regarding participants' ages. The majority (25 out of 30) are aged between 20 and 30 years old, and 4 Participants are aged between 31 and 35. Accordingly, almost all participants were born after 1980, with the exception of Ting, who is 40 years old. Accordingly, the majority of the sample was made up of the post-80s generation.

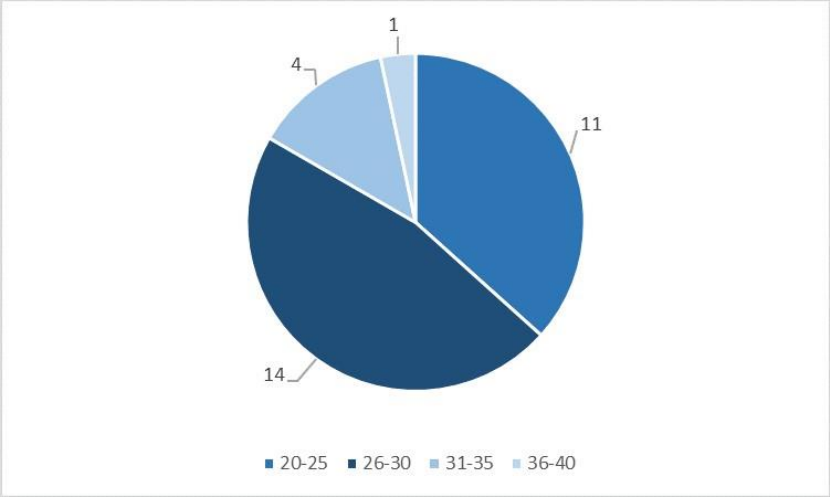

Figure 3.1 Interviewed Backpackers' Age

In terms of educational background, half of the participants had obtained a bachelor's degree, and 2 backpackers had obtained a master's degree. Because my fieldwork trips were conducted during school holidays, I met 4 student backpackers who backpacked during the holidays only. There are 2 undergraduate students and 2 postgraduate students in the study. I also interviewed 3 backpackers who had dropped out of college. Among them, Long (male, 20) and Nao (male, 21) were quite young and had begun to backpack in 2014. Bao (male, 28)

already had a stable job in Shanghai, but he always went backpacking during holidays. There were also 6 participants who did not go to college. Some of them had finished high school or junior high school, and some went to vacation high school. Although the average education level of the sample is quite high, it is not difficult to see that the sample is quite diverse.

Most of the participants are unmarried. However, there are 2 backpackers (Jin and Ji) who are already married but are without a child. I also encountered and interviewed 2 backpackers (Xiao and Che) who had divorced, also without a child. There is one participant, Peng, who had divorced and had a four-year-old son living with him at the time.

As Table 3.1 shows earlier, the majority of participants (25 out of 30) started to backpack after 2010. These backpackers were teenagers early in the 2000s, and most of them were engaged in studying at that time. In addition, as pointed out in the last chapter, it was not until the last five years that backpacking became increasingly popular among the younger generation in China. Accordingly, the sample represents the trend well. However, I also encountered people such as Ji and Pengyi, who started to backpack early in 2005 or 2006.

The length of a single trip varies from 19 days to one year. It is important to point out that some backpackers had travelled more than once, while some had only backpacked once. There were 11 backpackers who had travelled internationally, and 19 who had backpacked only in China. Accordingly, interviewees' backpacking experiences are also quite different from one another. It is thus worthwhile to examine the different role backpacking plays in young travellers' lives.

Tables 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4 show the research location and demographic backgrounds of three focus groups that are made up of college students. Two groups are made up of undergraduate students and one group of postgraduate students; however, there is no particular reason for choosing students at different levels of study. The average age of the 18 participants is 23. There are 10 female participants and 8 male participants.

Table 3.2 Focus Group of Undergraduates in Nanjing

Group	Name	Age	Gender	Education
Undergraduate Nanjing	Qian	21	F	Second Year Undergraduate
	Cheng	22	F	Third Year Undergraduate
	Xu	21	F	Second Year Undergraduate
	Xie	22	M	Second Year Undergraduate
	Guan	25	M	Fourth Year Undergraduate
	Hai	22	M	Third Year Undergraduate

Table 3.3 Focus Group of Postgraduates in Nanjing

Group	Name	Age	Gender	Education
Postgraduate Nanjing	Gang	28	M	Third Year Postgraduate
	Wang	29	M	Third Year Postgraduate
	Xue	27	F	First Year Postgraduate
	Mao	25	F	First Year Postgraduate
	Li	27	F	Third Year Postgraduate

Table 3.4 Focus Group of Undergraduates in Suzhou

Group	Name	Age	Gender	Education
Undergraduate Suzhou	Ling	21	F	Second Year Undergraduate
	Zong	21	F	Second Year Undergraduate
	Jie	22	M	Second Year Undergraduate
	Ku	20	M	Second Year Undergraduate
	Hui	21	M	Second Year Undergraduate
	Sen	20	F	Second Year Undergraduate
	Shi	20	F	Second Year Undergraduate

Tables 3.5, 3.6 and 3.7 state the research location and demographic backgrounds of three focus groups that are made up of young professionals. Two groups were conducted in Beijing, and one was conducted in Suzhou. The average age of the 17 participants is 27.7; there are also 10 female participants. Four participants are married - all of them are women. It is noteworthy that the majority (11 out of 17) had obtained a master's degree or above, and the rest had obtained a bachelor's degree. Therefore, these participants possess a very high level of education. Their average years of working are 3.3 years. As the tables show, they are from all walks of life, from public institutions such as the university, to private companies. One is a self-employed businesswoman.

The majority (7 out of 17) reported that their annual incomes of last year were between 100,000 yuan to 150,000 yuan. [15] 3 people stated they earned more than 150,000 yuan. 4 people owned 80,000 yuan to 100,000 yuan in the last year. Only 3 people earned less than 80,000 yuan in the last year, and all of them worked less than 3 years. Based on a survey conducted by Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences in 2016, 14.4% residents earned more than 100,000 yuan yearly in Shanghai, and the rest of the population earned less than that (Jing, 2016). Compared to the figures from the most developed area within China, there are 58.8% (10 out of 17) focus group members of this study who earned owned more than 100,000 yuan annually. Accordingly, regardless their family backgrounds, these individuals' salaries are far above average. Based on their educational background, occupation and annual income, most of them can be regarded as the 'new' middle class in China, who are 'salaried professionals and technical and administrative employees who work in large corporations' (Yang, 2010, p.437), while the 'old' middle class refers to the self-employed, small merchants and manufacturers.

[15] This is approximately 11, 627 pounds to 17,441 pounds.

Table 3.5 Focus Group of Young Professionals in Beijing 1

Group	Name	Age	Gender	Education	Institution	Annual Income (yuan)	Years of work	Marital status
Young Professional Beijing1	Ka	27	M	PhD [16]	Public institutions	20,000-50,000	0	Unmarried
	Xi	29	M	Doctor	Public institutions	100,000-150,000	1	Unmarried
	Wu	26	F	MA	Public institutions	50,000-80,000	1	Unmarried
	Shu	28	F	MA	State-owned/public owned enterprise	More than 150,000	3	Unmarried
	Jun	28	M	BA	Private-owned enterprise	More than 150,000	7	Unmarried
	Fei	28	F	MA	State-owned/public owned enterprise	50,000-80,000	2	Married

Table 3.6 Focus Group of Young Professionals in Beijing 2

Group	Name	Age	Gender	Education	Institution	Annual Income (yuan)	Years of work	Marital status
Young Professional Beijing2	Mei	30	F	BA	Private-owned enterprise	More than 150,000	7	Unmarried
	Zhang	28	M	BA	Private-owned enterprise	100,000-150,000	5	Unmarried
	Yun	27	M	MA	State-owned/public owned enterprise	80,000-100,000	2	Unmarried
	Ruo	28	M	MA	State-owned/public owned enterprise	100,000-150,000	3	Unmarried
	Yan	28	F	MA	State-owned/public owned enterprise	100,000-150,000	3	Unmarried
	Sha	28	F	MA	Foreign invested enterprise	100,000-150,000	1	Married

[16] Although Ka is a full-time PhD student, he receives 4-years scholarship from the institution. Therefore, he has a stable income and is recognised as financial independent by his parents.

Table 3.7 Focus Group of Young Professionals in Suzhou

Group	Name	Age	Gender	Education	Institution	Annual Income (yuan)	Years of work	Marital status
Young Professional Suzhou	Jiang	28	M	MA	State-owned/public owned enterprise	100,000-150,000	4	Unmarried
	Jing	25	F	MA	State-owned/public owned enterprise	80,000-100,000	2	Unmarried
	Hong	28	F	BA	Self-employment	100,000-150,000	5	Married
	Shuang	27	F	BA	Foreign invested enterprise	80,000-100,000	5	Unmarried
	Dian	28	F	BA	Government	80,000-100,000	5	Married

Interviews with backpackers recruited on-site and youth hostel managers were conducted in hostels located in several major tourist attractions of Yunnan Province, which will be introduced later in the work. As noted earlier, these selected hostels are famous within the destination, either because of their long history (such as Hump), or because of the fame of its owner (such as Desti). The details are listed in table 3.8, as below.

Table 3.8 Youth Hostels and Their Managers/Owners

Hostel	Hostel Location	Starting year	YHA China Member[17]	Features	Interviewed manager/owner
Hump	Kunming	2006	Yes	Located in the capital city of Yunnan Province; One of the largest youth hostels in Yunnan with a long history; Especially popular among foreign backpackers.	I interviewed the manager Yu, who was a post-80s. She worked in Hump for 5 years after graduated.
Laoxie	Lijiang	Before 2004	Yes	One of the earliest hostels in Lijiang. The owner, Xie, is one of the earliest businessmen to build a youth hostel in China. He is one of the founders of International Youth Hotel Association in China. He created a hostel model for 'middle class/bourgeois';	I interviewed the owner Xie, who was born in the 1960s. Chapter Five has more details.
Desti	Lijiang	2014	No	Founded by one of the most famous backpackers, Xiaopeng, who gained his reputation from his bestselling book *10 Years of Backpacking.* His story was introduced in the introductory chapter. Refuse to join YHA in order to create a 'Chinese style' hostel; Provide collective activities for guests every day.	I listened to Xiaopeng's speech in the youth hostel. A lot of his customs came to visit him. I recorded the speech that stated his backpacking experiences, as he permitted.
Horsepen46	Shaxi	2010	Yes	The first youth-hostel style guesthouse in the ancient town of Shaxi; Owned and operated by experienced backpackers; Maintain the traditional look and feel of the local architecture, with minimum modifications to the original structure.	N/A

In sum, the majority of interviewed backpackers were recruited on-site, during field trips in 2014 and 2015. Other participants were recruited through snowballing, personal connections and the Internet. The final sample includes 30 in-depth interviews with long-haul independent

[17] YHA China is the largest youth hostel association in China. The details are presented in Chapter Five.

budget travellers. There are 12 female backpackers and 18 male backpackers; 29 out of 30 were born after 1980. The sample is fairly diverse regarding education, occupation and marital status, while the majority are unmarried and have received a college-level education or above. The majority of backpackers travelled alone, with the exception of four individuals who backpacked together in a group. The length of a single trip varied from 19 days to one year. Approximately one-third of participants had previously travelled internationally.

6 focus groups were conducted in the first-tier cities and the most developed areas of China. 3 groups were made up of college students, and 3 of young professionals. This is because backpacking has long been recognised as a middle class activity in China, and there is an increasing number of student backpackers in recent years. All focus group participants were born after 1980. The average age of college student is 23. The average age of young professional is 27.7, and their average years of working are 3.3 years. They are from all walks of life. By comparing backpackers' life attitudes to those of non-backpackers, this study aims to explore the similarities and the differences of the post-80s generation.

I also examined the public spaces in 4 selected youth hostels, interviewing 3 managers/owners who had close contact with backpackers. The city of Dali is in Yunnan Province, and Yunnan were the primary fieldwork sites. Accordingly, more information will be introduced in the following section.

3.5 Research Location

3.5.1 Yunnan Province

As stated above, although interviewees were from different areas within China, most interviews were conducted in Yunnan Province during my two field trips. Yunnan, in this case, is suitable for fieldwork, due to the following reasons. Firstly, Yunnan has long been seen as 'the trendiest destination for China's exploding domestic tourist industry' from the perspective of international travellers (Lonely Planet, 2017). As demonstrated in the location map of

Yunnan (Figure 3.2)[18], Yunnan is in the far southwest region of China. The province borders Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region and Guizhou Province in the east, Sichuan Province in the north, and Tibet Autonomous Region in the northwest. A lot of the interviewed backpackers chose to backpack to Tibet after they arrived in Yunnan. Moreover, because Yunnan shares a border with Myanmar in the west, Laos in the south, and Vietnam in the southeast, its government identifies as the 'gateway in China's opening up to the southwest' (China Daily, 2011). Tourists may not only enjoy the beauty of Yunnan, but also get easy access to other Southeast Asia countries. This is precisely why I encountered a lot of backpackers in Yunnan who had visited Southeast Asia.

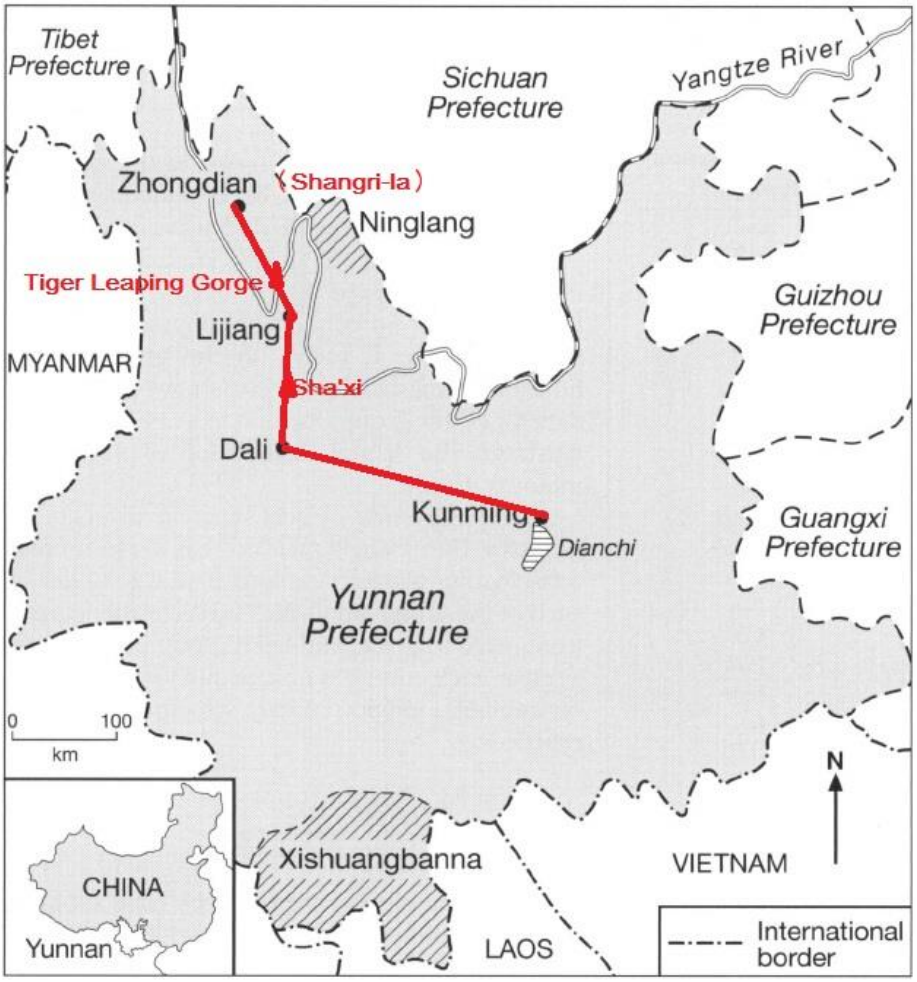

Figure 3.2 Location Map of Yunnan (Chow, 2005)

[18] The original map is cited from Chow (2005), and the red line and red letters were added by Jia Xie, the author.

In addition, as one of the most diverse provinces within China, Yunnan has splendid landscapes and an extraordinary mix of people from various ethnic minority groups, who make up nearly half of its population (China Daily, 2011a). All of the interviewed backpackers were Han Chinese; many of them mentioned that they were interested in the lives of ethnic minority groups. Yunnan is also rich in natural resources, with the largest diversity of plant life in China. Therefore, has Yunnan attracted numerous tourists, both domestic and international, beginning soon after China began to develop its tourism industry in the 1990s (Chow, 2005; Swain, 1989).

Thirdly, Yunnan gained the attention of many researchers within the area of tourism studies, and there are thus rich studies on backpackers and the tourism industry in Yunnan (Ateljevic and Doorne, 2005; Zhu, 2007; Bai, 2007; Zhang et al., 2017). Accordingly, a further study may provide a substantial comparative perspective. Inspired by previous researches, my two field trips started from Kunming. I went through Dali, Lijiang and ended in Zhongdian, as the red line in Figure 3.2 shows. The main tourist cities and sites, from east to northwest, included Kunming, Dali, Shaxi, Lijiang, Tiger Leaping Gorge and Shangri-La. Accordingly, interviews with backpackers and locals were conducted in these places.

Kunming is the capital and largest city in Yunnan Province, the political, economic, communications and cultural centre. Dali is known as the famous backpacker enclave in China (Ateljevic and Doorne, 2005). Shaxi, located between Dali and Lijiang, famous for its historic architecture, is an old village preserved and developed by a team of Swiss and Chinese scholars supported by the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zürich and the People's Government of Jianchuan County. In recent years, it has gradually become one of backpackers' favourite destinations, due to its 'unspoiled environment' (Feiner et al., 2002). The Old Town of Lijiang is a heritage site recognised by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, perceived to possess special cultural or physical significance (UNESCO World Heritage Site). It has also gained a reputation for its thousands of fantastic guest houses and relaxed atmosphere (Dewar, 2010). Tiger Leaping Gorge is near Lijiang; it is one of the deepest and most spectacular river canyons in the world, and thus becomes an internationally known hiking route for backpackers (Zhu, 2007). Shangri-la, also named Zhongdian, gained its international reputation because of the famous novel *Lost Horizon*, written by James Hilton. It was described as a mystical, harmonious and holy valley.

Therefore, all of these places not only attract mass tourists, but also adventure travellers who are interested in outdoor activities such as hiking and mountaineering.

3.5.2 Beijing, Shanghai and Jiangsu Province

Four focus groups were conducted in Jiangsu Province (city of Nanjing and Suzhou), while another two were undertaken in Beijing. As stated above, I also recruited participants through personal networks and via the Internet. Therefore, besides backpackers I encountered in Yunnan, I also interviewed backpackers from outside of Yunnan. However, these interviews were also conducted in either Shanghai or Jiangsu Province. Distinct from participants who travelled to Yunnan or lived in Yunnan, these participants primarily studied or worked in Beijing, Shanghai and Jiangsu - the richest and most cosmopolitan areas of mainland China.

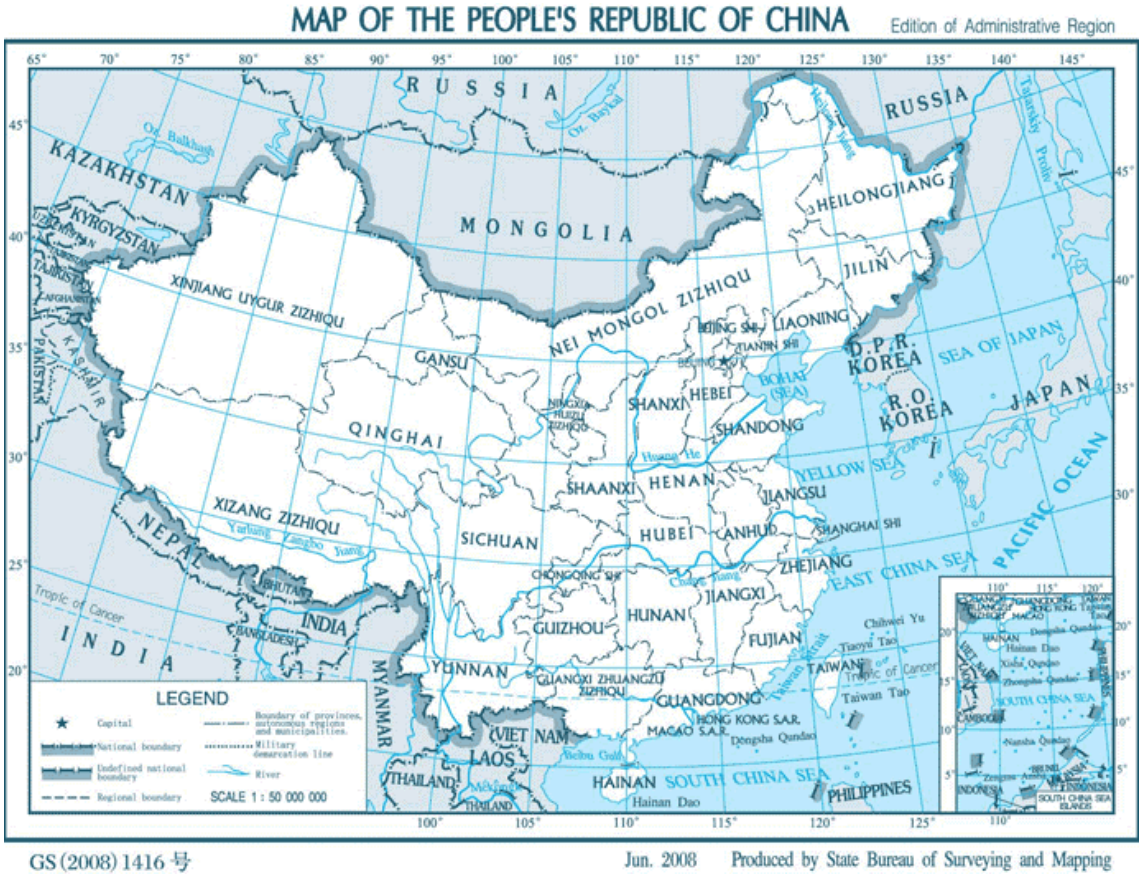

Figure 3.3 Map of The People's Republic of China (2008)

As Figure 3.3 shows, these provinces - Shanghai, Zhejiang, Fujian, and Guangdong - are spread along the southeast coast of China. These provinces, as well as the Beijing–Tianjin conurbation, have always sat among the group of highest Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita (Li and Gibson, 2013). Particularly Beijing, the capital of China, is known as the cultural and political centre of the nation. Shanghai, with only 0.06% of the nation's land area, possessed a population of 24.1515 million long-term residents and contributed 3.8% of China's overall GDP in 2013 (Information Office of Shanghai Municipality, 2014). It is thus one of the most influential cities in contemporary China. Nanjing is the capital city of Jiangsu Province, and is also the cultural and political centre of this area. Adjacent to Shanghai, Suzhou is also one of the most highly developed and prosperous cities in China (Yao, 2014). Apart from economic advantages, all the cities above are also leading tourist destinations in China, due to their historical value and natural beauty.

Backpacking, leisure tourism, or other outdoor activities have long been understood as the activities of the middle class, who could and would like to afford (Xiao, 2003; Wang, 2002; Zhu, 2007). Therefore, by conducting focus groups in these areas, this study was able to get access to potential participants possessing a knowledgeable in regard to the topic at hand. Also, in these most developed areas of China, the cosmopolitan feature allows people to have opportunities to learn about different ways of living. In this case, participants can discuss their opinions of different lifestyles. Moreover, due to the reasons stated above, the experiences and perceptions of participants in this study should not be taken as representative of China as a whole, or even as a complete picture of China's tourists and travellers.

3.6 Research ethics and reflections

The purpose of the qualitative methods employed in this study has been to gain an in-depth understanding of young backpackers' perceptions of travel experience and daily life, against the background of China's social transformation over the last three decades. In this case, creating a relaxed atmosphere with mutual trust and respect in interviews and focus groups is of great significance. This is the primary reason that I used the face-to-face interview in the study. As a result, most of the interviews were conducted during my field trips.

Under some circumstances, I was also one among a group of backpackers, which means that most of us were travel enthusiasts. Most often, to be an 'insider' helps to gain access, understand shared language and background knowledge, as well as build rapport with participants (Lewis, 2003). For example, interviewed backpackers felt that I was 'on their side' when discussing their passion for travelling, and felt that as their friends and parents did not often understand their passion. Some were more confident when talking about their own opinions and feelings; they admitted that they would not speak in the same way to their friends or parents.

However, the identity of the 'backpacker/travel enthusiast' brought its own challenges. Both sides may have possessed assumptions that should be expressed more clearly, or explained more deeply, but were not. For example, 'the love of travel' was usually recognised as 'undoubted truth'. This is why, in the above example, backpackers thought I was on their side when talking about how their parents or friends did not like travelling. However, in some cases, I found that the 'undoubted truth' was in fact doubtful. There were backpackers who possessed very mixed feelings about travelling. It is not necessarily 'the love of travelling' that pulls backpackers towards travel, but 'the desire to escape' that pushes backpackers into travel. Therefore, it was necessary that I approached every individual participant with fewer assumptions.

Moreover, to be an insider may have an impact on the researcher's interpretation and extrapolation of data collection and analysis (Twine, 2000). I am 28 and still consider myself a youth, along with the fact that I am also part of the post-80s generation, which in turn makes me a contemporary of most of my research participants. From this perspective, I am once again an 'insider', and thus I always reminded myself to be as neutral and objective as possible when talking or writing about this group. I have tried hard to avoid value judgements of generational differences. When participants complained that their parents interfered with their lives, I could state that I understand their situation; however, it is unfair to say that parents' preferences for a secure job are old-fashioned or short-sighted. I usually gave my personal opinions after the interview, as a friend.

Furthermore, my own relationship with interviewees became complicated when we became WeChat friend or QQ friends. I was always concerned with my own objectivity and neutrality

when talking and writing to an interviewee, who perhaps was also a 'friend'. I knew their everyday life through the photos they posted and the sentences they wrote. I knew their personality better in this way, which means that I had likes and dislikes regarding interviewees. For example, I personally like some backpackers who developed a routine to sustain their long-term trip. Some constantly talked about new knowledge or new skills they learnt on social media. However, I could not say that their lifestyle is great, or that the way they live is better than those who work in an office. For the same reason, I tried very hard not to judge people who travelled a lot but rarely made money independently, although I did not personally like them.

In addition, the title of 'PhD candidate from a British university' translated as trustworthy and knowledgeable for ordinary Chinese citizens, and it facilitated my fieldwork well in China. Therefore, I always introduced myself - and was introduced by others - with this title. Meanwhile, the title also created a certain distance of respect due to its 'professional face'. The interviews and focus groups were thus treated more seriously than a comfortable chat between friends by participants. However, it may pose a danger if the distance was so far that participants felt unconfident to talk, or reluctant when talking about controversial issues. In these cases, I was always conscious of the distance between the researcher and participants; it should be close enough for my participants to trust me and to share their life stories with me; however, enough distance is also necessary to create the formality required for such an interview.

Last but not least is the issue regarding language and the cultural connotations of language. Chinese is the mother tongue of the study's participants, and my own as a researcher. However, I wrote in English, and therefore, translation was not an easy task. Quite a lot of cultural context and social context was accepted without further explanation or discussion. When it comes to writing, it was necessary that the work illustrated the untold context first when referring to some texts. For example, when discussing the differences between non-backpackers and backpackers, Jiang (male, 28, young professional Suzhou) in the focus group said that, *'wo'men shi putong ren, suoyi wo'men yao zhaogu jiating'* (我们是普通人，所以我们要照顾家庭); this translates as 'we are ordinary people, so we have to take care of our families'). In addition, Qian (female, 21, undergraduate Nanjing) said, '*wo buhui xiang beibaoke nayang shenghuo. Wo shi putongren.'* (我不会像背包客那样生活，我是普通人. I

will never live like a backpacker. I am an ordinary person). In these circumstances, the word 'ordinary' does not connote negative meaning. Modesty has long been regarded as a virtue in China, and it deeply influences the language. When a person says, 'I am an ordinary man', he may (unconsciously) be trying to sound humble. Returning to the topic, as filial piety is also recognised as a merit, when the participant says that they need to take care of the family, what they may be implying is that 'I am a "good" man who has a strong sense of responsibility'. The primary rule I followed during translation is to be faithful to the original context. As a result, I added explanations or provided greater context to the sentences that had different meanings in Chinese and English, as the example shows.

Another issue regarding language originates with participants' social backgrounds. Most of them were college-level or above, so they spoke quite eloquently. The work needed to be careful about their positions and assumptions. What they said was not necessarily 'fact', but rather 'opinion'. As the researcher, it was necessary that I was always conscious of my own epistemological position of interpretivist, and the ontological position of constructionist, as stated in the beginning part of this chapter.

3.7 Summary and a critical assessment

This chapter illustrated the research questions, methods, samples, as well as the reflections regarding methods. This study takes a qualitative approach. In-depth interviews were employed as the primary research method, in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the travel experiences and life attitudes of Chinese backpackers. In addition, young professionals and college students in focus groups expressed their attitudes towards backpacking as a way of travelling and backpacking as an alternative lifestyle. By comparing backpackers' life attitudes to those of non-backpackers, the study explores the similarities and differences of the post-80s generation. Participant observation was also employed in order to examine the features of youth hostels in China, as well as the lives of backpackers who lived in the city of Dali.

Yunnan Province is the primary fieldwork site. In total, I conducted 30 interviews with long-haul independent budget travellers. I also examined the public spaces in 4 selected youth hostels, and interviewed 3 managers/owners who had close contact with backpackers. In addition, 6 focus groups were conducted in the first-tier cities and the most developed areas of China. 3 groups were made up of college students and 3 of young professionals.

I reflected on my own subjective perspective within this study. The role of insider (a backpacker, a young person, a post-80s) likely affected the interview process in different ways. Furthermore, the title of 'PhD candidate' had both advantages and disadvantages during fieldwork. There were some challenges caused by the fact that I underwent fieldwork in Chinese, while writing in English. I tried hard to be faithful to the original text when translating.

I employed different approaches to sampling, avoiding relying on established networks. This principle turned out to be useful, as I encountered backpackers with very different backgrounds. In addition, the face-to-face interview effectively built trust between the participants and I, although the size of my sample could be larger if I conducted interviews through the phone or the Internet. Also, to ensure that participants' privacy would be protected was crucial to building trust between the participant and myself.

In regard to interviewing, participants talked about their lives in the way they preferred. Although I had to do a lot of extra work to organise the data because the issues I concerned were presented differently, I felt that it was worthwhile to let the participant feel comfortable and confident. They shared lots of details that contributed to this research. However, I also reflected on the nature of interviewing when I became Internet friends with participants, as stated above. Sometimes I observed how interviewees' actions came into conflict with what she/he said. For example, some participants stated that they resisted shopping when travelling, but posted photos of shopping on WeChat online. Thus, it became clear that the interview, even the in-depth interview, can only access people's opinions and feelings; there is always a gap between opinions/feelings and actual behaviours in daily life. This is why participant observation is important to evaluating the interview materials. If possible, I shall spend more time in the field and conduct structured observations.

Another reflection originates from the focus group discussions. I shall arrange fewer questions. As listed in Section 3.3.2, the focus groups concentrated on three primary topics; the discussion planned to be 1 hour to 1.5 hours. However, as there were 5-7 people in a group, they sometimes felt there was not enough time to fully develop ideas. Accordingly, the discussion needed to last at least 1.5 hours.

The most important lesson regarding the recruitment and the data collection procedure was to contact potential participants directly. I left my contact details in youth hostels, and with people who might be interested, but nobody contacted me in this way. I considered that the most important and relevant ethical issue was managing my own different roles as a friend/contemporary of participants, and simultaneously as a researcher/observer.

4. ‘Backpackers are people who love freedom’: Comparative perspectives from non-backpackers

4.1 Introduction

The key question of this chapter is: how do non-backpackers in China, namely college students and young professionals, understand backpacking and backpackers? The answer to this question helps to understand the main research question ‘how is backpacking perceived by young Chinese people’. The perspective of non-backpackers is presented firstly, rather than that of backpackers. This is because that this thesis firstly intends to show how backpacking impinges on wider currents of public discourse within China. Other than non-backpackers’ interpretations of backpacking, this chapter also examines their attitudes towards backpacking and backpackers. Accordingly, non-backpackers provide a comparative opinion regarding attitudes and life choices. In the following chapters, through a comparison of non-backpackers’ life choices to that of backpackers, this study can further explore the impact of backpacking on young people’s lives. By doing so, this study can further explore how the development of this activity reflects the dramatic social change taking place in China, and how it reflects the spirit of the younger generation.

There exist few studies on backpacking in China that have provided empirical evidence on how Chinese people understand this activity, and their attitudes towards it. Therefore, this study starts with an exploration of how backpacking and backpackers are interpreted within the wider social context. The first section examines how young professionals and college students from focus groups get to know backpackers. It also explores the factors influencing their impressions of backpacking and backpackers. In the second section, non-backpackers discuss the perceived essential characteristics of being a backpacker. Furthermore, they distinguish backpacking as a way of travelling from a way of living. Focus group participants reveal their attitudes towards backpacking as a way of travelling and a way of living.

4.2 Backpacking: A well-known activity among the young Chinese population

It has been three decades since backpacking was first introduced to China. As donkey friend's clubs flourish online and offline in big cities (Luo et al., 2014; Lim, 2009), backpacking is no longer perceived as an unusual activity for the post-80s generation. College students and young professionals in focus groups were familiar with the word *'beibao ke'* (背包客), meaning 'backpacker'. As Qian, an undergraduate student said in one focus group discussion:

> *Ten years ago, backpackers were all foreigners. Today, there are lots of Chinese, such as college students. I've heard of 'gap year' and 'couchsurfing' all the time. More and more young Chinese people want to be a backpacker, to travel abroad. I think this is a part of globalisation…there are men and women, married and unmarried backpackers. I think the foreign couple who teach Spanish in our department are living like backpackers. They sojourn in China. Their motivation for making money is to travel around China. I think this is a unique lifestyle.*
>
> (Qian, female, 21, undergraduate Nanjing)

Qian's statement corresponds with recent research results (Chen et al., 2014), and the press releases from domestic and international media (Mo, 2016; Cottrell, 2014). It may be due to this press coverage that Qian believed that there were an increasing number of young Chinese people who were undertaking backpacking. However, it may be due to her own experiences, as a lot of college students participated in this activity over the last five years. Another focus group provided the relevant evidence. Ling (female, 22), Hui (male, 21) and Sen (female, 21) were studying in a university in Suzhou. They talked about one student who hitchhiked to Tibet in the group discussion. They all knew the student because he did a presentation on campus, to introduce and share his backpacking experiences with fellow students. The presentation was promoted on campus, as they saw the poster and the notice posted on campus media. In addition, this study did find that there were many student backpackers, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

According to Qian, the origins of backpacking are a Western import, and Chinese backpackers have been influenced by their Western counterparts. Wang (male, 29) was a postgraduate

studying in Nanjing; he said that the one 'true backpacker' he met was an American. Wang noted, 'He was in the sixties, carrying a large, worn-out backpack. I asked whether he had a family. He said no because he devoted the entire life to travelling. I was surprised by the passion.' Wu (female, 26), working in Beijing, said that she had encountered Western gap year travellers in the city, who often took up part-time jobs as a way to support their prolonged journey.

Following in the footsteps of Western backpackers, backpacking has spread globally. At the same time, the young generation in China has greater opportunities to travel overseas and becomes familiar with this way of travelling. Xi (male, 29), working in Beijing, had studied in the United Kingdom; he admitted that he was not familiar with backpacking or youth hostels until he travelled independently in Europe. Mei (female, 30) was working for an advertising company in Beijing. When going abroad, she said it was usual to meet middle-aged backpackers, while most Chinese backpackers were younger.

Cultural exchange between the West and the East not only relies on an increased exchange of people, such as travellers, but also on media representations of backpacking and backpackers. Some participants mentioned famous movies based on the stories of backpackers. For example, Mei and Zhang (male, 28, young professional) both watched *The Way* (2010, USA), which promoted the traditional pilgrimage. Sen (female, 21, undergraduate) said that she was impressed by the Chinese movie *Up in the wind* (2013), in which the heroine finally 'found herself' and 'understood the meaning of happiness' by backpacking to Nepal. Not restricted to only non-backpackers, some backpackers in this study indicated they were also influenced by films on relevant topics, such as *The Motorcycle Diaries* (2004, USA), *Into the Wild* (2007, USA), and *Kora* (2011, Taiwan). As demonstrated, backpacking has become a popular topic within films and television globally; as a result, young people have become familiar with this way of travelling through these media products.

In addition to backpackers depicted through cinema, a few 'star backpackers' have been shaped by social media, TV programmes and travel books in recent years. For example, when asked if she knew of any backpackers, Yan (female, 28, young professional) immediately referred to Gu Yue, a famous Chinese-American backpacker. Gu was born in China, but moved to America and became a citizen at the age of 11. In his twenties, he quit a well-paid

technical job with General Electric Co. and gave up the steady life in Seattle, in order to fulfil his passion for travelling. In 2010, a 20-episode documentary series, *Hitchhike to Berlin*, distributed on the Internet and aired on China Central Television, recorded how Gu hitchhiked from Beijing to Berlin to visit his German girlfriend. Yan and Mei in the focus group said that both of them had watched the documentary. Gu's story is well known by the Chinese public, through the documentary and press release (Yue, 2010; Li, 2012). Gu gained more than one million followers on Weibo in 2012; this number increased to four million in 2016, after he launched more recent travel projects, such as 'backpacking from Alaska to Argentina' and 'travelling around China without a penny'.

Gu is not the only 'star backpacker' in China. Cheng, a 22-year-old undergraduate in a focus group, expressed her admiration of Molly, a young female backpacker with more than three million followers on Weibo. As one of the followers, Cheng enjoyed browsing the travel photos posted by Molly, and thought of backpacking as 'fashionable' and 'innovative'. Hai (male, 22), Cheng's classmate, stated that he had read two travel books written by Xiaopeng, an icon for young Chinese backpackers. Xiaopeng's best-known biography, *Backpacking for Ten Years* (Zhang, 2010), had sold more than one million copies by 2015. Xiaopeng's story was not that different from Gu Yue's. After graduating from college, he worked several jobs; however, he could not settle down, because a nine-to-five job was not what he wanted. Therefore, he began to backpack after he resigned from working at a television station in 2001. At that time, he was 23 years old. He travelled all over the world in ten years and self-funded his trips through writing and photography. Xiaopeng now had more than ten million followers on Weibo, and has opened two youth hostels in China that were named after his bestselling biography. It is interesting to note that star backpackers are not only present on social media, but also on the university campus, as highlighted earlier in this chapter.

This study reveals that the emergence of star backpackers in the last five years has greatly contributed to the popularity of backpacking among young people. Famous backpackers such as Gu Yue and Xiaopeng made their backpacking experiences 'live' through social media, by updating their status frequently and communicating with followers instantly. Furthermore, certain modes of travelling such as hitchhiking and couchsurfing were introduced. These model backpackers not only introduced backpacking to wider audiences, but they even motivated some young people to go backpacking themselves. As we will see in the following

chapter, some interviewed backpackers have spoken about how they were influenced by model backpackers, both in regard to ways of travelling and ways of living post-travels.

Furthermore, the proverb ‘to read ten thousand books and travel ten thousand miles’ was frequently mentioned by participants in focus groups, such as Gang (male, 28, postgraduate), Ku (male, 21, undergraduate), and Wu (female, 26, young professional); this indicates that some Chinese backpackers are promoting traditional travel culture. Hui, an undergraduate student, referred to backpackers as the *‘da xia’* (大侠, knight-errant) of ancient China, a type of folk hero who travelled the land using physical force or political influence to help the common people in need. He thought that backpackers were similar to *Da xia*, who lived a ‘very cool and freewheeling’ life.

To summarise, the focus group discussions demonstrated that backpacking is well-known by the young generation, after it was introduced from the West in the 1990s (Zhu, 2007). Although non-backpackers thought that backpacking originated in the West, they did not imply that there were solely ‘Western backpackers’. On the contrary, participants recognised that more and more Chinese participated in this activity, and some even became stars on social media. The popularity of backpacking in China is thus a case of cultural exchange, facilitated by travellers, mass media and social media. Distinct from Zhu’s statement that Chinese backpackers are middle class citizens attracted to Western lifestyles (2007), participants in this study did not emphasise whether backpacking is a Western or Chinese lifestyle. They tended to interpret it as a global phenomenon, although they did think that the differences between Western countries and China largely influence people’s choices on being a backpacker, which will be further discussed in the following sections.

4.3 Backpackers: The one who pursues freedom

When describing the essential characteristics of backpackers, almost every focus group participant mentioned the phrase ‘loving freedom’. Non-backpackers thought that backpackers craved the feeling of being untethered. Gu Yue and Xiaopeng’s stories, which state that they

gave up their nine-to-five jobs to go travelling, perfectly match people's imagination of the backpacker. Guan's statement is quite typical of what was observed in the study:

> *Backpackers are people who love freedom. They are not constrained by nitty-gritty details or social obligations. They are brave enough to break the traditional rules. The backpack is very different from a suitcase, you know. Your hands are emancipated, as well as your body. You feel free. You then can be true to yourself, and find what you really want.*
>
> (Guan, male, 25, undergraduates Nanjing)

Similar to Guan, most participants thought that backpacking not only refers to a free way of travelling, but also a free way of living. Firstly, as Guan said, backpackers carried a backpack rather than a suitcase, walking in the street freely. Backpacking refers to a way of travelling; backpackers are thought to be free when travelling, because they can visit places as they want, and undertake activities as they like. Secondly, backpackers seem to be perceived as preferring a freewheeling lifestyle, as Guan stated that backpackers broke traditional life paths. To be specific, the freewheeling lifestyle refers to a rejection of the fixed patterns of life, which includes undertaking a stable job, settling down in a city, getting married and having a child.

It is not difficult to discover a big distinction between backpacking as a way of travelling (a way to spend a holiday) and as a way of living. The difference, as Cheng (female, 22, undergraduate Nanjing) suggested in one group discussion is that, 'Generally speaking, travellers have their destinations. And they will return home after the trip. However, lifestyle travellers have neither a destination nor home. They are on the road, always.' This study finds that young Chinese, although they were not backpackers, recognised that backpacking could extend to a way of living. As Cohen (2011) suggested in his pioneering study of lifestyle travellers, 'the lifestyle travellers ventured back time and time again into the social world of backpacking, often financed through brief but intense intermittent periods of work at home or creative ways of earning money whilst abroad' (Cohen, 2011, p.1551).

Previous studies on Chinese backpackers have rarely noticed there were also 'lifestyle travellers' (Cohen, 2011) in China, except for a very recent qualitative study on 'lifestyle

mobility' in China (Xu and Wu, 2016). Xu and Wu's study (2016) highlighted how some middle class citizens gave up lives in big cities and moved to Yunnan, in search of a more balanced life. Furthermore, some university students became tourist workers, trying to pay their long-term trips alone. However, the study concluded that all lifestyle mobility was middle class and overlooked the diversity. The following chapters of this work will focus more on interviewed backpackers, while the next two parts aim to explore how focus group participants understand backpacking as a way of travelling, and as a way of living.

4.3.1 Backpacking as a way of travelling: Free, but tiring and lonely

What does 'freedom' mean when participants refer to backpacking as a free way of travelling? Most often, they mentioned a word: *'ziyou xing'*. '*Ziyou xing'* (自由行), was coined in Chinese to emphasise the freedom felt in regard to travel; it combines *ziyou* - literally meaning 'freedom' - and *xing*, meaning 'travel'. As a result, *Ziyou xing* was translated into 'individual travellers/visitor' (Zeng and Zhang, 2005; Zhao and Wu, 2013), or 'independent travel' (Wah, 2009).

In opposition to *ziyou xing* stands group tourism, which primarily refers to packaged tours provided by travel agencies. Backpacking is recognised as one type of *ziyou xing*, because it is self-organised by individuals, rather than by travel agencies (Luo et al., 2014). Most non-backpackers stated that they preferred self-organised travel to group tourism. As Sen (female, 21), an undergraduate studying in Suzhou, complained in the discussion: 'There are too many constraints in group tourism. You should always follow the tour guide and listen to whatever he or she says.' All other young people in the focus group showed agreement with her statement. As self-organised travellers, individuals design their own trips, and accordingly, do it at their own risk.

According to this research, it can be contended that non-backpackers' meaning of 'freedom' also refers to the freedom of choosing your travel companions. Participants stated that they felt 'extremely not free' when travelling with colleagues, in particular with their superiors. Interestingly, every focus group of young professionals mentioned that they had participated

in leisure trips organised by *'danwei'* (work unit). Wu (female, 26), one participant in this study, was a human resource manager at a university in Beijing. She explained that most organisations sought to build a cohesive team through group leisure tours, so they had the specific funds for such activities. However, she disliked this, stating: 'It was the boss who decided where to go and what to do. Also, everything gives priority to the senior employees. As a junior, you can't say no.' Additionally, Dian, working in the local government, shared her story:

> *When I participated in a leisure trip organised by the work unit for the first time, we went to a historical town. One member of staff and I were attracted by some handmade crafts in the local market. Both of us were juniors, and we assumed it was the same as travelling with friends. We chatted with the stall-holder for a while. When we caught up with the group, my department head criticised us. He said that the 'big boss' had smoked two cigarettes, waiting for us. Since then, I never let myself relax during this kind of travel with work colleagues.*
>
> (Dian, female, 28, young professionals Suzhou)

It is worth noting that most participants who complained of unequal power relations in *danwei* were primarily from government-owned corporations and public institutions. Private enterprises and foreign investment companies were thought to be more liberal concerning corporate culture, according to Shuang (female, 27, international bank) and Jun (male, 28, private company). As pointed out in Chapter Two, the younger generation possesses greater demands for equality when compared to their parents (Song et al., 2009; Lian, 2014; Ngai and Lu, 2010); thus, they regard this kind of tourism as extra work rather than a leisurely activity. In contrast, the purpose of backpackers' travels is perceived to be 'pure' and 'self-centred', according to non-backpackers. It is thus understandable that young people appreciate the freedom backpackers enjoy. Accordingly, backpackers are seen as 'free' - precisely because their mode of travel is perceived as directly opposite to that undertaken by non-backpackers.

Although backpacking is regarded as *ziyou xing*, not every self-organised trip can be recognised as backpacking. Many participants also used 'laborious' and 'tired' to describe backpacking. Mao (female, 27, postgraduate) and Jun (male, 28, young professional) possess

experiences of hiking; they underlined how it was exhausting because of the heavy backpack carried. Cheng, the student who believed that backpacking was 'fashionable' in the earlier discussion, also emphasised that backpackers were 'simply dressed budget travellers'. It is interesting to note that many focus group participants mentioned that backpackers looked untidy, with descriptions such as 'unshaved in half a year' (Xie, male, 22, undergraduate), 'bohemian style' (Xi, young professional), and 'worn-out backpack' (Wang, male, 29, postgraduate). The opinion of Ling is typical, as stated:

> *Backpackers are courageous. They don't give up when encountering difficulties. The true backpackers rarely rely on transportation. They go on foot and sleep in a tent. All they need is in the backpack. They enjoy every moment of the journey and focus on inner peace. They don't care about the growth of individual wealth.*
>
> (Ling, female, 22, undergraduate Nanjing)

Apart from descriptions such as 'laborious' and 'tired', non-backpackers also thought of backpacking as somewhat 'lonely'. Most participants indicated that one important reason as to why they did not want to be a backpacker was because they could not bear travelling alone. As noted earlier, non-backpackers continually stated that they sought to travel with close friends and family. Yun (male, 27), working in Suzhou, said that he travelled alone once, and that it was 'so boring' that he would never do it again. Ka (male, 27), a postgraduate studying in Beijing, shared his observation, stating: 'Backpacking must bear the loneliness. You can imagine how lonely when one is walking in the wild. You have nobody to talk to and no entertainment. When I was travelling with my friend in Qinghai Lake, [19] we met some backpackers. They travelled alone. I thought they were so lonely.' Hai, the college student who read Xiaopeng's book, quoted from the book: 'The other side of freedom means loneliness. I think Xiaopeng enjoys being lonely, and he is not afraid of travelling alone. I can't handle the loneliness.' However, it is worth noting that - although Ka and Hai admitted that they could not bear the loneliness - they expressed their admiration for solo travellers. There were similar comments from Jun (male, 28), who argued that 'travelling alone requires inner strength'.

[19] Qinghai Lake is the largest lake in China. It is also a famous hiking destination.

Accordingly, it is worthwhile to highlight that most of the young people in the focus groups distinguished themselves from backpackers based on the purpose of travel. College students and young professionals, as non-backpackers, put emphasis on relaxation and pleasure. For the majority of non-backpackers, the perfect trip is made up of beautiful landscapes, comfortable hotels and beloved family and friends. Their choice of independent travel provides some feeling of freedom. However, backpacking is considered to be 'laborious' and evoking 'tired' and 'lonely' feelings, as discussed above. It is not difficult to find that non-backpackers perceive that anomie accompanies antinomy, as the theory of individualisation outlined earlier suggests (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Elliott and Lemert, 2009; Mills, 2007). Young professionals and college students seek freedom, but not to the extent of complete freedom – which they perceive to bring on feelings of lonely and helpless. Their concept of freedom is closely related to their social status, which will be discussed later in this work.

4.3.2 Backpacking as a way of living: A freewheeling, but alternative lifestyle

The second meaning of 'freedom' regarding backpacking refers to the idea of a freewheeling lifestyle, as noted earlier in this work. Xue (female, 25) was a postgraduate in Nanjing. She thought that the perceived pursuit of freedom in life meant that backpackers could not bear the routine life. Jiang (male, 28), working in a state-owned-enterprise, also suggested that backpackers were people 'who always demanded something new, something fresh in life'. Dian (female, 28), in the same focus group as Jiang, further illustrated this point, stating: 'Backpackers refuse to be arranged. They are looking for the freshness and excitement. They are able to manage their time independently and freely. I guess most of them are self-employed because full-time employees don't have so many holidays.'

The characteristic of being 'unconstrained by social obligations' is perceived as a crucial part of living a freewheeling lifestyle. For example, Hong (female, 28), as a new mother, said that she always put her family first by choosing activities that were suitable for her daughter during holidays. Dian (female, 28), in the same group, strongly agreed, stating: 'It might be the fundamental difference between backpackers and tourists like us. Backpackers don't need to care for others. They do everything for themselves, while we have to think about the others.'

Shuang further added, ‘Yes, and this is what freedom means. Backpackers enjoy the freedom.’ However, it is not difficult to find that non-backpackers can be critical of this kind of ‘freedom’, as most participants in the focus group are concerned with ‘taking care of the family’ and enjoy travels with families or friends.

Furthermore, this study finds that backpackers are perceived to be not only free from social obligations, but also from materialistic demands. They are seen as concerned more with inner feelings, rather than fame and wealth. As noted earlier, some non-backpackers indicated that backpackers looked untidy. However, in contrast to their austere appearance, backpackers were thought to have a rich inner world. Xie, the participant who said that backpackers looked unshaved, added: ‘But they were fully engaged and fulfilled in what they were doing. They must feel very happy’. As Xue (female, 25, postgraduate) stated, ‘backpackers live a free and pure life with great spiritual richness, although they wear old clothes.’ In earlier discussions, the backpack was referred as the symbol of freedom, through the ‘emancipation of your hands’ (Guan, male, 25, undergraduate). Here, the backpack represents simplicity, as Jie (male, 23, undergraduate) said: ‘All the necessities of life are packed in a bag. A backpacker travels around the world, with one single bag.’

Backpackers are further interpreted by non-backpackers as individuals who are faithful to their own feelings and the pursuit of their own personal dreams. In this case, backpackers are not only free from social obligations, but also from people's judgements. Tourists regard travelling as a means to achieving a successful or happy life, while backpackers regard travelling as an end in itself. As Ling said above, ‘They enjoy every moment of the journey, and focus on the inner peace.’ Wang, the postgraduate, referred to the sixty-year-old American backpacker as an ‘idealist’. Shu (female, 27), working in Beijing, also used the term ‘idealist’ to describe a backpacker, stating, ‘They are idealists, who do not aim at pursuing wealth or fame. What they want is a balanced, healthy life. And they have their own definition of success.’

However, the idea of transforming backpacking into a way of living is innovative and alternative within China’s specific context, as it is widely known in China that a man should be *‘sanshi erli’* (三十而立, established at thirty), as quoted from Confucius (Zhou, 2014). This indicates the belief that a man should settle down and have the career around the age of thirty. This idea was not only referred to by many non-backpackers in the focus group discussions,

but also by some backpackers in this study. However, the 'true backpacker' from the United States, as referred to by Wang, did not have a family. Also, famous backpackers such as Gu Yue and Xiaopeng are unmarried and self-employed, although they are over thirty years old. As Dian suggested in the above discussion, most backpackers intended to be self-employed; as a result, they could manage their time independently and freely. However, the status of being self-employed is never perceived as 'stable' by non-backpackers, in accordance with the perspectives of participants such as Sen (female, 21) and Ling (female, 22).

Most participants thought that it was more important to fulfil conventional social obligations, such as getting married and having a baby. Some preferred a stable life. Backpacking, as an alternative lifestyle, brings with it ambivalence and uncertainty. Again, freedom is not a completely positive thing to experience for non-backpackers. Accordingly, in the next section, more details regarding non-backpackers' perceptions of freedom - and why they do not choose a freewheeling lifestyle - will be discussed.

4.4 'I may travel like a backpacker, but I will never live like a backpacker': Non-backpackers' attitudes

It is noteworthy that backpacking, as a way of travelling, is very different from backpacking as a way of living, from participants' perspectives. Although most non-backpackers expressed their envy of backpackers' freedom regarding travel, it does not necessarily mean that they wanted to choose the freewheeling lifestyle. Participants were critical of the meaning of 'freedom'. The following two parts of this work will analyse why non-backpackers perceive freedom as important, and provide the terms of when they do not think that it is important. Participants' different attitudes towards backpacking as a 'free' way of travel, and as a 'free' way of living, is deeply rooted in China's historical, social transformation and their social status.

4.4.1 What does freedom mean?

As discussed above, the majority of non-backpackers in this study stated that they preferred independent travel/self-organised trips to mass tourism; this is consistent with previous research showing that there has been an increasing number of independent travellers over recent years, and that the majority are young people (Zhang, 2011b; Xiang, 2013; Qyer.com, 2016). This can also explain why online tourism business has flourished in recent years (Zhang, 2011b), as the Internet largely facilitates the process that individuals plan their trips. For example, Mei, working for the advertising company, always chose independent travel when going abroad. She was very familiar with travel advisory websites such as Qyer.com, Airbnb and TripAdvisor. Dian (female, 28, young professional) spent her honeymoon in the United States, renting a car in the country. Dian and her family designed a route and travelled by themselves. Although independent travellers refuse package tours, in many circumstances, they may buy the package of a flight plus hotel, or tickets for attractions through tour operators.

Why did young people in this study put so much emphasis on the aspect of 'freedom' when travelling? One of the most important reasons is that they want to control the trip by themselves, rather than handing it to the travel agency or tour guide. In addition, earlier discussions show that one crucial aspect of freedom is the freedom of choosing travel companions. As Xiang (2013) notes in research on Chinese independent outbound tourists, these tourists spent several months on searching for tourist information and making plans. The process not only helped to reduce anxiety caused by the strangeness, and to enhance control over the trip, but also satisfied travellers' learning motivations. In others, self-organisation demonstrates individual capabilities. Participants' freedom and independence to arrange their journey by themselves also can be understood as an expression of power. The capabilities required to travel independently thus demonstrate the ability of individuals to deal with uncertainty and handle risks.

Secondly, a self-organised independent trip shows a higher social status in the present day. However, it is interesting to point out that in the 1990s, the packaged tour was regarded as fashionable, and a symbol of social status, as only a few people could afford it (Wang, 2004). This study thus indicates a significant change. Young people in focus groups in this study

suggested that there exists a 'generation gap' regarding the preference of travelling patterns. As Ling, a 22-year-old student said, 'Grandparents and parents like group tours and packaged tours, while we don't. They are sight-seeing tourists, while we like to explore the destinations by ourselves. Also, they don't want to take any risks; they think that it is safe when travelling in groups and following a tour guide. We are different because we are the new generation.' Shuang (female, 27), working for a bank in Suzhou, also mentioned this point in the discussion, stating: 'It's our generation that likes independent travel. It is still non-mainstream. When the majority of this society becomes the post-80s, independent travel might be the mainstream.' When Shuang referred to a 'generation gap' between mass tourists and independent travellers, she also pointed out that there was a regional disparity, stating: 'People in undeveloped areas may prefer group tourism and rely on travel agencies, while people in developed areas prefer independent travel.'

Accordingly, group tourism is regarded as old-fashioned, and a symbol of lower social status, while travelling independently is interpreted as a form of privilege by young professionals and college students. In a word, only those who have the extra time and money, as well as the capabilities to manage the risks involved, can conduct independent travel. As Bauman noted, the concept of freedom is always related to power and privilege (1988). Particularly, the greater freedom regarding mobility consistently indicates a privileged status (Sheller and Urry, 2006).

As discussed in Chapter Two, the Chinese middle class is the pioneer of consumption, as consumption contributes to building personal abilities, creating individual identities, and sustaining privileged social statuses (Wang, 2008; Goodman and Zang, 2008). In this study, focus group members were made up of college students and young professionals, representing the prospective middle class in China. Their strong preferences to independent travel also indicate their social status. The rapid development of independent travel and online tourism business in recent years (Zhang, 2011a) again demonstrates the great purchasing power of the middle class in China. The freedom regarding independent travel thus results from a relatively high income and better educational background.

Earlier discussions show how many non-backpackers said that they did not want to be backpackers, as backpacking was 'laborious' and 'lonely'; rather, they wanted a pleasant and

comfortable trip. Accordingly, it is reasonable that some people doubt the value of backpacking, although they look forward to conducting a self-organised trip. The debate between Jiang and his colleagues illustrates this point well:

> *I have discussed whether backpacking was worth doing with my colleagues. Some of them thought that backpackers were mad. Backpackers spent two months cycling to Tibet. It would only take two hours if one took a flight! Tourists can visit the Potala Palace*[20] *and go to the snow mountain as well. There is no difference at all. However, I argued that maybe backpackers were looking for something different, something beyond sightseeing. The laborious experience is precisely what backpackers want. Backpackers and tourists have different attitudes towards travelling.*
>
> (Jiang, male, 28, young professionals Suzhou)

On the one hand, the young middle class, who conduct independent travel, achieve a sense of freedom based on extra money and individual capabilities. As discussed above, the reason why most independent travellers spend several months on searching for tourist information and making plans is that they want to enhance their control over the trip. To be specific, they do not want to be cheated by the local people, nor waste time on activities, such as finding the correct route. What they value is efficiency: they wish to buy souvenirs at a reasonable price, to avoid tourist scams, and spend time on the most valuable activities. Independent travellers achieve those goals by doing extensive work before setting off, which demonstrates that they are more capable than mass tourists in groups. Accordingly, their admiration of efficiency and individual capability is consistent with the fact that some non-backpackers think that backpacking is a waste of time. As Jiang's colleague in the debate above said, flying to Tibet was much more efficient than cycling to Tibet.

On the other hand, from the perspective of many non-backpackers, backpackers choose hitchhiking, trains, or cycling - most likely because they have less money. This point also explains why backpackers are sometimes regarded as losers in society. The following chapters of this work will show how some long-term backpackers of the middle class background felt

[20] The Potala Palace is in Lhasa. It is a museum and World Heritage Site.

anxiety about the label of ‘loser’, which further proves how the stigmatisation of budget travellers does exist.

To summarise, the ‘freedom’ admired by a substantial amount of the young middle class is relevant to strong individual capabilities, high social status and high efficiency. By conducting independent travel, the young middle class distinguish themselves from mass tourists, who are most likely to be ‘grandparents/parents’ or ‘poor people’. A truly bourgeois capitalist outlook regarding mobility has been developed and accepted by some young middle class citizens, who have grown up in an individualised society, and have been influenced by marketisation (Bauman, 1988; Sheller and Urry, 2006).

However, there still exists a kind of ‘freedom’ that is not relevant to efficiency or social status; it refers to being free from materialism. The pursuit of this type of freedom is very different from the consumption-led mobility of the middle and upper classes (Xu and Wu, 2016). As pointed out earlier in this work, some non-backpackers mentioned that they appreciated that backpackers could be free from materialistic demands and were concerned more about inner feelings. Moreover, although some participants stated that they liked star backpackers such as Gu Yue and Xiaopeng, some argued that backpacking could not be developed into a ‘career’. To be specific, these star backpackers made money by sharing, or selling, their travelling experiences and life experiences; they were thought to commodify themselves. Some participants, such as Shu (female, 27, young professional), as well as interviewed backpackers, doubted whether these star backpackers were the ‘true backpackers’ since they were pursuing wealth and fame by pretending that they were not interested in success.

Accordingly, the next chapter will examine a number of interviewed backpackers who differ from non-backpackers. For example, they valued the experience of being lonely, of being lost on the road. They chose to hitchhike or cycle not because they were poor, but because they wanted to. These characteristics were thought to make backpacking special. Also, some backpackers’ freewheeling lifestyles did challenge the traditional cultural values and life patterns. Travelling was perceived as an indispensable part of life; backpackers grew and changed due to the experiences of backpacking.

4.4.2 Why do non-backpackers often refuse a freewheeling lifestyle?

Although most focus group participants suggested that they respect backpackers who pursue freedom, and think that backpackers were competent and courageous, the majority of college students and young professionals also made it clear that they had no interest in living like a backpacker. As Qian, a 21-year-old undergraduate, said, 'I may travel like a backpacker, but I will never live like a backpacker.' According to focus group participants, their choice of 'not being a backpacker but being an ordinary person' is due to several individual and social factors.

First of all, some non-backpackers put emphasis on their personality. In this study, several non-backpackers indicated that they were not inclined to pursue novelty or explore the unknown. Instead, they preferred living in peace and security. For example, Wu (female, 26, young professional), working at a university in Beijing, said that she liked stable life and city life. Accordingly, Wu admitted that she would never be a backpacker. She was not an exception in focus group participants. Jie (male, 23) and Sen (female, 21) were undergraduates studying in Suzhou; both identified as a 'traditional and conservative person'. Jie said:

> *I will never live like that (backpacking). I am deeply influenced by my parents and traditional culture. I am quite conservative. I don't want to be far away from home. I like staying with my parents.*
>
> (Jie, male, 23, undergraduate Suzhou)

Sen emphasised that as a girl, her parents did not allow her to travel alone. She agreed and followed their rule. Ling, Zong and Shi, three girls in the focus group, agreed that it was more difficult for a female to be a solo traveller. Significantly, as both backpackers and non-backpackers attributed their choices regarding backpacking to personality, they implied that the choice of lifestyle was fundamentally 'a personal choice', as Xi (male, 29, young professional Beijing) stated. However, a personal choice does not mean that one can make the decision based purely on their own interests; a personal choice is never the outcome of solely personal preferences. Within China's context, a 'responsible personal choice' must take

account parents' perceptions and wishes into account, as indicated in Chapter Two (Qi, 2016; Barbalet, 2016)

The second reason for rejecting backpacking as a lifestyle can be attributed to ambition. As Ling (female, 22), an undergraduate, said, 'I won't live like a backpacker. I have so many things to do when I am young. Maybe I will try a long-haul trip after retire.' Ling's point of view corresponded with what Yan (female, 28, young professional) said in her group's discussion: 'I think the age is essential (if one could choose backpacking as a lifestyle). Most young people will work hard and settle down. But once you retire, you want to be a backpacker, travelling globally. It may be a kind of compensation.' Jie (male, 23), who self-identified as 'conservative' in the discussion above, argued that men - as the breadwinner - were responsible for providing the family with a primary income. In this case, it is impossible for a married man to be a backpacker. Jiang (male, 28), working in a state-owned enterprise, introduced the holiday policy in his company: employees could get a bonus if they gave up holidays. He stated, 'I just started my career, I prefer getting a bonus. A lot of people like me will make the same choice.'

Accordingly, the majority of non-backpackers chose to settle down in big cities, working hard for a bright future. Not all of the young people stated that they prefer 'inner peace' to 'fame and wealth'. The fact is the majority of the interviewed young professional and college students recognised the importance of a stable and successful life. As Liu pointed out in her study of Chinese college students, they held pragmatic attitudes towards life, namely, a 'middle class family dream' (Liu, 2008). As mentioned in the introductory chapter, the World Values Survey showed that the post-reform generations were more pragmatic and less idealistic, as they never overlooked individual successes or the value of money; although, they tended to employ more dimensions when assessing their job and overall lives (Sun and Wang, 2010). The following chapters will also demonstrate how most backpackers in this study choose to return and pursue individual success in mainstream society.

The third reason is due to family obligations. Some participants who were married made this point very clear. Hong (female, 28) was a businesswoman with a one-year-old baby girl, and Dian (female, 28) was pregnant. Hong said in the discussion:

> *I felt the pressure after I had the child. It's entirely different. You need a bigger house and a bigger car. You want to create a better living environment. I have to be responsible for this baby. Although it's a girl, it doesn't make any difference (to having a son). I love her so much, and I want to give her the best life I can.*
>
> (Hong, female, 28, young professional, Suzhou)

Dian added, 'my colleague's child went to kindergarten this year, and the annual fee is about 40,000 yuan. I have to think about this kind of thing right now. I don't want my husband to bear all of the burden.' Also, family travel always provides an opportunity for members to understand each other and to unite (Yun and Lehto, 2009), whilst most non-backpackers in this study expressed that they enjoyed travelling with their families. Accordingly, regardless of whether people focused on individual ambition or family obligation, they suggested that backpacking was not an appropriate lifestyle to achieve these goals.

Hong and Dian stressed their roles as both wife and mother. Other participants highlighted the importance of fulfilling *'xiao'* (孝, filial piety). Most participants thought that backpackers had to get their parents' consent for conducting such a non-traditional lifestyle. In the discussion above, participants such as Jie and Sen mentioned that the opinion of their parents had a great impact on their lives. According to Xie (male, 22, undergraduate Nanjing), 'it is irresponsible if you travel far way, and leave your parents at home. However, if your parents approve, it will be all right.' Most participants seemed to share a similar opinion to Xie. As Ka (male, 27, young professional Beijing) said, 'parents and partners are different from friends. Friends are tolerant, or they are irrelevant. However, you and your parents, or you and your lover are interrelated and interdependent.' All other participants in the group agreed with Ka. Wu (female, 26, young professional Beijing) added that, if one can convince their parents, and if their lover also likes this lifestyle, then it is possible to undertake backpacking as a way of life.

Accordingly, the factor of family obligation is regarded as an essential part of individual happiness for these non-backpackers. As highlighted in Chapter Two, family continuously plays a significant role in Chinese people's life within post-reform society. The above responses from focus groups are consistent with other empirical findings, stating that the majority of young Chinese are concerned with fulfilling family responsibilities and parents'

expectations (Barbalet, 2016; Cockain, 2012a; Lu et al., 2004; Liu, 2008; Qi, 2016). This finding thus challenges early studies on the only-child generation, which emphasised that the generation was egocentric, selfish, tending to pursue individual happiness at the expense of the wellbeing of their parents (Lu et al., 2004; Yan, 2006).

Additionally to personality, individual ambition and family obligation, participants noted that numerous societal factors also greatly influenced people's choice of lifestyle. Hong (female, 28), the businesswoman, said, 'The situation in China doesn't encourage people to undertake backpacking as a lifestyle.' First of all, young professionals, no matter whether from state-owned enterprises, government, or private companies, all strongly criticised holiday entitlement in China. According to the participants from state-owned enterprises and government, namely Yun (male, 27), Ruo (male, 28) and Dian (female, 28), the annual leave policy states that one has a five-day annual leave if their years of working are less than 10; it increases to ten days if the years of working are between 10 and 20; and, a fifteen-day annual leave is possible if the years of working amount to more than 20. This is the relevant provision of the Labour Law in China.

Moreover, Dian added that in her department, 'the head has never approved a five-day holiday even if it's your right. You have to separate the five days into several times.' In comparison to the state-owned enterprises and government, holiday entitlement in foreign investment companies was thought to be generous. According to Sha (female, 28) and Shuang (female, 27), they had at least a ten-day annual leave as juniors. Shuang added that every employee has an extra 10-day sick leave, in addition to paid holidays for their birthday, Youth Day, International Women's Day, and so on. Due to the lack of paid holidays, it is hard for people who have a job to conduct long-haul travel. This is precisely why most backpackers in the study who intended to conduct a long-haul, long-term trip all chose to resign from their jobs – often seeming like the only option. Furthermore, because of close family bonds, as discussed above, many non-backpackers said that they preferred going home to visit their parents during holidays. Given that China is geographically large, if one studies or works in another province, travelling back home can be time-consuming.

Therefore, as Hong (female, 28, young professional Suzhou) suggested in the group discussion, 'It is reasonable to conclude that why backpacking is definitely non-mainstream in China. As I

know, developed countries such as Germany have lots of public holidays and paid holidays. Then lots of people in Germany can be backpackers. Also, developed countries have better social welfare, such as healthcare and education. It needs great courage if one wants to be a backpacker in China. If you give up your job to go backpacking, what do you live for after you return?' To conclude, the question of whether backpacking is a non-conventional lifestyle is also related to the system and law of a country.

All other participants in the same group supported Hong's point of view. Shuang added, 'Plus, the Westerners' passports gain access to many more countries and areas than ours. Therefore, I saw Western travellers spend a month in a place, reading books on the beach. They go to foreign countries much more easily than us. We Chinese rush to tourist attractions because our time is limited.' What Shuang referred to here is the unequal mobility based on the visa system between countries (Bauman, 1988). This perspective challenges the previously explored idea that Chinese tourists do not care about authenticity (Oakes, 1998). It supports the critique of the implied social status of the theory of authenticity (MacCannell, 1973, 1999) stated in Chapter Two. Evidently, 'the quest for authenticity' (MacCannell, 1999) requires substantial time, money and knowledge, which are unequally processed by different social classes and unequally distributed among different countries.

Young professionals in Beijing further referred to cultural differences between the West and the East, explaining why Chinese people rarely had the chance to conduct backpacking. Again, they focused on parent-child relationships. These participants thought that Western parents did not interfere in their children' lives as much as Chinese parents. Accordingly, in Western countries, after the child completes education, parents are 'emancipated', as Ruo (28, male, young professional Beijing) said. However, in China, parents are considered to be responsible for their children's marriage - and even grandchildren's education. As discussed in regard to the Chinese path of individualism (Yan, 2010; Beck, 2013), Chinese people are living in a world lacking a well-established social safety net; thus, the family is perceived as the core factor that alleviates feelings of alienation and anxiety. The generation of singletons and their parents have to be interdependent, financially and emotionally. As a result, anyone who tries to put individual interests over family interests may feel discouraged.

Due to the reasons stated above, lifestyle travellers are regarded as the minority and non-mainstream by the majority of non-backpackers. However, there were still three participants out of thirty-five in focus groups who showed support for this way of life, namely Guan (male, 25, undergraduate Nanjing), Mao (female, 27, postgraduate Nanjing), and Sha (female, 28, young professional Beijing). They appreciated that backpackers resisted pressure from family and society; as a result, lifestyle backpackers were able to be faithful to their own desires.

Except for the three participants, the following excerpt from Qian illustrates well the prevailing viewpoint of the rest of non-backpackers in this study:

> *I think the best way to define non-mainstream is to use quantity. Otherwise, everyone can use his/her own criteria. Based on this, backpackers are non-mainstream because they are a minority. I may travel like a backpacker, but I will never live like a backpacker. I am an ordinary person.*
>
> (Qian, female, 21, undergraduate Nanjing)

To summarise, to be a lifestyle backpacker is an 'extraordinary' choice according to young people in this study, although they do not necessarily regard the 'extraordinary' choice as the proper or correct choice. Backpacking is thought to be non-mainstream and unconventional; individual ambition, traditional cultural values, and relevant social systems serve as the major anti-backpacking factors. Although backpacking is perceived as a positive, transformative way of travelling and a typical way to pursue happiness, backpackers who choose to live in an alternative way face the criticism of being unfilial and lacking ambition. Although most non-backpackers indicate that lifestyle is a personal choice, they evidently think that a responsible choice is never solely the outcome of personal preferences.

4.5 Summary

In this chapter, focus group participants illustrated their understandings of the label 'backpacker', based on media representations and personal experience. Participants felt that - although backpacking originated with Western societies - there were more and more Chinese

backpackers within contemporary society. As a result, they did not recognise backpacking as an unusual way of travelling. Moreover, they recognised that backpacking not only refers a way of travelling but also could extend to a way of living. Most of them stated that they might want to travel as a backpacker, but they did not want to live as a backpacker.

'Freedom' was regarded as the most essential characters of backpacking, as backpacking was perceived as a 'free' way of travelling, and backpackers were people who 'pursued freedom' in their lives. In addition, some participants thought that backpackers were idealist who resisted materialism and pursued inner richness. Backpackers' free will to arrange their journeys independently was interpreted as an expression of power and capability. As a result, they were offered respect by college students and young professionals. Accordingly, these non-backpackers - as China's young middle class - valued the strong individual capabilities, high social status, high efficiency and critical thinking that independent travel represents.

However, non-backpackers were also critical of what 'freedom' actually represented, as outlined earlier in this chapter. Most participants refused to live a freewheeling lifestyle, as lifestyle travellers were seen to. In this case, non-backpackers questioned the value of 'freedom', as they put financial stability and social obligation first. Moreover, non-backpackers pointed out that it was difficult for them to choose a freewheeling lifestyle without a well-established social safety net. Also, the emphasis of filial piety in China does not encourage individuals to place personal interests over family obligation.

Instead of freedom, most non-backpackers were found to pursue a dream of building a middle class family: to settle down in the city, get married and have a child, to have a stable job, a house, a car and some extra money to go on holidays (importantly, it should be self-organised holidays, rather than mass tourism). Every aspect of this dream relies on their hard working, and a stable job is crucial to this dream. On the contrary, a freewheeling lifestyle usually means instability. Therefore, individual freedom is not important when compared to family welfare and individual ambition. Backpacking, as a way of living, is widely perceived to be non-mainstream and unconventional.

5. ‘The most important character of an authentic backpacker is independence’: Perspectives from backpackers

5.1. Introduction

Following non-backpackers’ understandings of backpackers, this chapter intends to examine how Chinese backpackers identify themselves. Most definitions in the literature of ‘backpacker’ are based on their travel behaviours as shown in Chapter Two. However, this chapter seeks to explore how Chinese backpackers view themselves. It further investigates how backpackers’ self-identifications influence their travel behaviours. In doing so, a ‘backpacker’ is not only presented as a certain type of traveller, but also an individual possessing specific personal characters. As young backpackers’ characteristics and self-identification are revealed, this chapter also examines the similarities and differences between backpackers and non-backpackers.

‘Loving freedom’ was recognised as the core characteristic of backpackers by non-backpackers; however, when Chinese backpackers discussed what made a traveller a backpacker, most of them mentioned a different word: ‘independence’. Although backpackers focused on different aspects of independence and valued independence for different reasons, it is ‘independence’ that made travellers most strongly recognise themselves as backpackers. This chapter discusses why ‘independence’ is valued, how it is achieved and its relationship to ‘freedom’. The first section examines student backpackers who tried to become independent from their parents, discussing why financial independence is so often perceived as the precondition of freedom. The second section examines backpackers’ perception of freedom and loneliness, as travelling alone is perceived as the distinct character of backpackers. The third section focuses on the travel philosophy of backpackers, and how it is influenced by backpackers’ self-identifications.

5.2. Paid for by myself: Student backpackers' declarations of their independence from parents

As discussed in Chapter Two, traditional Chinese culture regarding travel places emphasis on its functions of recreation and entertainment. Furthermore, 18-25 is the age during which most young Chinese people are busy studying or preparing for their career (Zhu, 2007). Accordingly, some parents and teachers think that a long-haul trip will distract young people from their studies or career. Moreover, some Chinese teenagers are protected by their families, in regard to the many perceived risks of backpacking.

This study finds that often, if one has been unable to conduct self-funded travel, he/she has had to give up their travel plans. Zhi (male, 23) joined a cycling club during the first year of college. When he and his friends cycled to nearby cities, they stayed in youth hostels. Zhi met some independent budget travellers there, and thus became familiar with backpacking as an approach to travelling. In the second summer holiday of college, he cycled from Chengdu to Tibet and greatly enjoyed the experience. However, his mum strongly opposed to this way of travelling after hearing his story, because she thought that it was too risky. To prevent him from backpacking, Zhi's family sent less money to him the following year.

However, Zhi was determined to conduct a second trip; he wanted to backpack to the northernmost region of China; he grew up in the southern part, and the northern areas were more unfamiliar to him. To realise this dream, he did a lot of part-time jobs in his third year of college, such as working in a Pizza Hut restaurant on weekends, running a stall of accessories in the night market around campus, and being a home tutor for pupils. In the third summer, he hitchhiked from Shanghai to Mohe, [21] with all expenses paid for by the money he had made working. Zhi concluded, 'The feeling of being independent is great! I can do whatever I want. And I find that it is not that hard to balance study and work.' Therefore, in the final year, he continued to work part-time jobs on weekends.

Zhi's story well illustrates the conflicts arising from a difference in values, between a child and their parents. Zhi's mother thought that backpacking was risky and worthless, while Zhi took it as a chance to challenge and develop himself. There exists an emerging backpacking

[21] Mohe is the northernmost Chinese county.

culture among the younger generation in China, as this study has demonstrated. Young people in focus groups, as well as individually interviewed backpackers, identify self-organised independent trip as an indicator of individual capability. This idea is very similar to contemporary Western backpackers (Richards and Wilson, 2004; Heath, 2007), but differs from the traditional Chinese travel purpose of 'having fun'. It indicates a change in travel purposes, due to a change in social conditions. As the individualised society promotes the image of the autarkic human self (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002), individual trips are widely employed as a way of achieving personal growth (Snee, 2014).

However, not all student backpackers' desire for independence results from their conflicts with parents. Li was a 23-year-old senior student; self-identified as a budget traveller, he saved every penny during his trip by sleeping in a tent and hitchhiking. His travel budget came from working part-time jobs on campus and savings from his living expenses. Li said that he could not burden his parents anymore, as they were low-income peasants living in an undeveloped area. However, he could not give up the dream of travelling around China; therefore, Li chose to work part-time jobs and travel in a low-budget way.

Li's difficulty was primarily due to his humble background, while Yuan's situation was slightly different. Yuan was a 26-year-old postgraduate, majoring in tourism management. He worked for a travel agency on the weekends. As an outdoor enthusiast, he spent most of his income on outdoor equipment. Yuan suggested that his parents would buy the equipment if he asked, as his family were not poor. However, Yuan thought that it would be good if he was able to pay the money himself. For Yuan, 'It was a symbol of independence if one started to make money. Also, I can buy whatever I want as long as I can afford. I don't need to care if parents like it or not.' Again, Li gained the freedom by paying for the trip and the equipment by himself.

The cases of Zhi, Li and Yuan challenge the perspective that China's post-80s generation is a 'strawberry generation' heavily relying on their families, unable to bear the hardships of the real world (Lian, 2014). On the contrary, young backpackers appear to value self-reliance, and are willing to take financial responsibility for their activities. Developing social reform in China has created more informal working opportunities (Yan, 2010), whilst post-Fordist working conditions favour flexibility (O'Reilly, 2006). As a result, college students have been

able to find part-time jobs. With the money made, these young people are able to take their first step towards independence. Similarly, in the 1950s and 60s, the affluent American middle class puts money directly into the pockets of their children, who become economic capital themselves. This arguably led in part to the rise of – often rebellious – youth culture (Elliott and Lemert, 2009).

Li, Yuan and Zhi were student backpackers who primarily travelled during holidays. During my fieldwork, I also met young adults who had dropped out of college and gone backpacking, exemplified by Long (male, 20). These dropouts were never mentioned in previous studies on Chinese backpackers, perhaps missed due to their sampling methods, or perhaps this was a group of 'drifters' (O'Reilly, 2006) first appeared in China.

Long was the youngest long-haul independent traveller I interviewed; he would be a sophomore in college if he had not left early. However, he chose to launch an independent, and 'probably endless journey', as he said. When I met him in 2015, his trip had already lasted for nine months. Long narrated his story:

> *I was born to a traditional, middle class family; my parents own a seafood shop. All they want is for me to be an obedient child: get a college diploma, find a job, get married, have a child. They only want to discipline and control me, as well as the whole social system, the schools. Everyone is trained to be the same…No one cares if I am happy with that way of living. I am not! At least, I don't feel that is what I want right now.*
>
> (Long, long-term traveller, male, 20)

As Long states, his idea of quitting university was strongly opposed to by his parents, who tried to persuade him not to quit the college and go backpack. However, Long was determined not to ask for help from them. After leaving college, his priority was to make money. Long found a job as a tour guide in the city where the college was located, working for two months. With the money, he backpacked around northeast China. When he arrived in Beijing, he worked as an assistant for a football coach in a primary school, as he used to be a talented football player. Travelling along China's coastline, Long said that he attempted at least ten

kinds of different jobs, from the north to the south. As long as he saved hundreds of yuan, Long moved on. He used all kinds of transportation, such as hitchhiking, low-fare trains, or just walked all day with his backpack. He also worked as part of the reception staff or as a cleaner for youth hostels, in exchange for free accommodation.

Long and his parents quarrelled many times about whether he could quit college. His parents did not support him to go backpacking. However, it is crucial to highlight that Long did not break with his parents in order to pursue what he wants. Long contacted them once a month, updating his status. As an only child, he understood how his parents loved him, although he did not accept their approach to loving him.

Accordingly, the contemporary family relationship within China is negotiated by both parents and children (Barbalet, 2016; Qi, 2016). The power relationship between parents and children can be challenged, particularly when children become financially self-reliant. In a recent study, parents' support of their children has become a precondition to some degree of children's filial behaviour (Qi, 2016). In this study, young adults such as Zhi and Long can pursue what they want when they become financially independent.

However, to challenge parents' authority is not equal to breaking a relationship with parents. In Long's case, although he never enjoyed studying, he took the college entrance examination and attended a college anyway. To study hard and enter the university is always perceived as the most effective way to show filial piety and respect for one's parents in China (Zhou, 2014). Even after he dropped out of college and backpacked, he kept regular contact with his parents in order to ease their worries. Similarly, although Zhi went backpacking on holidays despite his mother's opposition, he never believed that his mother's opinion was not important to him. Family obligations have always had a great impact on backpackers' life choices, differing from non-backpackers' expectations. Backpackers' post-travel choices are largely affected by their parents, which will be discussed in Chapter Seven and Eight.

Apart from student backpackers, other interviewed backpackers also highlighted that they were self-funded. For those who held full-time jobs before becoming a full-time traveller, their travelling expenses were primarily covered by the savings from previous jobs. For example, Zu was a postgraduate when interviewed, studying in the United Kingdom. After obtaining a

bachelor's degree from a top Chinese university in 2011, he worked in an international accounting firm in Shanghai. Although the salary was good, he did not like the job. Encouraged by a bestselling book named *A Working holiday in New Zealand* (Wu, 2012), [22] Zu resigned in 2012 and applied for a working holiday visa in New Zealand. During his 'gap year', he travelled around the country by undertaking part-time jobs, and backpacked to Southeast Asia. Zu considered himself as 'definitely a backpacker':

> *A true backpacker should meet several requirements. Firstly, one's motivations for backpacking should be pure. In particular, your journey cannot be sponsored by any commercial institutions. A lot of tourist destinations and tour agencies want to promote themselves. Since backpacking is very popular among young people, a star backpacker is an ideal spokesperson. However, if you receive the sponsorship, you will no longer be free or independent. You're better to be self-funded. The second requirement regards the way of travelling. You travel on a budget. For example, I travelled with a 60-litre backpack, carrying cooking equipment on the road. I stayed in youth hostels, hitchhiked and chose budget airlines. This is not because I couldn't afford an expensive trip. Rather, I hoped the journey could be longer. A trip less than one month is a sightseeing holiday. You need to stop and stay in one place for five to ten days. A backpacker eats their breakfast in a local street market in the morning. At night, he hears other backpackers play guitar in the youth hostel.*
>
> (Zu, gap year traveller, male, 26)

Zu listed the essential elements of being a backpacker. It is worth noting that the travel behaviours of a backpacker as mentioned by Zu, such as to choose budget accommodation and interact with the local population and other backpackers, perfectly matches the widely accepted definition of backpacker as proposed by Loker-Murphy and Pearce (1995) - except

[22] The book was published in 2012, recording how the author spent a gap year in New Zealand. The author Wu Fei was a post-80s young man living in Shanghai. He was a young professional. However, he felt the routine life was boring and empty. He emphasised that the life was what his parents wanted, rather than himself. He thus decided to make a change. With 200 dollars, he went to New Zealand as a working holiday visa holder. He made money by doing all kinds of part-time jobs. Wu concluded that he gained 'parents' understanding, a lover, and the genuine friendship' in the year. More importantly, he found his passion. Wu decided to pursue his dream: being a detective fiction writer. The book had a great influence on young people and became the best seller. Also, it introduced concepts like 'gap year' and 'working holiday visa' to Chinese audiences.

for Zu's emphasis on 'self-funded'. Significantly, Zu thought a self-funded trip with 'pure motivations' was the first and primary requirement of a backpacker. Accordingly, he criticised how some backpackers in China received sponsorship from commercial institutions while claiming to be 'independent'. As noted in the last chapter, some star backpackers had millions of followers on social media, and their comments on travel destinations and attractions greatly influenced fans. They did sometimes receive commercial sponsorships.

From Zu's perspective, sponsored trips cannot be free or independent, because travellers must follow the instructions and meet the requirements of their sponsors. If a traveller is not free, he/she cannot be recognised as a backpacker. Also, they are suspected of deceiving their followers by concealing their interest-based relationships with commercial institutions. Thirdly, these backpackers are more likely to pursue fame and wealth through backpacking, rather than spiritual fullness and self-actualisation. Zu's idea corresponds with many young people's opinions in the focus groups, as backpackers are believed to be people who value spiritual richness, rather than material well-being.

Only a few famous backpackers can obtain sponsorship from commercial institutions; thus, the issue of the commodification of backpacking experience is only relevant to star backpackers. However, students and young adults who receive financial support from their parents face difficulties when their parents cannot or do not want to sponsor them, as discussed above. Within this study, student backpackers were motivated to find alternative ways to fulfil their dream, as their parents disagreed with their activities. As young people tried to be financially self-reliant, they were able to do what they want, regardless of their parents' opinions. This is very different from non-backpackers in focus groups, who tended to follow their parents' suggestions.

Zu highlighted how independence was considered to be the precondition of freedom. For backpackers, freedom not only refers to freedom regarding travel, such as where to go and what to do, but also refers to a wider choice, such as whether one could travel or not. This idea corresponds with non-backpackers' perceptions that freedom indicates a freedom of choice; however, backpackers placed emphasis on the cost of freedom: independence. Without independence, backpackers perceive that freedom is 'precarious' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, p.1).

5.3. Travelling by myself: Backpackers' perceptions of loneliness

For student backpackers, financial independence demonstrates their capability to pursue what they want. In this case, 'freedom' means that they are free from their parents, and possess greater choice. However, money does not seem to be a big concern for people who have years of experiences of working or full-time jobs. In this case, it is worth noting that interviewed backpackers - both student backpackers and adult backpackers - placed much emphasis on the ability to be able to travel independently. To be specific, they valued the ability to travel alone and even valued the moment of being alone. As discussed in the last chapter, Hai (22, male), the college student, quoted from star backpacker Xiaopeng's autobiography: 'The other side of freedom means loneliness. I think Xiaopeng enjoys being lonely, and he is not afraid of travelling alone. I can't handle the loneliness.'

The majority of non-backpackers refused to travel alone, as one primary purpose of their travel was social. Accordingly, non-backpackers chose not to travel if they lacked a companion. However, most interviewed backpackers had experiences of travelling alone. This difference well illustrates the distinct character of backpacking: self-centred. Although not all interviewed backpackers stated that their purpose of travelling was to 'search for the self' (Cohen, 2009), they made it very clear that the journeys were 'for myself': to relax, to learn, to realise a dream, or to make a change. From this perspective, they could be considered as individualistic.

Many interviewed backpackers stated that they actually wanted to travel alone. Ting serves as a good example here. Ting was 40, the oldest backpacker I interviewed in the study. In 1998, he graduated from a top university and became a technician in a foreign investment company. After ten years, he was promoted to department leader. Ting bought a flat and a car in Beijing, living like a typical middle class citizen in China. At 35, Ting thought that it was time to realise his childhood dream: going on a world tour. Ting was well-organised, and thus spent two years planning his trip - like the competent, independent travellers in Xiang's study (2013).

Ting insisted that the best way to travel was alone. Sometimes, he travelled with other backpackers he encountered on the road. However, he said that situation never lasted longer

than five days, because he did not want to compromise other people's trips and his own. He contended:

> *Frankly, that's the only way to be free. If you have companions, you have to take care of them, to negotiate when you have disputes…It is my trip. The trip is on my own. Why should I sacrifice my own interests for the sake of others?*
>
> (Ting, global traveller, male, 40)

Ting did not seem to be an irresponsible person; he understood that one ought to take care of another if they travelled together. Taking care of others seems to be a grave responsibility; as older than most other backpackers, it is a role that Ting could be forced to play more easily – and one he did not want to take. By stating that to 'travel alone is the only way to be free', backpackers such as Ting perceived anything except the 'self' as a burden. This narcissism reflects part of the social fact within contemporary China: that an increasingly individuated society encourages and shapes expressions of egoism (Sun and Wang, 2010; Lian, 2014; Chen and Lian, 2015).

Friends and families who share close relationships to the backpacker can become 'a grave responsibility', as suggested earlier. Indeed, most backpackers said that they prefer to travel with fellow backpackers they meet on the road, rather than friends and families. Xiao was a 35-year-old high school teacher, travelling during school holidays. Divorced several years ago, and childless, she spent most of her spare time and disposable money on travelling. She liked to travel with people she met in youth hostels, stating: 'It is a common sense among backpackers that if we are happy together, we travel together. If there appears divergence, we say goodbye with a smile. Everyone is independent, and everyone respects one another. We don't need to be tied together.'

Xiao's attitude is very similar to Elliott and Lemert's (2009) description of people's demand for intimate relationship in a privatised world; they note, '…desires for independence; impulses to avoid becoming too tightly connected to any given person, situation, network or job for very long; a general sense of dissatisfaction and impatience with the structure of all social things; and, perhaps above all, a preoccupation with keeping on the move and moving

on' (2009, p.98). Significantly, the rapid development of youth hostels across China indicates that Xiao's opinion is very popular among the younger generation. Youth hostels become a perfect setting to construct mobile and flexible relationships; this will be focused in greater depth in the following chapter.

It is also important to highlight that not all backpackers choose to travel alone from the very beginning. Some backpackers intend to find travel partners but fail; they travel by themselves as planned. Bao was 28 years old and working in a cultural and creative company based in Shanghai. He used to conduct long-haul budget travel trips during school holidays. After taking a full-time job, he could only take short trips because he had very few holidays. Still, he spent almost all of his holidays backpacking. For example, he backpacked in Shaanxi Province during the week-long National Day holiday in 2015. At first, he tried to find some travel companions through Weibo and WeChat.[23] However, Bao said that his plan 'scared people away'. He told people that most of the time would be walking on the road with the backpack. In addition, his budget was under 1000 yuan for eight or nine days; so it was impossible to stay in hotels or have a semi-expensive dinner. He was also not interested in visiting any tourist attractions. Without an ideal partner, Bao decided to set off by himself.

Bao's experience was not unique; Ke shared a similar story. He was 27, working in a state-owned-enterprise. He became obsessed with backpacking after taking a budget trip to Tibet with a colleague. From 2011 to 2014, he visited 22 provinces in China. [24] With little work in the off-season, he was allowed to take weeklong holidays several times in a year. Ke said that he once invited his colleagues to join him, but they refused because they perceived the trip as 'torturing'. Ke suggested that the main reason for this was that backpackers' purpose of travel differs so greatly from that of non-backpackers; he stated, 'For ninety-nine percent people, tourism is just about recreation and relaxation. But for me, it is beyond having fun. Backpacking deeply influences other aspects of my life, and it inspires me in many ways.'

Similarly to Bao, Ke was a budget traveller, which means that he was not interested in luxury hotels, fine restaurants or tourist attractions. Moreover, he was a 'shutterbug', noting, 'It is

[23] It is the most popular messaging app in China, with over 700 million users in 2016 (The Economist, 2016). It is also like Facebook and Instagram in some ways, as you can upload photos and status to share your activities. Your Webchat's friends can comment on your photos and status. 'The app offers everything from free video calls and instant group chats to news updates and easy sharing of large multimedia files' (The Economist, 2016).
[24] In total, there are 23 provinces in China.

common that I get up early in the morning and go to bed late at night when travelling because I want to take extraordinary photos. You know that light is essential in photography, but one has to wait for the perfect moment.' Backpackers such as Bao and Ke tried to find travel partners but failed; however, they did not give up on the idea of backpacking, which distinguishes them from non-backpackers.

Furthermore, this study found that backpackers not only perceive loneliness as a way to achieve freedom, but also as an opportunity to reflect on and examine oneself. Ning was a 27-year-old experienced backpacker, who said, 'I especially enjoy the moment of being alone. As when I travelled in a group, my attention would be distracted by others'. Ning thought that it would be a unique experience during backpacking trips if one could eliminate all distractions and fully feel the inner-self, as people were surrounded by trifles and troubles during everyday life.

Pengyi became familiar with backpacking when she was studying in the UK in 2006 after she heard of youth hostels and budget travel from classmates. During her stay, she backpacked around the country and wider Europe. After returning to China and beginning work, she kept backpacking as a 'hobby', which lasted for nine years. According to Pengyi, travel was the best way to relax and to reflect, as it provided a unique individual space:

> *I have a strong feeling of 'being lived' when travel, which is like 'making the most of life'. The pressure at work or problems with family and friends just disappear. For example, I asked myself why I quarrelled with my mum for such trifles. I like writing notes or diaries on flights and trains. During that time, it's easy to concentrate on myself and to reflect…The amazing nature and scenery, delicious but sometimes strange foods and interesting people, all bring me energy. I enjoy life purely. Every time I come back, I have a better sense of self and something new.*
>
> (Pengyi, self-employed, backpacker, female, 31)

According to Pengyi, backpacking not only allows people to see the world as it really is, but also provides the opportunity for self-development, as she refers to 'a better self'. One

essential characteristic of rising individualism is the individual need to possess a reflexive awareness of living experimentally and constantly breaking new ground (Elliott and Lemert, 2009). People such as Pengyi thus employ backpacking as a way to refresh and to reflect, with a purpose of creating a better life for oneself after returning.

Bao (male, 28), the budget traveller who worked in a cultural and creative company, said that the reason he was obsessed with hiking was that it was a kind of continuous exercise of one's body and mind. He regarded budget travel as a way to challenge himself. Similarly to Pengyi, Bao appreciated the moments of being alone on trains, because it gave him time and space to reflect. Bao suggested that he rarely felt uncomfortable if had nobody to talk to for the whole day. Under the circumstances, he focused on his inner self during travel. Bao called it 'meditation', and said that he found solitude to be positive.

It can be somewhat difficult to understand the desire for 'being alone', as a primary travel motivation for non-backpackers is 'being together'. However, backpackers - as the radical individualistic individuals - highlight the meaning of 'being alone'. By travelling alone, backpackers break the inside/outside or public/private distinction (Riley, 2002). They are open to anyone/any group, but they refuse to be a part of it. Rather than being lonely, backpackers are glad to have some time to examine the inner self. The demands of self-reflexivity are closely related to the living conditions within an individualised society (Elliott and Lemert, 2009), particularly within fateful moments (Giddens, 1991). In the following chapters, I will show how backpacking is employed as a way to attempt to overcome life crises.

It is noteworthy that not only male backpackers travelled alone; there were many female solo travellers. Ning thought the idea that 'it was unsafe for women to travel alone' was prejudiced. She stated, 'We shall not be prevented from travelling because of this prejudice. I heard terrible stories that female backpackers were attacked, but I did not encounter the situation. I also met a lot of female backpackers, and most of them travelled alone. Male backpackers were attacked as well, but people did not highlight their gender.' It would be incorrect to conclude that it is not dangerous for female backpackers to travel alone; however, it is important to indicate that female backpackers' travel aspirations are as high as male backpackers, and so are their capabilities.

In this study, ten out of twelve interviewed female backpackers had previously backpacked alone. None of the ten identified 'travelling alone' as a barrier to backpacking. If someone was concerned with the issue of safety, she would seek to be better prepared. Because the other two female backpackers did not want to travel alone, they proactively found suitable companions through the Internet. They did not mind that these *'wang you'* (网友, Internet friends) were also 'strangers' to some extent. Furthermore, it is very likely that women who are really concerned for their safety do not travel alone, as shown in the focus group discussion in the last chapter.

Although interviewed backpackers are a diverse group, as discussed above, they all suggested that 'independence' was the crucial characteristic of a backpacker. Student backpackers highlighted financial independence, and adult backpackers highlighted the ability to organise a trip and to travel alone. One experienced backpacker, Ji (female, 34), even suggested that independence represents 'independent thinking' and a 'critical mind'; and that it is these characteristics that make an individual a backpacker. She contended:

> *The most important characteristic of an authentic backpacker is independence. I am independent in many ways. First of all, I am an independent thinker. I am not easily influenced by this or those 'big names'. Then, I have my own income, and I enjoy freedom. When I was travelling, I followed my heart. Sometimes I had partners, but I made the decisions all by myself. I am the one who controls my journey, as well as my own life.*
>
> (Ji, experienced backpacker and youth hostel manager, female, 34)

Ji started to backpack in 2005. After graduating from vocational high school, she started to work as a gardener. However, she was disappointed by the working environment and a rude employer, so she resigned and went travelling. Ji indicated that the concept of 'backpacking' was not well-known at that time, and what she perceived herself as doing was going to the place she wanted with the least amount of money. From 2006 to 2010, she rotated travelling with working at home. This unsettled life ended, as she eventually found a job that she could combine work with her interests. She worked in a youth hostel from 2011 and later became a manager there.

Ji explained that the reason why she highlighted 'critical thinking' was because she thought that there were more and more 'fake backpackers' emerging over recent years. According to her, some young people went backpacking because they only wanted to pretend to be 'cool'. She explained, 'They lavish the money made by their parents. They hitchhike to save money, but they use the latest iPhone. How ironic! Some only visit tourist attractions in order to take a photo, and some go shopping. They are mass tourists carrying backpacks!' Ji's criticism of some young travellers was not solely personal; many backpackers and youth hostel managers pointed out the same phenomenon as well. Accordingly, backpackers, as a group, are expected to have certain 'common behaviours' when travelling. More importantly, these behaviours reflect their travel philosophy, which is greatly influenced by their appreciation of independence. Therefore, the next section will examine backpackers' travel behaviours.

To summarise, although there is a clear backpacker group[25] within this study, the findings of this study still challenge conclusions made by many previous studies on Chinese backpackers, which have emphasised that Chinese backpackers possess a strong group orientation, as they prefer travelling in a group (Luo et al., 2014; Ong and du Cros, 2012; Zhu, 2007). These studies further assumed that this was because Chinese backpackers were influenced by collectivism. However, this study has revealed that, although some backpackers tried to find travel companions, they were rarely afraid of travelling alone, no matter whether they were male or female backpackers. Some even enjoyed the freedom and solitude resulting specifically from travelling alone. Distinct to non-backpackers, who always seek to travel with family or friends, backpackers have been found to be willing to make new friends during the journey or remain by themselves.

The reason that most researchers may overgeneralise Chinese backpackers as group travellers may be that they rely highly on established online and offline backpacker communities when undertaking their research. Previous studies' samples were of backpackers who came from these communities. Instead, the samples of this study were recruited from various channels, as illustrated in Chapter Three.

[25] I encountered and interviewed four people, Beibei, Zang, Peng and Liao, who travelled as a group. They were all first-time backpackers, and this is the main reason why they backpacked together. Although they travelled together, they all emphasised the purpose of this trip is for the self. The four found each other on the Internet, and the following parts of this thesis will discuss more.

5.4. Go native and be local: An authentic experience, or to make a virtue of necessity

In the above discussion, Zu thought that a sponsored trip could not be free or independent, because travellers have to follow the instructions of their sponsors. Non-backpackers also pointed out that one big advantage of self-organised travel was to 'go where you like and see what you want'. Accordingly, it is significant to examine when backpackers are free, what activities they participate in. Furthermore, it is necessary to explore what behaviours make a traveller look like a backpacker.

First of all, the symbolic meaning of the 'backpack' has already been noted by many non-backpackers in the previous chapter. A backpack not only stands for freedom but also simplicity. For most interviewed backpackers, a backpack does play an essential role in their identity. Ning's statement represents the perspectives of the majority of backpackers within this study. Ning, the female backpacker who liked travelling alone, possessed three years of backpacking experience around China and East Asia. She was transformed from a factory worker to a long-term backpacker; she said, 'The word "backpacker" is derived from 'backpack'. It's very convenient to go anywhere you want with a backpack, so it makes you feel free. How can a backpacker walk on the muddy country road with a suitcase?'

However, during Ning's first long trip, she carried a 'super large handbag', as she had no relevant experience and did not expect to be a backpacker. Ning had worked in a garment factory in her hometown after dropping out of high school, but she became tired of the routine after five years. In 2010, she resigned and left her hometown. Her original plan was to visit several popular tourist cities in China and to 'have a rest'. She planned to return home to find a new job. However, in youth hostels, she encountered people who conducted budget travel for years, and their way of living inspired her. Ning decided to extend the trip; the first one lasted for seven months. She returned to her hometown and worked in a pub for half a year, but she missed the feeling of travelling on the road. Therefore, as the lifestyle traveller who repeatedly returned to long-term travel, Ning set off again. This time, she carried a backpack. Ning did not recognise herself as a backpacker until she carried a backpack. She said that her 60-litre backpacker was like 'a home' that included all the necessities: a sleeping bag, clothes for both summer and winter - because she was travelling all year round and moving from cold to warm regions - a pair of hiking boots, a camera, a laptop, accessories, travel documents, a large sport

water bottle, and so on.

In the previous chapter, non-backpackers indicated that hiking with a heavy backpack was exhausting, and that this was an important reason for why they did not like backpacking. However, backpackers talked about their bags with pride. Di was a lifestyle traveller, similar to Ning. She was thin and small; however, her backpack was 60-litres. Di said that sometimes people wanted to help her because they thought that she looked pitiful with the large backpack. However, she was confident in her physical capacities and rarely felt tired.

Di was one year younger than Ning, and did not go to college either. She left her hometown and went to Guangzhou after finishing high school, working for a customer service department in a clothing company. Although the boss and colleagues treated her well, Di decided to resign and conduct a long-term trip. Di noted: 'My boss didn't want me to leave, so she approved a 15-day leave period. However, I wanted at least a three-month period of leave.' She laughed, 'but I didn't expect it could be so long! I started backpacking in 2013. It has been more than two years up to now.' Over the past two years, Di has travelled around the West of China and Southeast Asia.

According to Ning and Di, the backpack plays an essential role in the creation of backpacker identity. Backpacks are pivotal in backpacker's bodily performance, and are thus regarded as an identification within and outside of backpacking circles on a global scale (Walsh and Tucker, 2009). The backpack was recognised as a heavy burden by non-backpackers, as they looked for a pleasant and relaxed journey. Accordingly, they usually carried a suitcase and left it in hotels.

However, the backpack is considered to be necessary to backpacker's journey, as it enables their freedom and independence. Ning, Di and Zu all mentioned their '60-litre backpacks' containing a tent, clothes, cookware, and so on. Thus, it is the backpack that ensures independence. Backpackers are therefore independent from hotels, restaurants, and external services. Accordingly, no matter whether backpackers possess a working class background, such as Ning and Di, or a middle class background such as Zu, all place emphasis on their backpack.

The symbolic meaning of the backpack is so widely accepted by both non-backpackers and backpackers, that one interviewed traveller doubted her identity as a 'backpacker' because she usually travelled with a suitcase. Xiao, the high school teacher mentioned above, was the only 'backpacker' I interviewed travelling with a suitcase. She contended:

> *If one must have a backpack to be a backpacker, then I am not. However, if a backpacker means that a traveller goes anywhere as she wants and can change the route anytime, then I am [a backpacker]. Most of the time, I am travelling by myself. Moreover, I always make the journey as long as possible. For example, in the winter holiday, I will not return home until Spring Festival.*[26] *I always keep travelling until my parents ask me to return. Plus, I stay in youth hostels and I use public transportation.*
>
> (Xiao, high school teacher and backpacker, female, 35)

According to Xiao, it is not the backpack itself, but the symbolic meaning it represents, that matters. To be specific, it is the ability to travel independently that defines a backpacker. From this perspective, Xiao does not differ greatly from all the backpackers mentioned above, so she said that she could be identified as a backpacker if to 'travel independently and freely' are the core of being a backpacker.

Ke, the amateur photographer, expressed a similar opinion. When asked what made a traveller a backpacker, Ke said, 'First of all, a backpacker should be self-helped…different from mass tourist, you arrange everything by yourself.' Xiao and Ke are the typical middle class backpackers previously referred to by Zhu (2007). The main reason that they choose an independent way of travelling is that they enjoy the feeling of freedom during the trip.

Freedom means that backpackers can leave the tour guide and burst through the 'environment bubble'(Cohen, 1972, p.166), a space in which tourists' accustomed environment and native culture are transposed to foreign soil. Backpackers attempts to see authentic culture; although this authenticity may indeed be staged (MacCannell, 1973). As mentioned above, Yuan was a postgraduate student who majored in tourism management. He worked a part-time job as a

[26] Chinese New Year. It is the most important traditional festival in China.

tour guide for large groups of tourists. Interestingly, most of the money he made was spent on his own backpacking activities. According to him, the fundamental differences between mass tourism and backpacking was that the latter could learn about local populations in more depth:

> *I thought that the true travellers should go to a totally different place, interact with the locals, and live like them. However, when I led a tourist group to Huangshan,*[27] *they simply took the ropeway to the top of the Mountain. And their activities were limited to a very small area. Also, tourists stayed in hotels and they did not contact the locals. You cannot learn the local customs and feel the difference between them and us…on the contrary, if I backpacked to Huangshan, I climbed to the top. I stayed in youth hostels or the small hotels run by locals.*
>
> (Yuan, student backpacker, male, 26)

By referring to backpacking as 'real travel', Yuan implicitly pointed out that mass tourism was not authentic. As Zu (male, 26), the gap year traveller, said, 'If you rely on travel agency, what you see is arranged by them. But if you travel independently, you can go to the city corners. I want to see the locals, such as how they live'. Distinct from mass tourists who always expect 'both more strangeness and more familiarity than the world naturally offers' (Boorstin, 1964, p.79), the most distinct travel behaviour of young Chinese backpackers is to explore the local surroundings as they naturally are. The amateur photographer, Ke, said that one of his favourite activities when travelling was to observe people's everyday lives; he said, 'I compared how people lived in first-tier cities different from those in third-tiers, like how fast they walked, what they wore. I also like visiting public parks in particular, because you can see how people spend their leisure time. This is the local culture, the grassroots.'

Backpackers ate local food, took the local bus and lived similarly to locals. They tried hard to avoid looking or behaving like tourists who travelled in a group and only went to tourist attractions. For example, Zhi, (male, 23), the student backpacker, said, 'no matter how weird the food looks, I will try. Sometimes, they tasted really bad, but this is precisely why I travel. I want to try the authentic local food.' Pengyi (female, 31) said that she always bought local clothes and tried street food. She also found that the moment of feeling lost in a strange place

[27] It is a mountain range in eastern China, famous for its spectacular scenery.

was also ‘enjoyable’; she stated, ‘The main purpose of travelling is to relax and to learn about the local culture. Getting lost is not a bad experience, as you have an “opportunity” to talk to local people, and to explore the place without referring a guidebook.’ Pengyi’s appreciation of ‘spontaneity’ and ‘go with the flow’ are similar to Westerners’ perspectives, as a way to avoid the environment bubble (O’Reilly, 2006),

It is noteworthy that some backpackers further chose to live as locals when backpacking. Di, who had travelled around the West of China and Asia over the last two years, described her everyday life when backpacking in Southeast Asia:

> *I think travelling means that you change your place of living. I never stayed in big cities, like the capitals. The living cost is high, and the big cities just look the same, such as the skyscrapers and the shopping malls… I didn’t go to tourist attractions or adventure parks either. A ticket for gliding in Nepal was 600 yuan, too expensive…I like staying in small villages for one or two months. I don’t think I take part in any touristic activity. I just eat, sleep, and live a normal life.*
>
> (Di, budget traveller, female, 26)

Di’s experience was not unusual. Another long-term backpacker, Ning, shared a joke: ‘Today we will go to the most famous tourist attraction in the city: the local market!’ A lot of backpackers mentioned that the local market was their favourite place to visit, as they could buy food and other necessities of life at local prices. For budget travellers, it is essential to get the best deals and pay local prices, because it not only means one can save money, but that one becomes familiar with the local area. Similar to the study of international budget travellers in the mid-1980s (Riley, 1988), budget travellers value the hardship and non-touristic experiences during journeys, and compete to ‘get the best value’. Plus, interviewed backpackers encountered serendipity in local markets. As Ning and Di noted, sometimes one got local delicacies from the hands of generous strangers, and sometimes one found useful second-hand furniture.

Furthermore, backpackers such as Ning reflected on the nature of tourist attractions, questioning ‘who has the right to claim that a place is an attraction, particularly for natural

landscapes? Doesn't nature belong to everyone? If the government charged for administration, why did I see trash cans and dirty toilets in the park?' In this case, Ning highlighted consumer rights. She further indicated, 'I never resisted those (attractions) with historical and cultural importance, such as Angkor Wat. [28] Even though the ticket was not cheap, I went to visit.'

Accordingly, backpackers have their own criteria regarding places that worth a visit. Zhimi was from an urban middle class family; when in college, he wanted to do 'something cool and different'. Inspired by an 'on live' backpacking trip in the 'bar', Zhimi and two friends decided to go backpacking. [29] Moreover, they decided to travel with minimum expenses as a challenge, and to make their trip 'on live' as well. Zhimi said that their trip lasted for three months. They did not visit any scenic spots, as most tickets cost more than 100 yuan. Zhimi said that 200 yuan was enough to cover his expenses for 4 or 5 days. He thought the essential meaning of *qiong you* was to prolong the trip for as long as possible; however, in the meantime, to spend as little as possible. According to Zhimi, 'the landscape in the wild is much better than scenic spots. It is beautiful, and it is free. The spots are artificial, made by humans.'

Desires of contemporary Chinese backpackers to 'go native' and 'be local' may reflect one trend of 'post-tourism', as tourists are no longer solely interested in sightseeing (Ritzer and Liska, 1997; Franklin, 2003; Wood, 2005). The tourists described by Boorstin (1964), MacCannell (1973) and Urry (1900) primarily travelled for sightseeing. They sought the different and unusual, as a contrast to the familiarity of everyday life. However, a new tourism of the body was emerging, which focused on exploring the destination with the whole body, rather than just looking at it solely with the eyes (Franklin, 2003). Accordingly, everyday life replaced sightseeing in the post-tourism era.

However, there is another possibility for backpackers' preferences for everyday life. Since budget travellers can only afford cheaper travel, their way of travelling was presented as more 'authentic' than the more expensive forms. It is very similar to Bourdieu's analysis of working class culture: to make a virtue of necessity (Bourdieu, 1977). According to Bourdieu, taste is a

[28] As one of the most famous tourist attractions in Asia, Angkor Wat is a temple complex in Cambodia and the largest religious monument in the world.

[29] As pointed out in Chapter Four, famous backpackers such as Gu Yue and Xiaopeng made their backpacking experiences 'live' through social media, by updating their status frequently and communicating with followers instantly. This way of travelling was imitated by many independent travellers on a lot of social media platforms.

reflection of the class hierarchy. The working-class follows the aesthetics of necessity, while the middle class possesses a more refined and distanced taste of the middle class (Bourdieu,1986).

As pointed out in earlier chapters, there have emerged more and more *'qiong youers'* (budget travellers) over recent years. In this study, some backpackers were in their early twenties, with relatively underprivileged backgrounds in terms of family and education. They did not want to, or could not, receive financial support from family. Accordingly, in order to prolong the trip, they had to make every penny count. Therefore, 'make a virtue of necessity' can be regarded as a cultural practice of young backpackers who had limited resources. Most of them are student backpackers and backpackers with a working class background. As the existing literature on Chinese backpackers focused exclusively on middle class backpackers (Zhu, 2007; Zhang, 2008; Xiang, 2013), few noticed how there existed a group of backpackers that came from a working class backgrounds, such as Ning and Di mentioned above.

The backpacker group serves as another example here. Beibei (female, 25), Zang (female, 26), Peng (male, 28) and Liao (male, 25) were all young migrant workers who had left their rural hometowns years earlier to seek opportunity in cities. All of them were born in rural parts of China, and none of them went to college except for Liao; however, Liao indicated that the college he went to was 'at the rock bottom' - so it was difficult for him to find a 'not so bad' job in cities.

Although they had no backpacking experience, they all yearned for a long-haul, long-term trip, due to different reasons. As beginners, they tended to travel in a group in order to reduce the risks on the road. After meeting on the Internet, they spent months buying supplies, researching, and designing routes for a trip that would likely take months. In the summer of 2014, they quit their jobs, met up in the city of Chengdu, and began the trip from there. They planned to walk and hitchhike their way from there.

The night when I met the group of four in the youth hostel, Beibei said that they had started walking at four o'clock in the morning, in order to arrive at the Tiger Leaping Gorge before six. Passes for the Tiger Leaping Gorge cost 65 yuan per person – too much for their meagre budget – so the group chose to sneak in before the ticket office opened. After about twelve

hours of hiking, they arrived at the youth hostel. Zang and Beibei paid 80 yuan for two bunks. After negotiating with the owner of the youth hostel, Peng and Liao pitched their tent in the yard to save the accommodation fee. Peng thought that they had already spent a lot on equipment such as backpacks, tents and hiking shoes, so it was necessary to save every penny on accommodation and transportation. They slept in tents and always hitchhiked; they usually kept walking until there was a free ride.

According to interviews with the four-member backpacker group and Zhimi, they limited their daily expenses to under 50 yuan per person. Bao, the self-identified budget traveller, proudly said that he spent only 900 yuan for a nine-day backpacking trip in Shaanxi Province. He took the overnight train in order to save a night's worth of lodging costs. It is important to refer to other tourists' expenses here. According to Xiang's recent study on Chinese independent outbound travellers (Xiang, 2013), more than 50% out of 431 surveyed self-organised tourists spent at least 600 yuan daily during outbound trips. In the study, most participants self-identified as budget travellers. Xiang further illustrated that daily expenditures relied on the living costs of the destination. In developed destinations, the minimum daily cost for independent tourists was around 500 yuan for budget accommodation and transportation, while in developing destinations it could be limited to less than 100 yuan (Xiang, 2013). Moreover, according to the news coverage mentioned in the introductory chapter (Mo, 2016), Xu Jing's average daily expenses in Africa was less than 60 yuan. Wu Fangzhou travelled through 13 Chinese provinces within 50 days, spending 4000 yuan. In general, the budget travellers in this study tried to travel with minimum expenses.

To conclude Chinese backpackers' activities, they highlighted the symbolic meaning of the backpack: free and independent. Their travel philosophy can be understood as prioritising going native and being local. One of the main reasons is they are not satisfied with the superficial experiences provided by the well-established tourism industry, and seek the destination's authentic culture in person (Welk, 2004; Kannisto, 2014). Significantly, they tried to immerse themselves in the local life, rather than visiting the tourist attractions.

However, there is another possibility: that they are making a virtue of necessity. Travelling on a budget is a cultural practice conducted by young Chinese people who have limited resources. This study finds that there are a few backpackers with limited resources who try to extend the

trip for as long as possible; thus, they are concerned with their budget during the trip. This group is very different from middle class backpackers who approach backpacking as a hobby. In order to sustain their 'free and independent' trip, they have to save every penny. Again, they place greater emphasis on freedom and independence, than 'visiting world famous tourist sites'. For the student backpacker Zhimi, the motivation of conducting budget travel was to do something 'cool'. However, how to understand other budget travellers' motivations? The following chapters will further examine the phenomenon and its relationship specifically to China's backdrop of ongoing social change.

5.5. Summary

The interviews with backpackers showed that it was the pursuit of freedom that arguably drove backpackers to be independent. First of all, student backpackers were motivated to achieve financial independence when their parents did not support their dreams of travelling. It is independence that ensures the freedom of choice. Secondly, interviewed backpackers thought that travelling alone helped to ensure freedom in two ways: backpackers can fully control their trip, and they emphasise the purpose of the trip is for themselves. Thirdly, backpackers were able to explore the local freely if travelled independently. By going native and being local, backpackers believed that they are able to experience authentic local life. In addition, the budgeted way of travelling helped to save money, so that they are able to extend their trip for as long as possible.

Although backpackers most often travel alone, they do not travel with feelings of loneliness. Some appreciate solitude, while others can always find fellow backpackers in youth hostels and on the Internet. Youth hostels, along with the Internet, provide a new form of connection within the individualised era. It is a connection that allows 'a preoccupation with keeping on the move and moving on.' (Elliott and Lemert, 2009, p.98). Accordingly, the next chapter will examine backpacker communities in China, providing a critical view on backpackers' claim of 'independence'.

6. Communities constructed by youth hostels, smartphones and backpacker enclaves: A critical view of 'independence'

6.1. Introduction

Within this study, Chinese backpackers claimed that they were independent travellers, and perceived independence as an essential character; however, it is necessary to examine what factors beyond 'the individual' enable their independence. Therefore, the primary purpose of this chapter is to provide an analysis of backpackers' independence. Does independence mean to be isolated from one another? Is there any support provided by an institution or technology that enables backpackers' independence? As discussed in Chapter Two, 'the darker side of freedom and choice may be that it brings higher anxiety, feelings of individual responsibility, and even depression' (Mills, 2007, p.73). Accordingly, do Chinese backpackers purely enjoy 'being alone' and 'being independent'? Or, do they open themselves up to others, to explore the richness of relationships, and achieve fulfilment during the journey?

This study finds that individual backpackers rely heavily on physical and virtual backpacker communities constructed by youth hostels, mobile Internet and backpackers' enclaves. Therefore, the first section analyses the role youth hostels play in the formation of backpacker culture in China, as social life in youth hostels have been regarded as an essential part of the backpacking experience. The second section of the chapter focuses on backpackers' use of smartphones and mobile Internet. As explored here, the new technological context changes backpackers' experiences of 'being away from home' and 'being alone'. The third section examines a particular type of backpacker: alternative seekers, who refuse to find a stable job and settle down in big cities. On the contrary, they adopt backpacking as a way of living. More importantly, as extremely individualistic travellers, they form a kind of community in the city of Dali in China, living together when they are not on the road.

6.2. An in-between space: Youth hostels as a 'home' on the road

The previous chapter shows how some young people search for freedom and independence through backpacking, despite opposition from parents. Moreover, some backpackers thought that to travel alone was the best way to ensure freedom, as intimate relationships with friends and family were perceived as a 'burden'. In this case, the security and belongingness represented by 'home' were abandoned by some backpackers. As Bauman noted, 'The tourist's favourite slogan is "I need more space". And the space is the last thing one would find at home' (1996, p.31). It seems that many backpackers are desperately seeking 'being alone'. However, another important finding of this study challenges this assumption. The majority of interviewed backpackers mentioned all kinds of experiences in youth hostels, such as searching for companions, drinking overnight with fellow backpackers, and making dumplings together during Chinese New Year. Youth hostels thus become a significant part of backpacker culture within China.

6.2.1. Development and features of youth hostels in China

As pointed out in Chapter Two, the youth hostel is not a product of traditional Chinese society. Influenced by the travel culture *'qiongjia fulu'* (One should make every penny count at home, but should treat oneself well when travelling), and 'travelling for fun', Chinese tourists were obsessed with boutique hotels. When reviewing the development of the tourism industry in 2010, Zhang (2011b) pointed out that the developer and local government still exclusively targeted the high-end market.

The emergence of youth hostels in China is closely related to the rise of the middle class. Xie, the owner of several youth hostels, opened his first youth hostel in Guangdong in the late 1990s, when the idea of the youth hostel was first introduced to China. As the pioneer in the market of backpacker tourism, Xie witnessed the development of the youth hostel, and the change of backpacker tourism in China. Xie said that, at first, most of the guests were part of the young urban middle class who did professional work, such as journalists, IT technicians and managers.

These middle class individuals appreciated the relaxed atmosphere of youth hostels, as luxury hotels with an empty lobby, marble tiling, and the perfect standardised smiles of the staff. However, these urban middle class wanted something new for their accommodation. Xie said that he was one of them, and he knew what they wanted. Therefore, he invited a 'bourgeois hostel style'. Xie designed a garden on the terrace, surrounding the sofa, as Figure 6.1 below shows. The decorations also aimed to represent the local culture of the destination. Moreover, he allowed his dog and cat to walk freely in the hostel; 'It was more like a home', Xie concluded. In addition, the price was lower than starred hotels. This style quickly became popular among young professionals, and Xie opened his second and third youth hostels soon after.

Figure 6.1 Yard (Laoxie)

The emergence of youth hostels in China corresponds with global trends, as many researchers highlighted how the segmented, flexible and customised modes of tourism had replaced the packaging and standardised modes (Urry, 1995; Ritzer and Liska, 1997; Desforges, 1998; Poon, 2003). However, distinct from youth hostels in Europe - that are designed for young

people with limited resources[30] - Chinese youth hostels were originally designed for the middle classes who searched for a more personalised travel experience.

As one of the founders of the Youth Hostel Association in China (YHA), Xie made efforts to promote youth hostels and the idea of backpacking in China. The founding of YHA was not straightforward. Because the Chinese government does not approve international non-governmental organisations launching a national-wide branch in China, Hostelling International (HI) could not set up a non-governmental, not-for-profit branch in China (Zeng, 2010). YHA China claims to be a member of HI, but it employs franchising as the business model (Zeng, 2010; Lang and Liu, 2004). As a result, all youth hostels in China are owned and operated by private sectors, distinguished from their Western counterparts that are non-governmental, not-for-profit.

Only YHA members can use the logo of Hostelling International, which is made up of a house and fir tree in a blue triangle, and is used internationally. Plus, all visitors - both domestic and international - can find member hostels on the website of YHA China, and book rooms online[31]. The branding of YHA China is quite successful, as more and more youth hostels have applied to join in recent years. YHA China members distinguished themselves from non-YHA hostels by attaching the logo of HI to their signs, as showed below (Figure 6.2, 6.3, 6.4). In this study, Horsepen46, Laoxie and Hump are all members of YHA.

Figure 6.2 Horsepen46

Figure 6.3 Laoxie

Figure 6.4 Hump

[30] The idea of hostelling was raised by a German school teacher who wanted to provide cheap accommodation for school children when they went camping. International Youth Hostel Federation (IYHF) was founded as a non-governmental, not-for-profit organisation in 1931, starting with 12 Youth Hostel Associations in Europe and 2600 hostels. IYHF changed its name to Hostelling International (HI) in 2007. It is one of the world's largest youth membership organisations, HI was recognised by UNESCO and had been an Affiliate Member of UNWTO in 2014 (Hostelling Internationa, 2014).

[31] The English website is: http://www.yhachina.com/index.php?hostID=2

Xie said that it was not until recent years that college students became the primary customers of youth hostels, making it a 'real youth hostel'. He thought this change was positive because youth hostels were supposed to host students lacking substantial money. Personally, he always encouraged young people to travel, as he believed that it was the best way to learn about society and broaden one's experiences.

As the idea of the 'youth hostel' became more and more popular among the younger generation, it is interesting to find that numerous budget hotels and B&Bs named themselves *'qingnian lvshe'* (青年旅舍, youth hostels) - although they held no relation to YHA China (Zeng, 2010). For example, although the star backpacker Xiaopeng aimed to create 'China's own youth hostel brand', his Desti also agreed to the 'mission' proposed by HI[32]. The statement was translated into Chinese and pasted up on the wall of Desti's lobby.

More importantly, ideas such as environmental protection, do-it-yourself, and volunteerism - promoted by HI (Zeng, 2010) - are also accepted by YHA China. For example, YHA members refuse to provide disposable hotel toiletries, in order to protect the environment. Moreover, most rooms in youth hostels are dorms. As Figures 6.5 shows, customers are required to do their own laundry and change bedding by themselves. As a kind of cheap accommodation, it provides public toilets (Figure 6.6). As a result, the price for a bunk in a youth hostel is often less than a quarter of the price for a regular single room in a budget hotel. [33] All of these characteristics differentiate youth hostels from hotels.

[32] The mission is: To promote the education of all young people of all nations, but especially young people of limited means, by encouraging in them a greater knowledge, love and care of the countryside and an appreciation of the cultural values of towns and cities in all parts of the world, and as ancillary thereto to provide hostels or other accommodation in which there shall be no distinction of race, nationality, colour, religion, sex, class, or political opinions and thereby to develop a better understanding of their fellow men, both at home and abroad (Hostelling Internationa, 2014).

[33] I searched the price for the *'Ru Jia'* (如家，Home Inns), which is a budget chain hotel in China. The check-in date was 8th, February 2017 and check-out date was 9th, February. The location was the Old Town of Dali, which was my fieldwork site. The lowest price was 151 yuan for a single room. I then searched the website of YHA China. There were three YHA youth hostels located in Dali, and their lowest prices for a bunk respectively were 30 yuan, 35 yuan and 40 yuan.

Figure 6.5 Laundry Room (Hump)

Figure 6.6 Public Toilets (Horsepen46)

Therefore, although an increasing number of people have chosen youth hostels in recent years, there is still a large number of Chinese that do not like this accommodation. As pointed out in Chapter Four, non-backpackers thought that they were much less adventurous when compared to backpackers. For example, non-backpackers such as Qian (undergraduate), Jie (undergraduate) and Dian (young professional) said that they would never travel with strangers. From their point of view, it was hard to trust people they met on the road. However, in the dorm of youth hostels, one has to share space with strangers. Only a very few non-

backpackers said that they had chosen youth hostels as the accommodation of choice during their trips. In general, from the perspective of non-backpackers, youth hostels were thought to be cheap, unsafe, and poorly equipped.

As highlighted in the last chapter, backpackers were concerned greatly with their budget. Because of the distinct character of youth hostels, they became perfect spaces for backpackers to get together and socialise. Zhi, the student backpacker, became familiar with the idea of backpacking when he stayed in a youth hostel. At first, he chose the youth hostel because it was cheap; however, during his stay he met all kinds of independent budget travellers and subsequently began to recognise it as an interesting place to stay. According to Zhi, the people he met in schools and during college were similar; however, in youth hostels, he encountered travellers from various backgrounds with differing life experiences. Zhi stated, 'Their stories, no matter whether true or false, broadened my horizons.'

Youth hostels thus became the best place for 'backpacker culture' to emerge in China. Businessmen developed more styles for youth hostels besides the 'bourgeois hostel style' as invented by Xie. In particular, a lot of hostels' decorations focused on the theme of travel. For example, 'Hump' was named after a well-known legend in China: Flying Tigers and the Hump flight. The story illustrates how the U.S. Army Air Force helped Chinese people to defend themselves against Japan's invasion during the Second World War (China Daily, 2015). It is a story of courage, adventure and international cooperation. As Figure 6.7 shows below, one wall of Hump's lobby was full of photos and news coverage on Flying Tigers.

Figure 6.7 The Wall (Hump)

Another example is how a lot of youth hostels are decorated with travel-related items. For example, in Horsepen46, lots of bicycle helmets were hanging on the wall, displaying cycling culture memorabilia (Figure 6.8). In Desti, every room was named after a world-famous city. In addition, guests can find photos taken by Xiaopeng during his travels in each city (Figure 6.9).

Figure 6.8 Bicycle Helmets (Horsepen46)

Figure 6.9 The 'Venice' Room (Desti)

'Staying in youth hostels' gradually developed into a 'behaviour code' for Chinese backpackers. Ming was 24 years old; with her parents' support, she opened a small clothing

shop after graduating from high school. After five years, she decided to take a long-haul trip, as going to Tibet was her dream. In the autumn of 2014, Ming travelled alone from Shandong (her hometown) to Tibet by train. It was her first long-term independent trip. After arriving in Tibet, she lived in a dorm of a youth hostel because it was cheap. However, she did not get used to sharing a room with strangers, so she changed to a private room. When she hung out with other backpackers in the youth hostel, Ming quickly found that almost everyone lived in dorms. Ming was told that only couples and people on business stayed in private rooms. Therefore, she thought that she ought to get used to a dorm if she wanted to be a real backpacker; subsequently, she moved back to a dorm room. In this case, Ming became an 'authentic' backpacker by accepting living in a dorm of a youth hostel.

To conclude, over the past decade, youth hostels have transformed from personalised accommodation for the middle classes, to standardised accommodation for young budget travellers. The strong network created by youth hostels has become one of the biggest institutional forms of support for the popularity of backpacking in China. As Ritzer and Liska contend, one significant reason for the popularity of the personalised and de-McDonaldised tour in the contemporary world is precisely because of the very success of McDonaldisation: 'It is because so much of the larger society has been McDonaldized that there is less need to McDonaldize the package tour itself' (1997, p.98). Youth hostels, in regard to travelling, are like McDonald's in regard to food: they both provide a standardised product and experience. Accordingly, when backpackers conduct their self-organised trips in a risky world, the role of youth hostels is just like a home. 'The "home" is', as Bauman puts it, 'the place where nothing needs to be proved and defended as everything is just there, obvious and familiar" (1996, p.29).

6.2.2. Never lonely: Social life in youth hostels

Social life in youth hostels is regarded as an important part of the backpacking experience by many backpackers. For example, Che (male, 29) worked in an SOE after graduating in 2006. He had been obsessed with cycling since 2010. In 2011, he resigned from the job and opened a bicycle shop. Che also founded a club to organise cycling trips for his customers and local cycling enthusiasts. His business was quite successful at that time. However, his wife cheated

on him, so he divorced in 2013 after one year of marriage. After divorcing, Che devoted more time to cycling and backpacking. However, he found that 'it was inevitable to feel lonely sometimes, especially during the festivals'. He noted:

> *I was travelling by myself in Nepal in 2013, the year when I became divorced. The Chinese New Year was coming. It was the moment for family reunion; however, I was thousands of miles away from home. You know, I started to feel lonely and to question whether it was the right choice, to start the bicycle business, to get divorced…I felt depressed, but the youth hostel rescued me finally. I found that there were also quite a lot of Chinese backpackers in that youth hostel. We got together and made dumplings. We talked, ate, and drank overnight. I felt that it was even better than staying at home. This experience turned out to be one of the best moments of my life.*
>
> (Che, cycling enthusiast, male, 29)

It is noteworthy that Che gained the feeling of home in a youth hostel. What he and fellow backpackers did in a foreign country – make dumplings – was a typical Chinese way to spend the spring festival. The combination of familiarity and difference provided by youth hostels can create a 'suspending reality' (Wilson and Richards, 2008) for individual travellers. In Che's case, the space was far enough away from his real home of pressures. The space was able to create a familiar environment, providing a sense of belonging to help him recover from his life crisis. Accordingly, the youth hostel can offer something liminal, something in-between the destination and home. Moreover, distinct from the hotel, one has family members in the youth hostel, who are all named 'backpackers'.

Youth hostels soon realised that backpackers needed a place to get together, so they usually provide sofas, snooker, table football, darts in the lobby, and a café and bar, to encourage interactions between guests. In most hostels, this equipment is free to use. As Figure 6.10 shows, guests were playing snooker in Hump. [34] Studies on Chinese youth hostels also pointed out that these public spaces were the 'soul' of youth hostels (Su, 2010; Zhou, 2013).

Figure 6.10 Playing Snooker (Hump)

[34] It is in Kunming, the capital city of Yunnan Province. Opened in 2006, it is also one of the largest youth hostels in Yunnan with a long history.

Yu, the manager of Hump, was proud of the large balcony the hostel had, as shown in Figure 6.11 below. In the lobby of Laoxie[35] there were a lot of books. Guests could just pick up one and read, for free. Desti had a 'library' which was full of the owner's private collection, [36] including books and art crafts that Xiaopeng had bought from all over the world, as Figure 6.12 shows below.

Figure 6.11 Balcony (Hump)

Figure 6.12 Library (Desti)

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Xiao, the high school teacher, preferred finding travel companions on the road, and youth hostels were regarded as the ideal meeting places. Most youth hostels have a bulletin board, showing the weather forecast, announcing activities, helping backpackers to find companions, and so on. For example, Figure 6.13 shows the bulletin board in Horsepen46. [37] On left side of the board, it announced that you could join the dinner by paying 20 yuan. On the right side, it told guests there was a local rock climbing club. On the bottom of Hump's bulletin board (Figure 6.14), there were some notes written by backpackers who wanted to find travel companions. According to Hump's manager Yu, 'Hump tried to create a "home on the road" for all travellers. More or less, one will be a little panicked when they arrive at a new place. Youth hostels try to make you feel relaxed and comfortable.'

[35] It is one of the earliest hostels in Lijiang, with a history of more than 10 years.

[36] It is founded by one of the most famous backpacker in China, Xiaopeng. He gained his reputation by the best seller *10 Years of Backpacking*. His story was introduced in the introductory chapter.

[37] It is the first youth-hostel style guesthouse in the ancient town of Shaxi, Yunnan Province.

Figure 6.13 Bulletin Board (Horsepen46)

Figure 6.14 Bulletin Board (Hump)

Interviewed backpackers said that they 'befriended' a lot of fellow backpackers they met on the road, but also admitted that it did not necessarily mean that they were 'real friends'. The situations were different based on individual circumstances and the context in which they were: away from home and everyday life. For people who regarded the backpacking experience as a once-in-a-lifetime experience, they tended not to contact 'fellow backpackers' again after the trip. For example, Peng (male, 28), a member of the backpacker group, conducted backpacking because he wanted to 'examine himself'. Peng's business had failed, and his wife had left him, and so he wanted to reflect on his life during this long-haul trip. Peng was determined to return home after the trip, as he had a four-year-old son to take care of. Peng said 'I will remember these interesting people and their wonderful stories, but I will not contact them anymore, ninety-nine percent.'

However, for people who backpacked a lot, fellow backpackers might become real, long-term friends. For example, Xiao said. 'I met a girl when I was in Guilin[38], in a dorm of a youth hostel. We travelled together for two or three days. We found that we shared a lot in common. We kept contact through social media. The next year after we met, we backpacked to Dunhuang[39] together.' In routine life, Xiao and the girl also contact one another regularly, sharing their life stories.

[38] Guilin is a tourist city in China.
[39] Dunhuang is a city in Western China. As a major stop on the ancient Silk Road, it is best known for the nearby Mogao Caves.

Again, it is important to note that youth hostels create something liminal, something in-between. Fellow backpackers are not close like family or friends, but they are not as distant as complete strangers. The distance between individuals created in a youth hostel seems perfect for backpackers, as it always allows for a mobile and flexible relationship. This type of demand mirrors the situation of an individual living in late modern society. Rojek and Urry (1997) employed Bauman's idea (1993) that both the 'tourist' and the 'vagabond' are plausible metaphors for postmodern times. Their common characteristic is to move through other people's spaces, and they both separate physical closeness from moral proximity. Youth hostels create a very special, unique space: it belongs to anyone who self-identifies as a backpacker, yet it does not belong to any one specific person.

Moreover, it is notable that Chinese youth hostels have also become a part of a 'global youth culture', as HI demonstrates in its mission. Yu mentioned that Hump had a good reputation among foreign backpackers, because they provide a bilingual service. However, it seems that all YHA youth hostels provide a bilingual service. For example, most notices were written in both Chinese and English. Games such as table football and snooker catered to Western backpackers.

For some Chinese backpackers, encountering foreigners in youth hostels is a novel experience. Ning's experience might be recognised as a fulfilment of the demonstration of HI, which states 'to promote the education of all young people of all nations, but especially young people of limited means'. As discussed in the last chapter, Ning did not finish high school, and she knew little English before travelling. However, she learnt a lot through the trip, as she noted:

> *I didn't finish high school, so I could barely speak English. But after backpacking for three or four years, I learnt English and some other languages on the road. In Southeast Asia, sometimes I hung out with foreign backpackers. I met people from all kinds of cultures in youth hostels. Now, I host backpackers from other countries in Dali.*
>
> (Ning, long-term backpacker, female, 27)

Accordingly, youth hostels in China not only refer to budget accommodation for young people, but also are often devoted to creating a space for mutual cultural exchange and youth education. It aims to create a travel culture, witnessing the meeting and parting of backpackers. It promotes ideas such as environmental protection, do-it-yourself practices, and volunteerism. This study also found that a lot of young backpackers worked part-time in youth hostels in exchange for food and accommodation, and therefore they were able to extend their journey.

Moreover, some young backpackers even devote themselves to the hostel business after backpacking, as the experienced backpacker Ji (female, 34) did. Fanqi (female, 27) backpacked in Europe when she studied in the UK, and subsequently fell in love with backpacking and youth hostels. When she came back to China in 2013, she chose to work in a youth hostel. The owner of Horsepen46, Laoxie and Desti were all experienced backpackers. As Tomazos' study of backpackers' 'common identity' reveals, former backpackers play a vital role in the sharing of knowledge and providing invaluable support to novice backpackers, which in turn creates a network of support (2016). This network of support also gradually developed in China.

As a result, the strong network created by youth hostels becomes one of the biggest forms of institutional support for the popularity of backpacking in China. When backpackers conduct their self-organised trips in an uncertain world, the youth hostel acts like a home, as it provides standardised experience and a familiar atmosphere. Moreover, one important reason that youth hostels have become popular is because they offer liminality, something in-between. It creates a space that sits between strangeness and familiarity. In addition, it encourages comradeship, but allows for flexibility.

6.3. To connect or not, that is the question: Smartphones as the invisible backpack

During my fieldwork, I noticed that almost every backpacker travelled with at least one technological gadget; the most common are smartphones, tablet computers, and digital cameras. These devices, supported by wireless Internet, were employed to record and share travel experience instantaneously. It is in this case that Zhimi and his friends made their trip's

'live broadcast' possible. In Chapter Three, I also mentioned that some interviewed backpackers invited me to 'befriend' them on social networking sites and visit their homepages, as their photos and posts on social media helped them to recall travelling experiences.

As the following Figure 6.15 shows, the Wi-Fi access notice in Laoxie was written in both Chinese and English, emphasising that the hostel provided special VPN, linking to 'blocked' sites such as YouTube, Facebook and Twitter. [40] The notice was pasted up on the wall in the lobby, to make sure that every customer would notice it immediately. It is no exaggeration to state that the smartphone can become backpackers' 'invisible' backpack.

Figure 6.15 Wi-Fi Access Notice (Laoxie)

6.3.1. As an Individual in the physical world, and as a group in the virtual world

It is far more convenient for today's backpacker to travel without consulting fellow backpackers or local people, supported by travel-related websites and mobile applications,

[40] As the Chinese government has never admitted that they blocked certain websites, they cannot demonstrate the VPN service which helps getting access to foreign websites is illegal. Otherwise, the demonstrations of the government would be self-contradictory. In China, one could pay extra money to get the VPN service, as the owner of the youth hostel did.

such as Ctrip and Dianping.com. [41] For example, TripAdvisor and Dianping recommend top authentic local restaurants; itineraries are able to be more flexible too. Backpackers receive the latest information to be able to adjust their plans instantly, according to the deals of budget flights, and hostels on Ctrip or Hostelworld. According to interviews, most backpackers had booked flights, trains, and accommodation using these applications. Furthermore, Google Maps shows every route. For Zhimi, searching via Google Maps was even better than asking local people. He noted:

> *The first impression of a place is so important. Imagine I ask a person about the route. However, I get an answer in an indifferent tone. Or sometimes, just a cold 'I don't know'. I became disappointed with the place immediately. Thus, I preferred searching through Google Maps.*
>
> (Zhimi, budget traveller, male, 24)

This clearly challenges the belief that backpackers should go native and interact with local people only, as discussed in the last chapter. Zhimi was correct in thinking that the locals might not know any better than the Internet, and that they might not be friendly to a traveller. However, by avoiding this kind of 'unpleasant' experience, he returned to a safety net. In the Internet age, the safety net is no longer provided by travel agencies, but by technology.

Ting's experience serves as another example. He noted, 'When I was in Brazil, a lot of places did not have Wi-Fi, such as the beach. It was nice sitting at the beach. However, after two or three hours, it became extremely boring. You had nothing to do'. As Germann Molz and Paris (2015) found in their research, because backpackers were able to maintain continual presence and interaction with their personal networks virtually, mobile technologies were able to further disrupt the local travel experience.

The role of the Internet is controversial. On the one hand, individuals can travel by themselves without consulting the backpacker or local community, with the help of online resources. The mobile Internet creates very individualistic travellers. On the other hand, the Internet plays an

[41] Both of Ctrip and Dianping.com are famous travel websites in China, like Booking and Tripadvisor.

irreplaceable role in the creation of a 'common identity' of backpackers, particularly in the context of China.

Zhimi's participation in *Baidu Tieba* illustrated this point well, as highlighted in the last section. His trip was inspired by backpackers from the online community, and their trip further encouraged other members of the community to conduct backpacking. The experience of Che, the backpacker who went to Nepal after getting divorced, also serves as another example. Che got to know a lot of cyclists through online communities, and a cyclist named Xiang greatly influenced him. Xiang opened a bicycle shop in Chengdu and often cycled to Tibet.[42] Xiang shared a lot of useful information, as well as his experience on the Internet. Before cycling to Tibet, Che made a trip to visit Xiang, 'to see the idol'. Che's decision to resign from his stable job and open a bicycle shop was also largely influenced by Xiang.

Some interviewed backpackers also frequently shared their experiences on the Internet, promoting the idea of backpacking. As Yuan (male, 26) contended, 'I want people to know backpacking, and sharing is the best way. Friends think my way of travelling is cool. It feels good that they fix their eyes upon me.' Xiao (female, 34) became an expert on travel among friends: 'Friends and colleagues always consult me before travelling. They trust my advice. One girl was afraid of travelling alone because she thought it might be dangerous. After she saw the photos I taken, and heard my story, she changed her mind. Now, she travels alone sometimes.'

Significantly, the Internet seems to narrow the gap between the underprivileged and privileged in the case of the formation of the four-member backpack group. As pointed out earlier, three out of the four never went to college and began to work from an early age. Beibei (female, 25) and Zang (female, 26) – both from rural China – said that they always liked travelling, but that it was difficult to find companions. None of their friends or colleagues travelled often. Most of them married in their early twenties, and they saved all their earnings for their family and children. Beibei and Zang, both in mid-twenties, were still unmarried, which seems very unusual to their families and friends.

[42] It usually takes twenty to thirty days cycling from Chengdu to Tibet. This route is one of the best-known cycle routes in China.

However, Beibei and Zang did not want to live in a similar manner. They wanted to enjoy life and treat themselves well with the money they earned. While working in Hangzhou, Beibei participated in group tours organised by travel agencies on weekends. After gaining some experience, she travelled to nearby tourist cities alone. Then she began to search for like-minded people on the Internet. In 2013, she took a week-long trip with some Internet friends to Sichuan, and it turned out to be a wonderful experience. Beibei said that she always dreamed of going to Tibet as it was holy and mysterious; however, she was not confident enough to travel alone because it was expected to be a long-haul trip with certain risks. She found a group named 'backpacking to Tibet' on Momo[43], a social networking platform, and joined. Zang, Liao (male, 25) and Peng (male, 28), who had the same dream, were in the group as well. This is how they found each other and decided to backpack together subsequently.

It is incorrect to suggest that young people such as Beibei and Zang would not travel without Momo; however, it is fair to state that Momo greatly helped the formation of the group. It is quite difficult for young migrant workers such as Beibei and Zang to imagine another kind of lifestyle without the Internet, and it is even more difficult to put their 'crazy ideas' into practice. Undertaking a long-term journey may sound common for college students and young professionals, as shown in Chapter Four. However, it sounds 'crazy' for Beibei and Zang's colleagues and friends. The Internet encourages them to be different and be themselves. As discussed in the introductory chapter, the younger generation in China has learnt how to find like-minded people, and be able to form interest-based social networks in the era of Web 2.0.[44]

[43] It is a Chinese social networking platform that is used for all manner of meet-ups. The Chinese name for the platform is 陌陌.

[44] Web 2.0 refers a 'second generation of the World Wide Web used to describe social media on the Internet. These include social media applications such as blogs, photo and file sharing systems (e.g. Flickr, SlideShare, YouTube) and social networking sites (e.g. Friendster, Facebook, MySpace, SecondLife)' (Reddick and Aikins, 2012, p.1). Web 2.0 emphasises user-generated content, usability, and interoperability.

6.3.2. Being alone on the road but connected through technology

The second controversial issue caused by smartphones and mobile Internet is that they blur the boundaries between 'home' and 'destination', and between 'being alone' and 'being accompanied'. As pointed out earlier, almost every backpacker carried at least one smartphone during their travels, including budget travellers such as students and migrant workers. Ji (female, 34), the experienced backpacker who became a hostel manager, was the only exception. Her phone was not 'a smart one', as she did not rely on it for information searches, rather preferring maps and asking local people. Moreover, she had no interest in social networking sites. However, the majority of backpackers tended to agree with Fong (male, 35), a travel writer, who stated:

> *Biological and physiological needs used to be at the bottom of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Nowadays, it is Wi-Fi. Wi-Fi is like air and water.*
>
> (Fong, male, 35, travel writer)

In the latest study of backpackers, places without Internet connections were called 'dead zones', and a lot of backpackers took the Internet connectivity for granted (Germann Molz and Paris, 2015). The situation in China is quite similar. Ting (male, 40), who conducted the global tour independently, brought three phones: two smartphones and one regular mobile phone. He stated, 'It is always good to be prepared…I don't mean these gadgets make me feel secure, but you know, that's the way you connect to the world.'

A few interviewees said that they updated their status every few hours, or every day on social media when travelling; this is precisely why smartphones and Wi-Fi are so important. A lot of people's trips were 'live broadcast' to some extent like Zhimi, as they recorded their routes and uploaded photos from time to time. Zang (female, 26), one person from the backpacker group, said happily that since she had begun to backpack, and that there was an increasing number of people visiting her 'space' on social media. Her friends, who got married and settled down, were envious of her freedom: 'Most of them said that they admired my courage. Some agreed that one should "live for myself", like I did. However, they got married and felt

they were living for others.' The first thing she did every morning was to turn on her smartphone and read people's replies.

A few backpackers even developed strategies regarding the use of social media. Ting, the independent global traveller said, 'You know, people are not interested in your inner feelings. They want to see something funny, something crazy.' The 'shutterbug' Ke also said, 'I rarely shared feelings or personal point of view. I always picked something interesting, such as weird food. One reason is I want to protect my privacy. Another reason is that people are looking forward to something funny.' This demonstrates how some backpackers made their travel blog, or social media, into an ongoing drama.

However, it is not always advantageous to share travel experiences through social media. Also, not all of the backpackers who participated in this study liked sharing their experiences through social media. Ning (female, 27), the long-term traveller, thought that frequent updates distracted her from exploring local life. Ning felt that if one shared too much on the Internet, she/he might be too concerned about others' comments, rather than ones' inner feelings. Some backpackers consciously controlled their use of social media. Some turned off smartphones and iPads when travelling.

The experience of Shen, 25 years old, is a good example. When in college, he backpacked a lot during school holidays. Shen said that he was addicted to social media when he launched his backpacking trip for the first time. However, he quickly noticed that a lot of his time was spent on writing, editing and deleting posts, rather than travelling. He contended:

> *It seems that I was getting sick. I updated a lot every day, then deleted all of the information on social media suddenly one day. Probably I was afraid of revealing too much, or perhaps I was upset that day. Then I started to use microblogging again, and then deleted the account. It was a vicious circle. Now, I control myself. I keep away from social media and the Internet.*
>
> (Shen, budget traveller, male, 25)

Ning and Shen suggested that the feeling of achievement did not come from others' comments, but from one's own heart. As Ning and Shen imply, the desire for others' attention through

social media may go against the statement to 'travel by myself', proposed earlier. Some backpackers thus reflected negatively on their use of social media.

Accordingly, this study reveals that the majority of backpackers' travel and life is mediated by and filtered through mobile technology and social media. On the one hand, the use of smartphones and mobile Internet makes independent travel more convenient for them, and backpackers are able to travel individually more easily. On the other hand, the reliance on smartphone and mobile Internet conflicts with backpackers' intentions to immerse themselves in the local community. Cohen and Taylor argue, 'the electronic media have thoroughly undermined our distinctive sense of place' (1992, p.9). The frequent use of social media and the desire for people's attention arguably undermines the statement 'the trip is on my own'. Whenever you want to escape, your device connects you back. As a result, the experience of 'being alone' was challenged by the new technological environment.

Bauman has argued that the mobile phone was a key incarnation of liquid modernity, as it allows individuals living within global insecurity to feel a semblance of security through the linking in a web of messages (Bauman, 1988; Davis, 2008). In the case of Chinese backpackers, the role of the Internet and networking technologies played in one's trip is deeply ambivalent. Individuals employed different strategies to deal with their connections to the Internet. In doing so, their experience of 'being alone' and 'being away from home' was constantly changing and challenged by being connected to the Internet. The classic backpacker culture, which focuses on going native, taking risks and investigating yourself, is also challenged by the new technological context.

6.4. Individually, together[45]: The making of backpacking as an alternative lifestyle

As stated above, the primary purpose of this chapter is to provide a critical view to analyse backpackers' independence. The discussion above shows that their independence deeply relies on the success of the McDonaldisation of this world – as discussed earlier – and the connections provided by the Internet. In the section, I will discuss another perspective to

[45] It is a title of the forward written by Zygmunt Bauman for the book *Individualization: Institutionalized individualism and its social and political consequences* (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002).

understand backpackers' independence: that, by living together individually, a group of lifestyle travellers are creating an alternative way of living in China. The lifestyle is alternative to a 'standard one' proposed by the urban middle classes: having a stable job, a house, a car, settling down in the city, getting married and having a child.

6.4.1. Alternative seekers: 'I don't like the normal way of life.'

As noted in Chapter Two, nowadays, most backpackers perceive backpacking as a time-out from the ordinary routine of life, and as a chance to delay the transition to adopting the responsibilities associated with adulthood (Cohen, 2003). This study also finds that the majority of backpackers well acknowledged their social responsibility and returned, despite the fact they did not feel ready to do so. Moreover, as shown in Chapter Four, most non-backpackers did not think of backpacking as a proper lifestyle, instead choosing family welfare and individual ambition over freedom and personal interests. Backpacking, as a way of living, is widely perceived to be non-mainstream and unconventional in China.

Although most backpackers returned home, this study found that some young people refused to do so. They did have a home; however, they did not plan to return anytime soon. More importantly, they did not accept the traditional idea that 'in different stages of life, one has different priorities' and that 'a man should be steadfast at the age of thirty'. When most backpackers strived to justify and negotiate their choices with families and wider mainstream society[46], those who refused to return tried to discover their true self and their own subjective way of living through backpacking. In this case, some backpackers who wish to extend travelling into a way of living, get together and support each other. They are identified as 'alternative seekers' in this study.

First of all, it is noteworthy that those who refused to return tended to emphasise that their trips were motivated by an irresistible impulse to travel. Meng said that she had never had an itinerary before backpacking. She began to backpack after graduating from college in 2012. At

[46] As showed in Chapter Five, there are always conflicts between student backpackers and their parents about the value of backpacking. Also, for adult backpackers, they sometimes are criticised as spending too much money and time on 'playing/having fun' rather than career.

first, it was the excitement of exploring the unknown that drove her to travel; then, she was 'enchanted by long-haul travel itself'. She contended that she knew that she loved travelling much more than a routine life. More importantly, the motivation of travel was not necessarily the excitement, because she had already travelled for more than two years. She felt peaceful inside when travelling, and travelling became Meng's regular life.

Since travelling can become a new routine, it can also be full of difficulties. Also, one may sometimes be bored. However, backpackers such as Meng found that it was harder to come home than to go away. As another long-term backpacker, Ning, stated:

> *Even when you felt you hated travelling, the next day you put on your backpack and set off again. It feels like an instinct. Do you know the word 'wanderlust'? I am one.*
>
> (Ning, alternative seeker, female, 27)

Zhao (male, 29), gave up his stable job in a SOE after working for two years, as he could not bear 'the boring life' anymore. I met him in Housepen, the youth hostel in Shaxi. Zhao worked there as a full-time employee and planned on learning how to manage a youth hostel; he dreamed of opening a youth hostel of his own. He said that he was 'born to be a traveller'.

One distinct characteristic of these alternative seekers, such as Meng, Ning and Zhao, is that they stated that they did not like 'the normal way of life'. Meng had tried to return home after the first trip and find a stable job, but she gave up eventually. All working experiences in the city sounded unpleasant to Meng. She mentioned that she used to work in a luxury spa because she wanted to learn Yoga; however, 'the boss treated his dog much better than the staff!' She did not accept the way that her boss had treated his employees, although the salary was not bad. As for another office job, a colleague kept making things difficult for her because Meng's working performance was outstanding. Her job was to book tickets and design travel plans for customers; because Meng was an experienced traveller, and she was also outgoing, she was popular among customers. However, one of her colleagues was jealous and deliberately got Meng into trouble. Meng couldn't stand the dirty office politics, as she stated, 'I didn't want to "play the game"; otherwise, I became an ugly person too. I didn't think I

should live like that. I didn't need to bear that way of living.' Meng also mentioned the idea of cosmopolitan and diversity. She admired the lifestyle of hippies, saying, 'they have the best life attitude, from my perspective. They are not interested in making money. They are willing to give up everything, travelling internationally with little money.'

Therefore, alternative seekers thought that a life of routine was not necessarily what they wanted. The college drop-out, Long, stated that most people did the 'normal' things because they were expected to, and people wanted to live up to others' and society's expectations. Long admitted that he was young. However, he knew that he was unhappy with the life path designed for him by his parents: finding a job in his hometown, getting married and having a child. Therefore, he tried to discover where his passions lay by conducting a long-term trip. He said, 'I don't know the destination, to be honest. And I don't know what will happen. It has been half a year after I dropped out from college. Everything looks fine, and I will continue.'

According to alternative seekers, backpacking feels like a way of life, not a means to an end. They resisted the idea that 'a man should be steadfast at the age of thirty'. Also, they refused a conventional life path. Before backpacking, Ning said that she thought that 'life was a straight line', as people she met in factories all lived in the same way. However, after she met more and more lifestyle travellers, she realised that one was allowed to live the way they liked - that there was no standard way of living. Most people may want to have a home; however, Ning suggested that she might never settle down, and to be a sojourner was not bad.

Except for Ning, Meng, Zhao and Long were all college students from urban middle class families. Shen is another example of 'a rebellious middle class child'. After eight months' of working, he decided to leave a job that he was not interested in. Shen recited the classic lines from the movie *Into the Wild* (2007, USA) when explaining his choice:

> *I am greatly influenced by this movie and I read these lines many times. As it says, 'rather than love, than money, than faith, than fame, than fairness…give me truth.' All I want is truth. I want to know what I am interested in and what I can do for society.*
>
> (Shen, backpacker and youth hostel worker, male, 25)

Shen was always a good student and was successfully admitted to a top university in China. Majoring in sociology, he always wanted to work for a non-governmental organisation after graduating. However, his parents thought the payment for such a job was low, and that the future for the career looked bleak. At first, he tried to be filial; so, he wanted to work in a factory located in Shanghai. As a college graduate, Shen took an office job, and the boss seemed to think highly of him. However, after eight months Shen decided to resign, saying, 'I didn't like the job, and I didn't think it was meaningful. I repeated similar tasks every day. It was a waste of time.'

Shen had backpacked around Sichuan Province and Yunnan Province when he was in college, so he decided to go backpacking again. When he searched youth hostels' information on the Internet, he found that one youth hostel in Yunnan was recruiting employees. More importantly, the owner of the youth hostel had opened a public library in a local primary school, and she was about to launch a new volunteer project focusing on promoting equal opportunity in education in the local area. As discussed above, many youth hostels in China promoted ideas of volunteerism. Accordingly, the owner welcomed people who were interested in the project. Shen immediately went to the youth hostel and was employed. The payment was low, as his parents predicted; however, Shen believed that he was doing what he wanted.

It is noteworthy that Meng, Long and Shen all talked about how their decisions went against their parents' wishes. As they pursued independence, they did not want to rely on their parents anymore. In Chapter Five, I indicated that this was why backpackers believed that the most important character for an authentic backpacker was independence. Financial independence was considered as the foundation of freedom. Furthermore, in the case of Meng, Long and Shen, what they pursued was alternative, so their parents would not support them. Meng's experience perfectly illustrates this point. Her mum said that she would no longer give her any money if she was addicted to travelling and refused to settle down. However, Meng told her, 'That's fantastic! Please leave me alone. I want to rely on myself.'

6.4.2. Dali: A 'home' for alternative seekers

Meng majored in garden design at college and was good at painting. She made her paintings into postcards and booklets and then sold them to tourists in Dali, a famous tourist city. She had a stall with goods spread out on the ground for sale. There were lots of stalls in the Old Town of Dali, as showed as in Figure 6.16. It is said that most products were handmade, or designed by the stallholder. Figure 6.17 shows Di (female, 26), another long-term backpacker who sought an alternative way of living, was making a necklace for tourists to buy. Tourists thought that these handmade crafts were unique and personalised, distinct from the mass-produced souvenirs sold in shops.

There are a lot of long-term backpackers, or sojourners, such as Meng, Ning, Di and Long, who live in Dali and Lhasa. These cities have many 'backpacker enclaves' (Wilson and Richards, 2008), wherein backpackers live together and become connected to one other in various destinations. As I observed in Dali, backpackers took it as not only a gateway to Tibet and Southeast Asia, but also a base city for long-haul travel. Backpackers who run out of money whilst travelling undertook all kinds of work there, such as receptionists in hostels, selling craftwork to tourists, and teaching Chinese to foreigners. As a result, places such as Dali and Lhasa make a unique lifestyle possible.

Figure 6.16 The Stalls (Old Town of Dali)

Figure 6.17 Making Necklace (Old Town of Dali)

There are several important reasons for places such as Dali to become the hub of an alternative way of living. The first reason is that Dali has an excellent natural environment, which makes it an ideal tourist city. All year, it has a plenty of sunshine and a mild climate. Compared to big cities with severe pollutions and a high cost of living, the blue sky and plenty of sunshine in Dali make it a paradise for many tourists. Dali is also famous for its scenic beauty, with a

long history - since the 4th century - as well as for the various nationalities living there side by side (Top China Travel, 2017).

Interviewed backpackers complained about the congestion, overcrowding and feeling of isolation in cities; places such as Tibet and Yunnan are therefore appreciated by backpackers. These places are thought to be less modern, and more calm and simple. All of the interviewed backpackers were Han Chinese people, so they were interested in minority groups who have a different culture and religion. Compared to the inland and coastal areas in China, Tibet and Yunnan in the far West of the country are thought to be isolated and underdeveloped. In the eyes of backpackers, these characteristics represent a pure and holy lifestyle (Shepherd, 2009).

More importantly, Dali has a reputation for being friendly to foreigners, drifters and strangers. As Ning concluded, 'Dali is unique in China, because it promotes diversity.' Figure 6.18 showed a person playing the guitar, who appeared to be a foreigner.[47] On the cardboard, he wrote, 'I want to go to Thailand to do a transsexual operation. Please support me!' In a country where same-sex marriage is not legally approved, and people identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender are facing stigma and alienation in real life (Hildebrandt, 2011; Liu, 2013; Jiang et al., 2014), the statement made by this person is bold. I even witnessed two Chinese men holding hands giving him some money when passing by.

All interviewed backpackers who stayed in Dali greatly appreciated it as 'one of the most interesting places in China'. 'Poets, artists, tramps, retired government officials, resigned college teachers…you can encounter all kinds of people there, and some are real recluses,' as Meng said. Figure 6.19 shows the 'Poets' Corner' in the Old Town. Meng and Di both said that they had seen people, whether famous poets or ordinary citizens, reading their poems in that corner. This scene would rarely be witnessed in public spaces of other cities across China.

[47] I took these photos (Figure 6.16,6.17,6.18,6.19) as a tourist and a passer-by since all of them were taken in public. The face of the guitarist was blurred, as I did not ask for his permission. His appearance did not look like a Chinese.

Figure 6.18 Foreign Guitarist (Old Town of Dali)

Figure 6.19 The Poets' Corner (Old Town of Dali)

Stalls were not allowed in most Chinese cities because they occupied the streets and did not pay taxes. However, in the Old Town of Dali, street stalls were allowed by the local government in certain areas. Moreover, stallholders did not need to pay any tax or administration fees. The street market became a feature and a tourist attraction of Dali. Meng shared her experiences: she got up early in the morning in order to occupy a good location; the

market opened until late in the night. When she first started this 'small business', Meng made 1700 yuan in 10 days. Although she was exhausted, the financial rewards were good. As she became more experienced, Meng got even more money. In the New Year's holiday of 2015, when there were thousands of tourists in Dali every day, Meng made 7000 yuan in 10 days. 7000 yuan would be two months' salary if she worked in an office. Once she had saved enough money, she left and began travelling again.

Most stallholders, such as Meng, were backpackers who sojourned in Dali. Di and Nao were another two interviewed backpackers who made money via a stall. Nao (female, 21) was a college drop-out like Long. As showed in Figure 6.17, Di sold necklaces she designed herself, and Nao sold scarfs and gloves she bought when travelling in Nepal. They told me that if one wanted to buy something on stalls and told the holder that you were also a long-term backpacker who stayed in Dali, one can get fifty percent discount. 'It is a kind of comradeship,' Di said.

Di and Nao also stated that the rent for a bunk in some hostels was only 200 yuan for a month. They called these hostels 'secret gardens', as they were only known by backpackers who were based in Dali. The rent was incredibly cheap compared to other accommodations. For example, in Dali, the price for a single room in a budget Chinese chain hotel, the Home Inns, was over 150 yuan for a night. [48] The average price for a bunk in an 'ordinary' youth hostel was 35 yuan, which meant that it cost 1050 yuan for a month. Accordingly, the rewards of selling goods were not bad, given that the living cost was so low. Many long-term travellers thus recognised Dali as their second hometown.

When interviewed, Lv was working temporarily in a youth hostel in Dali, in exchange for food and accommodation. He thought that life in Dali was very simple, and that the personal relationships undertaken there were pure. He said that the most wonderful moment after work was going to the Old Town, and drinking with other backpackers. Sometimes they built a campfire, talked, drank and sang together. Lv said that the people he met in Dali were

[48] I searched the price for the Home Inns, a budget chain hotel, on the Internet. The check-in date was 8th, February 2017 and check-out date was 9th, February. The lowest price was 151 yuan for a regular single room. I then searched the website of YHA China. There were three YHA youth hostels located in Dali, and their lowest prices for a bunk respectively were 30 yuan, 35 yuan and 40 yuan.

different from those in cities in China, stating, '[in the city], they desperately want to make big money and be successful'.

Lv graduated in 2012 and resigned from his job at a delivery company in 2014. Lv thought that the city life and personal relationships he experienced turned him 'into a cold-hearted person'. He thought the travelling self was 'more human', stating:

> *I don't like the city. In the Chinese city, everything is unhealthy and dirty. And everything requires money. It is so crowded. People don't talk about emotions and feelings but just care about their own individual interests. I think that the city is cold, and that I turned into a cold-hearted person… through travel, I want to be more human. If you stay in one environment too long, you just take it as the whole world. You take yourself as the world… I am leaving the city, hoping not to live as a dead-alive person.*
>
> (Lv, alternative seeker, male, 25)

Lv used the phrase 'to be more human' several times throughout the interview, and he thought that the life he lived in Dali gradually made him 'human' again. Lv said that he and some classmates from college always did volunteer jobs in a nursing home on weekends. However, this kind of experience and the spirit of volunteering were recognised as 'a waste of time' or 'stupid' by colleagues after he began to work. However, in Dali, people understood volunteerism. More importantly, 'They did not judge you based on how rich you are'.

As a result, places such as Dali thus became ideal hubs for budget travellers who tried to extend their trip for as long as possible. Moreover, by returning to Dali regularly during the gap between long-term trips, backpackers ensured that backpacking was a sustainable way of living. Meng and Di sojourned in Dali in this way. Meng sold her paintings, and Di sold handmade crafts. At the time of the interview, Ning was managing a youth hostel, but she stated that she would continue travelling again in the future. Once they had saved up some money, these backpackers planned to launch another trip. They did not seek to return to big cities, nor did they possess a stable job. Meng explained that she took painting as her career. Backpacking inspired her all of the time, so it became her lifestyle. Before, she did not know

what to do and where to go after the trip. Now, she knew that she would return to Dali and continue to paint.

In this study, there were backpackers who agreed with the 'middle class family dream' (Liu, 2008), which was also found by Liu in her study of young Chinese people. Accordingly, they conducted backpacking in order to enrich their lives. However, there were also young people such as Meng, Ning, Di, Shen, and Long, who pursued their own ways of living based on their own personal interests. Under the circumstances, the argument made by some non-backpackers that backpackers chose personal interests and inner peace over wealth and fame is correct. Dali, because of its pleasant natural environment and a culture promoting diversity, it became a gathering place for alternative seekers. Backpackers sojourning in Dali perceived it as the opposite to China's big cities, full of careerists who worship the power of money.

6.5. Summary

This chapter, along with the last chapter, has provided an overview of backpacker culture in China. These two chapters examine how 'independence' - as the core character of the Chinese backpacker - is practised by the individuals and is supported by a larger system. The system, made up of youth hostels, advanced communicative technology and backpacker enclaves, enable greater independence for individual backpackers. Because of this system, more people can travel solo. They can find companions and search for information almost anytime, anywhere. Therefore, this study contends that backpackers are empowered as individuals by this system.

More importantly, this chapter reveals a common characteristic of youth hostels and mobile Internet: both of them allow the establishment of a mobile and open relationship, which mirrors the demands of people living in an individualised world. As Elliott and Lemert suggest,

> *In the so-called do-it-yourself society, we are now all entrepreneurs of our own lives. What is unmistakable about the rise of individualist culture, in which constant risk-taking and an obsessive preoccupation with flexibility rules, is that*

> *individuals must continually strive to be more efficient, faster, leaner, inventive and self-actualizing than they were previously.*
>
> (2009, p.3)

Previous studies only observed that youth hostels and the Internet created a 'community' for backpackers; they rarely realised that young people's love of youth hostels and online communities was largely due to their flexibility and mobility. Dali, as the enclave of backpackers, also possesses a similar kind of flexibility. Different backpackers come and go, but Dali is always open for backpackers. It is necessary to further examine how the nature of places such as Dali reflect the characteristics of a late modern society.

This chapter also described a particular type of backpacker: alternative seekers. As individuals, they claim to search for an alternative way of living, by refusing to settle down in big cities. However, one can never neglect how backpackers' travel motivations are influenced by many factors besides personal interests, such as social background, age and life experiences. Accordingly, this thesis proposes a new classification of the backpacker in the next chapter, which aims to demonstrate how backpackers can be distinguished from one another, in regard to personal motivations, social background and life experiences.

7. Distinctions within a new classification of the backpacker

7.1. Introduction

As noted in Chapter Two, the backpacker has become an increasingly diversified and heterogeneous group from the 2000s onwards; for example, the identity of 'backpacker' is sometimes resisted by some independent travellers in the West (Elsrud, 2001; Cohen, 2003; Richards and Wilson, 2004; O'Reilly, 2006; Cohen, 2011). This study shows that - although Chinese travellers recognised the identity of the 'backpacker' - there are larger numbers of people participating in this activity with diverse backgrounds, undertaking backpacking for very different purposes. It is no longer a personalised and expensive activity exclusively conducted by the middle classes. Under the circumstances, recent research attempted to distinguish Chinese backpackers based on their motivations (Chen et al., 2014). Although the quantitative research helped to identify backpackers' motivations, to classify backpackers based on their motivations, and calculate the percentage of each type, it arguably ignores the context in which people chose to go backpacking, as well as the role backpacking plays in their lives. Moreover, it overlooks the fact that backpackers' travel motivations were usually multifaceted, and that these motivations were not mutually exclusive.

The primary purpose of this chapter is to propose a new classification of the backpacker, through a qualitative approach. This classification emerges from the discussions in the previous chapters but also seeks to provide a model which can be useful beyond this study. Employing the in-depth interview, this study has located people's travel motivations within the context of the conditions and circumstances of their lives. The classification therefore not only aims to identify Chinese backpackers' various travel motivations but to also examine how backpackers' personal backgrounds and attitudes towards society affect how they perceive the role backpacking plays within their lives. Significantly, as the post-80s generation is not a homogeneous group (Lian, 2014), this study attempts to demonstrate how different groups of young people living within a changing society are influenced by different cultural values.

Accordingly, this chapter is organised as follows: the first section proposes a new classification of the backpacker. The following four sections illustrates four types of backpackers identified by the classification, namely: the amateur, the dreamer, the escaper, and the alternative seeker. Then, the next part illustrates why one's social background, travelling experiences and life stage at the time of the activity are important when analysing the role of backpacking within people's lives. As a result, one can always transfer from one type to another; furthermore, the categories are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Again, this reflects the character of Chinese individuals, who constantly examine and reflect on the self within an increasingly individualised society.

7.2. A new classification of the backpackers

There are two primary approaches to classifying tourists. Cohen's work greatly contributed by conducting a qualitative approach (1972, 1979a); he was the first to propose a classification of the tourists. The typology was a continuum of travel experience, ranging from familiarity/high levels of organisation, to novelty/high levels of flexibility. Accordingly, the organised mass tourist, the individual mass tourist, the explorer and the drifter were identified (1972). Later, he identified five modes of tourist experiences,[49] which 'span the spectrum between the experience of the tourist as the traveller in pursuit of "mere" pleasure in the strange and the novel, to that of the modern pilgrim in quest of meaning at somebody else's centre' (Cohen, 1979b, p.183). The most significant contribution of this work is how Cohen employs Turner's idea of 'the centre out there' (1973), in order to analyse how modern people are alienated from their home society. In this case, some are so completely alienated as not to look for any centre; some try to search for what was lost in the home society but was preserved in other cultures; some think that different centres are the same and search for the purpose of their own lives instead; finally, some may find that their spiritual centres are actually located within another culture. However, there exist few studies on the classification of the backpackers who have noticed the importance of Cohen's work.

[49] They are the recreational mode, the diversionary mode, the experiential mode, the experimental mode and the existential mode.

The quantitative approach of classifying tourists has been developed by Pearce and Caltabiano (1983), who adopt Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs. Their study found that there exists a 'motivational career in travel', which means that more experienced travellers reported experiences containing greater needs in higher orders (Pearce and Caltabiano, 1983). The notion was later illustrated as a 'travel career ladder' (TCL) by Pearce in the 1980s (Ryan, 1998). In Loker-Murphy's (1997) study of backpackers' motivations for travelling to and within Australia, respondents were asked to rate the importance - on a 1-5 Likert scale - of ten motives for travel, which reflected different levels of the travel career ladder in a questionnaire. Accordingly, four types were identified, namely: the escapers/relaxer, social/excitement seekers, achievers, and self-developers[50]. Moreover, nationality was found to be the most pronounced difference across segments; for example, backpackers from the UK and Ireland were more likely to be self-developers, while those from North America were more likely to be social/excitement seekers (Loker-Murphy, 1997). The contribution of TCL indicates that backpackers' motivations may be more complex, due to the growth of travelling experiences. Furthermore, there exists a potential hierarchy of motivations.

This study proposes a new classification of the backpacker, generated from this qualitative study. It is a four-quadrant classification, which is different from the continuum/spectrum model as proposed by Cohen (1972, 1979a) and the hierarchical model proposed by Loker-Murphy (1997). It aims to reveal that travel motivations, social backgrounds and life experiences evidently distinguish backpackers from one another. As Figure 7.1 shows, the four-quadrant classification of the backpacker is based on two dimensions: backpackers' physical distance from home, and their psychological distance from mainstream society. In the context of this study, mainstream society refers to the stable and routine life possessed by many young Chinese. The mainstream 'dream', as this study and Liu's (2006) study on Chinese college students demonstrates, is to fulfil a middle class ideal: a house, a car, a stable family, and disposable income for leisure activities.

[50] The first type was escapers/relaxers, who placed 'relaxing/taking it easy', 'escaping the pressure of life' and 'the pursuit of excitement/adventure' in much higher importance. The second was social/excitement seekers who rated 'meeting local people and other travellers' and 'the pursuit of excitement/adventure' higher. The third was achievers who had the highest ratings on all motives with the exception of 'spending time with people they care deeply about'. The fourth type was self- developers who reported the relative importance of the higher-level motives in the ladder and showed a lack of importance of lower ones.

Four types of backpackers, namely the amateur, the dreamer, the escaper, and the alternative seeker, are identified in this study. It is crucial to note that the identification of backpackers within this study, namely the procedure used to decide which participant is categorised as which type of backpacker, is based on their own personal life stories and travel experiences, rather than how they themselves identify. Significantly, as the Figure 7.1 demonstrates, the categories are not completely mutually exclusive, as there exists a series of motivations and attitudes more present in some categories than in others, and which can be considered as fluid - in the sense that people change and can move from category to category, for example due to a change in life circumstances or specific experiences.

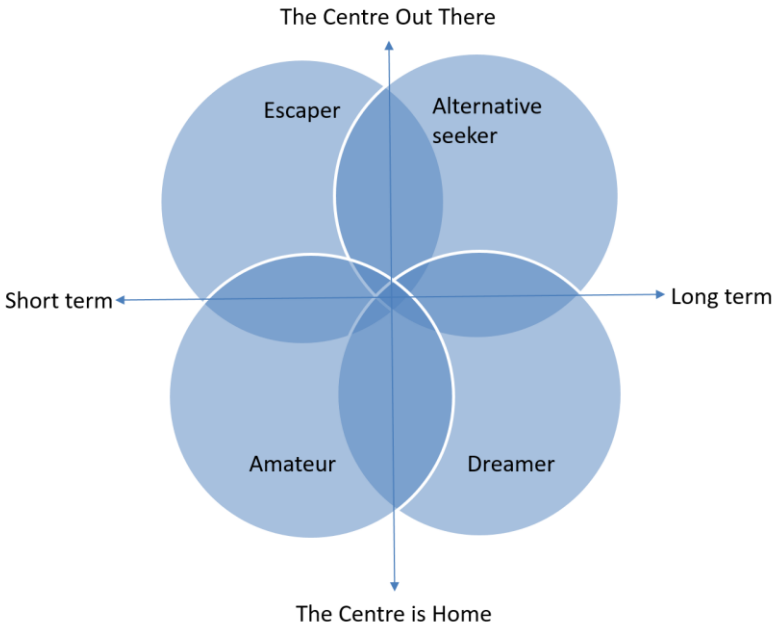

Figure 7.1 A Classification of the Backpacker

The horizontal axle of Figure 7.1 shows backpackers' physical distance to their home, relating to how far they are prepared to travel, and how long they leave home. As discussed in Chapter Three and Chapter Four, public and paid holidays within China are relatively fewer than those in developed countries such as the UK, Australia and Germany (Zhu, 2007; Chen et al., 2014). In China, the longest public holiday is the seven-day Golden Week. In Chapter Three, this study suggests that a single backpacking trip should be at least fifteen days within the context

of China. Within this classification, the trips of escapers and amateurs usually last from two weeks to two months. However, the trips of alternative seekers and dreamer can last for several months to several years.

The vertical axis demonstrates backpackers' psychological distance to conventional society, which relates to what extent they agree with mainstream values and norms, as suggested above. The idea is inspired by MacCannell's theory of authenticity (1973, 1992) and Cohen's classification of the tourists (1972, 1979a); the assumption is that modern travellers' underlying motivation is to overcome feelings of alienation resulting from everyday life embedded within a highly differentiated and industrialised society. Backpackers who recognise home and mainstream society as the centre of their lives are amateurs and dreamers. They are expected to return to work and their home after the trip, whilst escapers and alternative seekers are more critical of mainstream values and approaches, unsure whether to return or not. They may extend their trip for as long as possible, as they believe the spiritual centre were in a place far away (Turner, 1973). In this classification, 'the centre out there' means that there is no particular destination or final stage of the trip, specifically lived out by escapers and alternative seekers.

7.3. The amateur

According to amateurs, backpacking is widely considered to be an important part of one's life; however, it can be understood to be more similar to a hobby than a holistic way of life. This is demonstrated through their assertion that they would not give up their normal life for backpacking; therefore, most only backpack during holidays. It is noteworthy that many amateurs are student backpackers and people who possess stable jobs, exemplified by participants Xiao (high school teacher), Bao (cultural and creative company staff), Ke (SOE employee), Zu (gap year traveller), Yuan (postgraduate) and Zhi (undergraduate) in this study. However, there nevertheless exists a substantial difference between non-backpackers and the category of amateurs, as the latter chooses to invest time and money in travelling, rather than focusing on making more money or staying with families and friends. This can be understood as a difference regarding personal values, which will be discussed further in this study.

Xiao, the high school English teacher, spent most of her holidays backpacking. By comparing herself to her college classmates who worked in challenging environments, Xiao admitted that she preferred having a stable job; however, she did not want to spend her whole life in the same city. Travel provided an ideal way to explore other places and make new friends. It is significant to note that Xiao could choose to conduct home tutoring during holidays and make extra money, as most of her colleagues did. However, she believed that travel was more valuable. She noted:

> *I used to work during holidays. However, I found that the happiness brought by making money was quite…limited. I don't mean that I am rich. I just question the meaning of making money. Perhaps I earn ten thousand yuan in two months, but so what? Furthermore, lives have a limit. What's the point of spending all of your life simply making money?*
>
> (Xiao, high school teacher, female, 34)

Xiao stated that she understood her colleagues who simply sought to make more money for their family; however, she thought that her purpose in life was not to save money for the next generation, but to live a meaningful life. Xiao noted that - even if she married again in the future - she would like to backpack with the family during holidays. Xiao's salary was not high, so she chose to travel in a budgeted way. In addition, she liked to stay in youth hostels, because there she could find travel companions and make new friends, as highlighted in the last chapter.

Although Xiao mentioned that the teaching work was boring to some extent, she said that she did not want to change it; as stated above, she preferred to have a stable income. She did consider opening a youth hostel two years ago, as she loved travelling so much, and even visited some places to choose the location. However, she finally gave up the idea, as none of her parents or friends supported it. Xiao realised that, without the support from family and friends, she would risk her life.

Many participating backpackers stated that their motivation was 'to meet people', which was less possible if one travelled with friends or through packaged tours. Meeting other travellers

and interacting with locals have long been regarded as the essential characteristics of backpackers (Loker-Murphy and Pearce, 1995). In this study, student backpackers put much emphasis on this motivation. As showed in former chapters, Zhi enjoyed talking to different backpackers in youth hostels; through this, he believed that he gained a lot from backpacking:

> *I meet so many smart and interesting people on the road, while my classmates only know people on campus. I am not as optimistic as my classmates [about finding a good job]. An undergraduate degree doesn't mean anything in the job market. In order to succeed, you need to be modest and pragmatic. I learn from travelling. I don't think that I learn any specific skill through backpacking, but I can say that I understand society better because of it. I thus adjusted my expectations and discovered my strengths and weaknesses.*
>
> (Zhi, student backpacker, male, 23)

Zhi referred to the story of 'the frog in the well', an idiom in China. Without travelling, he was like the frog in the well, who never that knew there existed a whole ocean. Fortunately, he travelled a lot as a student. He said that sooner or later, everyone would know how big the ocean was, but that he had been able to realise earlier on than many other people. Li (male, 23) was also in his last year of college. He backpacked within China during every school holiday and thought that it would be even more interesting to explore the world than to sit in a classroom.

Accordingly, it can be contended that the backpackers within the category of amateurs enjoy the feeling of freedom and sense of independence during travel. Furthermore, they perceive being local and going native as the essence of travel, as discussed in depth in earlier chapters. Some seek novelty or adventure in travel. Moreover, for those who enjoyed staying alone during the trip, backpacking was regarded as a vital opportunity to create a unique and individual space; this was outlined by Pengyi (female, 31) and Bao (male, 28) earlier in Chapter Five.

The ancient proverb, 'read ten thousand books and travel ten thousand miles', is well known in China. Over recent years, as the popularity of backpacking among young people has

increased, the proverb has been employed by the YHA China, as a contemporary slogan. Their official slogan is, 'read ten thousand books; travel ten thousand miles; understand the world and yourself better through travelling'.[51] Rather than accepting the traditional idea that, 'When his parents are alive, a son should not go far away; or if he does, he must let them know where he goes', many young backpackers such as Zhi, Li and Zu (gap year traveller, 26, male) were inspired by this idea of better knowing the world and yourself through travelling.

The revival of this ancient proverb denotes a significant cultural change in China. Travelling is perceived not only as a way to have fun, but also a way to achieve continuous self-development. The change is closely related to the growing individualisation of Chinese society. On the one hand, by investing time and money on 'the self' instead of 'the family', the younger generation does become more individualistic. Furthermore, they do not accept that being rich is the only evaluation of success; rather, some amateurs prefer a balanced and less materialistic way of life. On the other hand, backpacking is believed to enhance the ability to handle risks, as pointed out in Chapter Two. The capability of the self is regarded as an essential factor of individual success within late modern society (Giddens, 1991; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). Accordingly, young people - particularly college students - recognise it as a way to develop themselves and to gain greater cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

7.4. The dreamer

Similar to amateurs, dreamers recognise the stability of home and work as the centre of their lives. However, distinct from amateurs, who take backpacking to be the nourishment and supplement of everyday life, dreamers launch their trip because they seek to realise a dream. None of the previous research on Chinese backpackers has noted how some backpackers undertook the activity because they wanted to realise a dream. However, within this study, participants Ting, Chi, Ming and Zhao clearly demonstrated that they backpacked to precisely to do so, and 'realise my dream', as they themselves stated.

[51] The Chinese version is '*du wanjuan shu, xing wanli lu, zai lvxing zhong renshi shijieheziji.*' (读万卷书, 行万里路, 在旅行中认识世界和自己.)

Thus, there are two important questions regarding the emergence of the 'dreamer' in China. First of all, how do they negotiate the realisation of an individual dream with other life plans, such as the career and family? It is noteworthy that, in order to take a long-term independent trip, all of the backpackers in this study had to give up stable employment. Ting resigned from his management job in Beijing; Chi resigned from his job in Shanghai; Ming closed her clothing shop in her hometown; Zhao resigned from a job in a state-owned-enterprise in his hometown. Secondly, where did the 'dream' come from? Did the idea spring up spontaneously from within, or were individuals influenced by anything in particular, that led to the cultivation of this dream?

As introduced in Chapter Five, Ting sought to complete a global travel tour. After achieving financial independence aged 35, Ting thought that it was time to realise his childhood dream: going on a world travel tour. He said that friends labelled him a dreamer, but that he treated this dream extremely seriously. He prepared it for two years, as noted:

> *To embark on a world tour is my dream. I guess a lot of people dreamed of travelling globally when they were young. However, most of them gave up the dream… The sense of security comes from your inner self; if you know clearly what it is you want, you will feel safe and steady. I knew I wanted to fulfil this dream, and so I spent two years planning it. I calculated the costs, making sure that I could afford it. I take responsibility for what I do; I don't think that I am taking risks.*
>
> (Ting, global traveller, male, 40)

It is noteworthy that, although Ting resigned from his job and became a full-time traveller within three to four years, he did not recognise the change as a 'risk' to his future life. According to Ting, material wealth did not necessarily result in happiness and security; on the contrary, he asserted that it might lead to greater anxieties. He was surprised by some of his friends, who were extremely anxious about the fluctuation of house prices in Beijing. He stated, 'Although they already had several flats in Beijing and very rich, they never felt satisfied and happy. They could not sleep well and eat well when the price was volatile. They wished that house prices would rise all the time, which was impossible!' Similarly to Xiao,

Ting thought that he was different from most of his colleagues and friends; he noted, 'Compared to a salary, I care more about whether I would like to do the thing or not. After years of working, I have a flat and a car. I think that is enough. I had savings that could afford my dreams. I want to spend time on things that I love.'

Born in 1975, Ting is not part of the post-80s generation; however, he does represent a spirit among young Chinese backpackers: to follow and do what you love. Although, to 'do what you love' is never an easy task when followed in relation to certain individual backgrounds and social conditions. As Ting suggested, he did not begin the trip until had enough money and had prepared a detailed plan. Moreover, he was waiting for the perfect timing;[52] He thought the mid-30s was perfect. Firstly, he was not too old to try the off the beaten track in some areas. Secondly, he was mature enough to know how to reintegrate himself back into society after the long-haul trip.

Timing is often found to be critical for those who want to fulfil their dreams. Chi is another example; he loved cycling and had dreamed of cycling from Shanghai to Tibet for years. However, there were two problems: firstly, he could not have a three months' holiday if he wanted to keep his job; and secondly, his parents and girlfriend worried about his safety. In order to persuade them, Chi promised that it would be a one-off, once-in-a-lifetime experience. He also promised that he would find a stable job when he returned. To realise the dream, he spent two years preparing, taking up training such as cycling on weekends and collecting updated information on the route. In the summer of 2013, he felt that he 'had to' set off, and thus resigned from the company. He stated:

> *I couldn't wait any longer. I was 28 at the time, and I was considering getting married. If I am married, it is difficult to leave my wife and child behind. The route was quite risky, and I could not take a risk in those circumstances. I had some savings from two years of working, so I could afford the trip. Plus, I was tired of the job by then. Even if I resigned, I could find a better one after returning.*
>
> (Chi, cyclist, male, 29)

[52] Ting began his trip in 2011, which means he began to backpack when he was 35. When I interviewed him in 2014, he had backpacked around Europe, Asia, Africa and America. The only place he did not go was Oceania.

Chi emphasised that it would be too late if he could not realise the dream before he turned thirty years old. As discussed in Chapter Four, the idea of Confucius*, 'shiyouwu er zhiyuxue, sanshi erli'* (One should set the heart up learning at the age of fifteen and be established in a career at thirty), is still widely accepted by young professionals and college students in China. Chi strongly agreed with the idea. A man is expected to be steadfast at the age of thirty, which means that he should settle down, get married and follow a career path. Chi's experience can be regarded as a complex negotiation of 'do what I love' and 'do what I should do (according to traditional views)', demonstrating the way in which the younger generation may be engaging more with finding ways to accomplish both and keep all parties satisfied.

Yan claimed that 'the pursuit of a life of one's own' prevailed in post-reform China (2010). However, Chi's case, along with the arguments made by non-backpackers that 'I would never live as a backpacker', show that some traditional ideas are still influential with the younger generation in China. Although individuals have more opportunities to pursue what they want, this does not mean that they can do whatever they want. Both Ting and Chi were regarded as courageous by their friends because they pursued their own dreams; however, from Ting and Chi's perspectives, they fought for this 'freedom'. Again, as discussed earlier in Chapter Five, backpackers within the study understood that 'independence' ensures 'freedom'. Both participants worked hard to be financially independent. Furthermore, they strived to balance their dreams with influential expectations origination with their family.

As these backpackers were motivated by their dreams, it is worthwhile examining where precisely these dreams came from. Zhao (male, 29) identified as a 'born traveller'; he contended that he had always dreamed of being a traveller when he was young. Zhao said that there was a popular national TV program - *Zhengda Zongyi* (正大综艺, Zhengda Variety Show) - in which the host travelled globally to show the world to the audience. Zhao was fascinated by the program. After entering college, he had more spare time, so he escaped classes in order to travel. With little money, he sometimes slept at railway stations or paid 20 yuan for a night in an Internet café.

However, his free and easy way of life ended after graduation. Zhao found a stable job in an SOE at the wish of his parents. Two years later, he could not bear that kind of life anymore, so he resigned. It is not difficult to comprehend that Zhao was also a backpacker who preferred to

'do what I love'. Compared to a stable job, opening a youth hostel may be more challenging and risky; however, he would like to try to do so, as it is what he enjoys and dreams of. Zhao did what Xiao (high school teacher) wanted to but could not. I met Zhao in Housepen, the youth hostel in Shaxi. Zhao worked there as a full-time employee and planned to learn how to manage a youth hostel.

Produced by and aired on CCTV (China Central Television), 'Zhengda Variety Show' made a great contribution to promoting tourism in China since the Reform and Opening-Up (Wang, 2011; Keane, 2009). The slogan *'bukan buzhidao, shijie zhenqimiao'* (不看不知道，世界真奇妙) translates as 'If you do not see the world, you will never know how wonderful it is', and is known widely in China. Starting in 1990, it was one of the most successful and longest-running entertainment TV shows, entering the lives of many parts of the post-80s generation. When discussing if they liked travelling, several participants within different focus groups also mentioned how they were influenced by this show, such as Guan (male, 25, undergraduate Nanjing), Wang (male, 29, postgraduate Nanjing), and Hui (male, 22, undergraduate Suzhou).

According to Keane (2009), one of the primary factors of the show's success was China's audiences' fascination with the external world in the 1990s. As highlighted in Chapter Two, the Chinese state strongly promoted the development of the tourism industry from the 1990s onwards; thus, mass tourism became one of the most popular leisure activities within China. As a result, the younger generation grew up in this atmosphere. Ting and Zhou suggested that 'every child dreamed of being a traveller', and Ji contended that she 'always wanted to travel'. Their demonstrations might be exaggerated; however, it can be contended that these dreams and travel impulses are closely related to the social circumstances that they, as individuals, have experienced.

It is worthwhile to note the differences and similarities regarding motivations between Chinese backpackers and their Western counterparts. Based on interviews and ethnography, O'Reilly's study of Western backpackers (2006) highlighted how over a third of informants answered that they had always wanted to travel, when asked where the idea of backpacking had come from. Some answered that the idea had sprung up spontaneously from within themselves, while some stated that they might have been influenced by something or somebody, but they were not sure. Seventeen out of the thirty participants clearly stated that they were influenced

by friends and family who had previously travelled. Furthermore, backpackers mentioned the vast influence of relevant travel programs, wildlife documentaries, movies, and travel novels.

Similarly, media representations were often mentioned by Chinese backpackers, as stated above. In the era of the Internet, a greater amount of resources has been able to be accessed by the younger generation. In addition, star backpackers Gu Yue and Xiaopeng became famous on social networking sites. As a result, stories about Western backpackers became widely known by the Chinese population, through the Internet. For example, Ting stated that, several years before he set off, he had watched a video on the Internet, which recorded a foreign man dancing on the streets located in different areas in the world. The video moved Ting; it reminded him of his childhood dream and motivated him to realise it. The video was named, 'Where the Hell is Matt'; Pengyi also mentioned that it had inspired her[53]. As noted in Chapter Four, young professionals and students got to know backpacking through media products, and their impressions of backpacking were largely influenced by star backpackers. The examples of Ting and Pengyi further demonstrated how young Chinese backpackers have been substantially influenced by Western backpackers and media representations.

However, distinct to Western backpackers, this study shows that Chinese backpackers are rarely influenced by the friends and family around them. As demonstrated in many cases of the study such as Zhi's argument with his mother and Jin's argument with her husband, friends and family usually did not encourage backpackers to undertake the activity. Backpackers usually found fellow backpackers or like-minded individuals through the Internet or during their travels. In O'Reilly's study (2006), more than half of the backpackers in the study had said that they had been influenced by friends and family who had travelled before them. This result is credible, as backpacking in the West emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, and so there exist previous generations of travellers.

However, within the study, only one backpacker, Zu - the gap year traveller who went to New Zealand - mentioned his mother's influence. Zu said that his mother was well-educated. As Zu described, his mother was different from other parents; 'my mother always encouraged me to

[53] Pengyi clearly remembered the name of the video, while Ting could not. It may be a coincidence or not, as the series video made by Matt Harding has been an Internet phenomenon since 2005. One video called 'Dancing 2006' showed Matt dancing for 3 to 7 seconds apiece in 36 locations, mostly in front of world famous landmarks, getting more than 18 million views (Wikipedia, 2017).

participate in group tours during holidays. Sometimes, we went travelling independently together. We didn't know of the idea of "backpacking" at that time, but what we did was exactly that.' Zu indicated that his mother was different, as most backpackers in this study emphasised that they were different from their friends, colleagues and family. Accordingly, young backpackers are stressed if they backpacked for a long time; the dream not merely brings courage but also stress.

The stories of those within the category of dreamers best illustrate how young people may struggle with emerging conflict from the simultaneously existing individualistic idea 'a life of one's own' with the traditional idea 'a life for collective/family welfare'. Most often, dreamers have to resign from stable jobs in order to conduct a long-term trip, but they usually promise to return when setting off. Even through, there are always risks that they cannot find a good job or they find it is hard to reintegrate into society upon return. Significantly, the reason they care about the welfare of family is primarily due to the social structures within China. As pointed out in Chapter Two, parents and children may be forced to be interdependent, because of the receding role of the state within individuals' lives, alongside the one-child policy (Barbalet, 2016). Most dreamers strived to negotiate conflicting values, and this is why the timing of realising the personal dream is crucial. However, there are also dreamers such as Zhao, who change their life plans during the process of realising a dream. They decide not to return to mainstream society, and rather transform into the category of backpacking alternative seekers. Different types are not mutually exclusive, as mentioned earlier.

7.5. The escaper

The category of the escaper refers to those who wish to escape from life crises and transitions. Accordingly, their trips are not necessarily long. However, when compared to amateurs, who recognise home and mainstream society as the centre of their lives, escapers begin to question the pre-established values of dominant society and reflect on themselves in relation to it. This study finds that some long-term trips are generated by the 'fateful moments' of when the reflexivity of individuals is highlighted, in order to make decisions that are particularly consequential for their future lives (Giddens, 1991). Significantly, escapers within this study

also believed that backpacking could be a hallmark in the transition in life; they expected a 'new start' after completing the journey. To summarise, escapers employ a long-term, long-haul, independent trip in order to overcome frustrations, to reflect on themselves, and to begin to forge a new identity.

Fong (male, 35) worked as a manager in a sales department of a company in Shanghai. He held the same job for eight years and did not think that his life would change greatly as he aged. He stated, 'I am a good salesman, and that's it. Maybe I will be promoted again, and the salary will increase. Anyway, I will spend my life like this.' He identified as part of the 'ordinary middle class', enjoying travelling, writing and watching films in his spare time. However, he never dreamed of transforming these 'hobbies' into a 'career' if 'the accident' did not occur.

At the end of 2009, Fong was deceived by a client with whom he shared a long-standing work relationship and friendship. The man owed two million yuan to Fong's company and ran away. Fong was forced to resign as punishment. He thought that it was unfair as he was not responsible for the occurrence, yet he was forced to quit his job. Fong stated that he felt more disappointed and upset that a close friend had cheated him, than the fact that he had been forced to resign. As a result, Fong decided to leave the city for a while. He used to take short trips by himself, and he wanted to take a long-haul journey at that time. Fong thought that it was the biggest crisis of his life. As he said, 'Confucius said "a man should be steadfast at the age of thirty", and we Chinese people believe it. Ironically, I lost my job, as well as my passion for life, when I was thirty years old'. However, Fong found that his mindset was also transformed due to the crisis. He said, 'Surprisingly, because I lost so much at that time, I thought that I had nothing more to lose. When there is nothing to lose, there is nothing to fear.' Through this crisis, Fong was able to consider ideas and plans that he had previously been too scared of to undertake, such as backpacking.

Accordingly, Fong decided to pursue what he really loved. He always dreamed of taking a long-haul journey around China by train, but he had never been given a long enough holiday to do so. As he lost his job, he could do whatever he wanted at that time. Fong loved slow

trains,[54] particularly as it played a special role in his childhood. Born in 1980, Fong said that he rarely had a chance to travel as a child in the 1980s. Every year when his parents took him to his grandparents' home during the Chinese New Year, they travelled by train for several days. The journey crossed several provinces from the North to the Southeast of the country. Most of Fong's friends at primary school had never travelled outside of their city, and so Fong always proudly told them of his experiences after returning. Although slow trains were smelly, slow and crowded, they were considered to be the most important form of long-distance travel by several generations within China, from the 1950s to the 2000s (Qi, 2014).

When Fong took his long-term trip via the slow train, he wrote interesting stories detailing what happened on the train; subsequently, one was published in a magazine. An editor read the article and invited him to write a book about his journey, as the editor believed that travelling via the slow train was a memorable, nostalgic topic. Although Fong had never written a book before, he decided to attempt it. His first book was published in 2012 and turned out to be an unexpected winner in that year's publishing market. Encouraged by the success, he took up travel writing as a serious career path. In 2014, Fong published his second book, sharing his in-depth travel experiences in Southwest China. Thus, the life crisis Fong experienced before he went backpacking turned out to be a chance for 'a new life', in Fong's own words. He also stated that he would never return to 'the office', as he enjoyed the freedom of being a freelancer; Furthermore, he contended that he gained an unprecedented sense of accomplishment from writing and travelling.

Although not everyone like Fong can discover a 'new life' after a crisis and begin a new career through the pursuit of travelling, life crises were found to force individuals in the study to reflect on 'normal' life and face their own desires and fears. This process is somewhat similar to the idea of 'fateful moments', as proposed by Giddens (1991). As discussed in Chapter Two, fateful moments not only refer to those transitional points within one's life, but also to certain personal crises. Reflexivity is heightened in these moments, because 'events come together in such a way that an individual stands, as it were, at a crossroads in this existence; or where a person learns of information with fateful consequences' (Giddens, 1991,

[54] They were called 'green-skinned' trains, because their external paint was green. The rapid development of high-speed railway in China since the 2000s aimed to replace the old and slow trains, as the modernisation of transportation system was one of the main tasks of the Chinese government's 10th Five-Year Plan (Zhang, 2011b).

p.113). In Fong's case, when he was abandoned by the company and cheated by his close friend, he began to reflect on society's and his own pre-established beliefs. When he decided to embark on a long-haul journey, as he 'always wanted to but couldn't', he found that happiness for him resulted from following his heart - as opposed to following prescribed societal values, such as that of possessing a stable job. As a result, he gave up the idea of finding another office job and became a freelancer, focusing on an activity he greatly enjoyed.

Distinct from Fong, who did not know what would happen when he began his journey, Peng was determined to go back when he set off, as he had a four-year-old son to take care of. Still, Peng sought to undertake a long-haul trip in order to re-energise himself and recuperate, following a divorce and business failure. As a 28-year-old man, Peng's life experience was unique when compared to most interviewed backpackers in this study. Growing up a rural village, Peng never thought that his 'way out' would be through attending college, as he had no interest in studying. Peng's father died when he was very young, and so his mother raised him and his two siblings. Peng wanted to transform his fate; so, he decided to leave his hometown to find some work – rather than attending high school when he was 14 years old. From 2002 to 2007, he worked different jobs in several cities, and eventually found an opportunity in Shenzhen - which had the reputation of 'a new workshop of the world' (The Economist, 2002). In 2007, with the money he saved and borrowed, Peng opened a small garment workshop. Peng and his employees worked from dawn to dark, and the small workshop developed quickly, eventually into a factory that had forty employees during peak periods. As a result, Peng earned hundreds of thousands of yuan a year. In 2010, he got married and bought several flats as an investment. His mother and younger brother also lived with him and worked in the factory.

However, things began to change over the following two years, as Peng's business suffered from the gloomy economy. Worse still, he had a dispute with his brother regarding the issue of money. The dispute with another member of his family saddened Peng, and he ended up with a gambling addiction. In 2012, his factory did not receive enough orders and was forced to close. Peng wanted to restart, so he spent all of his savings on opening a new restaurant. Unfortunately, the restaurant was forced to close after only a year, and Peng lost almost all of his money. His wife filed for divorce and left their four-year-old son with him.

The transformation from a successful businessman to a penniless divorced 'loser' made him want to 'forget the self he had before and find the determined and strong self again'. To conduct a long-haul trip sounded like a good option at the time, but he had never travelled alone before. In September 2013, he met Beibei, Zang and Liao on the social networking platform Momo. As discussed in earlier chapters, the four were all young migrant workers who had left their rural hometowns years earlier to seek new opportunities in cities. Differing from Beibei, Zang and Liao, who wanted to continue their trip after arriving in Tibet, Peng decided to return home immediately, realising that he already had a plan for a new business.

However, the trip still played an important role in Peng's life, as he stated that it gave him the chance to release all of his burdens and attempt to find a new beginning. Before setting off, Peng quarrelled with his mother, who had repeatedly cried when Peng told her that he wanted to take a trip. She was extremely angry and said that Peng was unfilial. According to her, if Peng was seeking a fresh start, he should get a job. However, Peng didn't think so; rather, he thought that a journey would help him to recover from the crisis. Peng stated:

> *I told her, 'You don't understand. I need some time to refresh and examine myself. I may make 3000 yuan working for three months. However, the money does not help my future. Instead, if I spent the three months travelling, I might figure out the underlying problems in my life and my personality.' I told her that I was not going out to have fun or wander around; rather, I wanted to calm down. I wanted to recover from so many changes in my life, such as the business failure and divorce.*
>
> (Peng, budget traveller, male, 28)

Peng and his fellow backpackers had already travelled for a month when I met them in a youth hostel located in the Tiger Leaping Gorge. Peng said that he was looking back on his former life while he was backpacking. He thought that he had succeeded when he was in his early twenties; he attributed this as the potential reason for how he became arrogant and stopped listening to people's suggestions. He felt sorry for his son and missed him a lot while travelling; he said, 'I have to be strong, for the sake of my mother and son.' Peng promised that he would return with a 'new self', hoping that this journey would mark a transition in his life.

When telling their travel stories, backpackers frequently mentioned the phrase ‘to examine the self’, such as Pengyi (female, 31) and Bao (male, 28) stated in the discussion above. Furthermore, for backpackers such as Fong and Peng, they did not merely employ backpacking as a way to escape from their own personal crisis, but also as a way to signal and begin a fresh start. Thus, the journey is recognised as a hallmark of a transitional point within one’s life. Many studies of Western backpackers and Israeli backpackers showed that backpacking is often related to life crises and transitions (Desforges, 2000; Maoz, 2008; Noy and Cohen, 2012); however, few studies of Chinese backpackers have raised this point.

Jin’s story serves as another example here. She was 29 years old and had been married for several years. Growing up in a village, she studied hard to go to a college and settle down in a city. Jin did not have many chances to travel when she was young. Influenced by the popularity of backpacking in recent years, Jin began to learn of the idea of backpacking. She said that sometimes browsing travel blogs made her feel so excited that she could not fall asleep. Jin said that, compared to young people who travelled the world in their teens or early twenties, she felt that she had never experienced ‘youth’, partly because she had spent most of her time studying and working. However, she felt unsuccessful, as she did not have a good job. Furthermore, Jin thought that she rarely had time to do things she really loved, such as travelling and painting. Jin sounded a little depressed when she said, ‘I don’t know. Maybe I was just wasting time when I was young’. Therefore, before getting pregnant, she decided to conduct a long-term journey. She wanted to travel around China and visit all of the places she sought to go when she was younger, as a farewell to her youth.

Jin said that her husband did not understand her passion for travel, as he thought backpacking was risky and arduous. Jin had taken short backpacking trips before, but her husband had rarely been supportive. They had a dispute about whether to have a child. Jin did not think she was prepared, while her husband wanted to. As a result, Jin felt pressured; she resigned from her job and demanded that she take a journey to ‘make up her mind’. Jin said about her husband, ‘I told him that it would be too late if I could not go out this time. I told him, you should give me this last chance.’ When I met Jin in Shaxi, she had travelled for more than twenty days; she said that she might try to conceive a child after the trip.

Although the specific situations of Fong, Peng and Jin differ from one another, it is not difficult to find that, when facing personal challenges, all of them turned inwards into themselves, rather than directing themselves externally towards others. Some participants were forced to do this, whilst others chose to do so. Thus, backpacking is often employed as an opportunity to question oneself, to clarify beliefs, to diagnose a situation, to deliberate and negotiate concerns, and then to define one's own life project. This is what reflexive individuals do within late modernity (Giddens, 1991; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002).

7.6. The alternative seeker

In the previous chapter, this thesis discussed the emergence of the backpacking category of alternative seekers, also focusing on their community in Dali. The thesis contends that the distinct character of this group is that they question the meaning of life, alongside traditional expectations and conventions, namely stages within one's life, such as getting a job, settling down in a city, getting married and having children. Significantly, they often find life on the road more interesting than a stable life in a city. Accordingly, they extend backpacking to a way of living and develop their own individual routines.

This study has found the existence of both push and pull factors in regard to conducting an alternative way of living through backpacking. The push factor is how some young people find it difficult to succeed in mainstream society in China. They realise that processes of reproduction and stratification of social classes are underway in the country, and that opportunities and resources are increasingly unequally distributed across the population. Accordingly, these young people give up the dream of building a middle class family, choosing instead to travel and explore other ways of living. The pull factor is how the freewheeling lifestyle allows individuals to develop their own dreams and interests, as not everyone wants to be rich or live a stable life.

Long and Nao were two participants part of the post-90s generation; both had dropped out of college early and decided to go backpacking. As highlighted earlier, Long believed that the established conventional life pattern - to get a diploma, find a job and get married - was a

'trap', rather than a 'happy middle class dream'. He deeply doubted if he would be happy living in this way. Moreover, Long was very disappointed by the life provided by the college he attended; he stated, 'We were asked to get up at six in the morning to do square dancing[55] … the university taught us to be obedient. I don't think this is what a college should teach.' Furthermore, Long thought that a diploma from a 'third-tier college' did not help in the job market, so going to the college was not the only 'way out'. In fact, his comment on higher education in China was not unusual, and other participants within the study offered similar critiques of conventional education.

Nao (female, 21) dropped out of college in the first year for similar reasons, believing that four years of higher education was a waste of time. Similarly, Li, the college student in his last year, thought that it was more valuable and interesting to spend his time travelling, rather than sitting in the classroom. Long, Nao and Li all believed that a college diploma would not help them in the future, particularly a diploma from a 'normal college'.

Their criticism of college education relates to the expansion and marketisation of higher education in China, occurring since the 1990s. The overall enrolment for all types of higher educational institutions was more than 2.7 million in 1999, having increased by over 40 per cent (Bai, 2006). One consequence was that rich parents could pay more for better products; for example, some educational institutions were open to students with poor performance standards, but who had rich parents. Also, as noted in the introductory chapter, an increased number of Chinese students chose to study overseas, although the tuition fee and the living cost were a big burden on many families. Moreover, widespread unequal access to education played an important role in the social stratification over recent years in the country (Rosen, 2004; Xiang and Shen, 2009).

Educational inflation further resulted in the devaluation of the college diploma; this is precisely why young people such as Long, Nao and Li did not believe that a college diploma would help them in the job market. The year of 2013 was said to be the 'hardest job-hunting season' (China Economic Website, 2013), with the largest population of college graduates in

[55] Usually, hundreds of people danced together in the public space. In china, it is a popular activity among middle-aged and retired women. It also represents the collective aspect of Chinese culture (Kirkpatrick, 2015).

history, while job vacancies proposed by employees had decreased when compared to previous rates in 2012.

These young people realised that they were relatively disadvantaged within the job market, and the experiences of Lv, Ruan and Liao further evidenced their opinions. They all graduated from a 'third tier' college, working a 'very boring' job day after day before resigning. As noted in the previous chapter, Lv believed that life in the city was terrible, as people there were selfish, and the job was meaningless. Another young backpacker, Ruan shared a very similar opinion, contending that backpacking was a way to escape from the emptiness of this conventional lifestyle.

Liao was another example. Graduating from a college in 2013, He changed jobs several times over the last two years. At first, he spent one year at a small workshop, making blueprints for an architecture firm. The work was very simple, and he did the same thing repeatedly each day, with little payment. After one year, he could no longer bear it, so he quit. Liao went to Guangzhou and worked in a factory for two months. However, the boss did not pay him, eventually running away. Later on, Liao was cheated by a person and lost some money. His uncle introduced him to a vehicle repair plant for employment, but he was not interested.

Born to a peasant family in rural China, Liao stated that he was never a good student, but that his parents wanted him to go to college. They believed that it was the only opportunity for upward social mobility. Liao ended up at a 'third-tier' college with high tuition fees. His parents worked very hard to support him; however, the certification was like 'a waste of paper' in the job market, he asserted. After two years of struggling, Liao thought that it was impossible for him to succeed with such fierce competition within the job market. He thus sought to take a long trip, hoping to clear his mind and discover other possibilities.

As noted earlier, Liao was the only participant possessing a college degree in the four-member budget traveller group. However, he did not possess a richer economic or social life when compared to Beibei, Zang and Peng. Lv, Ruan and Liao's experiences correspond with the findings of an 'ant tribe' in China. As introduced in the introductory chapter, the term 'ant tribe' was coined to describe college graduates who live on a low-income salary, or desperately search for jobs in big cities. In one survey conducted in 2009 (Lian, 2009), it was

found that the majority of the art tribe possessed humble family backgrounds and a diploma from a 'normal college', just like participants Liao and Lv. Two years later, another survey showed that graduates from elite universities with underprivileged family backgrounds could also become part of the 'ant tribe' (Xinhua News, 2011).

As indicated earlier, Beibei and Zang didn't attend college. Instead, they worked in factories for years. According to them, the jobs they were working did not require any refined skills and just involved repetition. Although they 'jumped' from one factory to another, life seemed repetitive. For young people in China such as Lv, Liao, Beibei and Zang, the future doesn't have any attraction as all the jobs they can do seem the same. The backpacking journey not only helps young people escape the past, but also assists them in seeking new, unconventional possibilities, as Long and Li stated above.

In this case, Ning, who quit her factory job in 2010 and backpacked across China and further afield within Asia, seems to have successfully found another way of life through backpacking. As discussed in the previous chapter, Ning learnt a new foreign language during her journey and became a youth hostel manager in Dali. However, Ning still had some problems. She wanted to apply for a Working Holiday Visa to New Zealand; however, the visa is only issued to young people who possess a senior high school qualification. Even if she could get an average level of 5.5 on the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) to prove 'a proficient level of English' as requested, it seemed impossible for a 27-year-old backpacker to return to high school to get a diploma. All public high schools in China are full-time and receive students aged around 15. When I asked if these requirements for the visa were fair, Ning said, 'I think they do need to select, but it's a shame.'

Compared to gap year traveller Zu, who easily obtained the Work Holiday Visa, backpacking to Western countries still sounded like a dream to backpackers with less privileged backgrounds, such as Ning. However, alternative seekers with privileged backgrounds also encountered challenges. In fact, they often appeared to be even more anxious than those with underprivileged backgrounds, as the former were giving up the opportunity to live a mainstream life – more accessible to them through their privileged backgrounds.

As highlighted in the previous chapter, Shen was a graduate from an elite university. However, he gave up a stable and well-paid job in order to fulfil his dream of backpacking. Shen was frank when interviewed, expressing his concerns:

> *To be honest, I worry about the future sometimes. I disobeyed my parents. More importantly, I chose a way of living that was different from most of my classmates. They went to work for big companies, or studied overseas, etc.…I am here in this remote area. I am sure I love this job, right here, right this moment. However, my deepest fear is, what if I think this job is meaningless after one or two years? Will I feel regretful then? Will I then be abandoned by mainstream society?*
>
> (Shen, backpacker and youth hostel worker, male, 25)

The very reason that Shen felt anxious is that he had to take full responsibility for his life. As Elliott and Lemert suggest, 'Reflexivity's promise of freedom carries with it the burden of continual choice and deals with all the complexities of emotional life' (2009, p.118). In Chapter Five, I highlighted how backpackers valued self-reliance during their trips and appreciated being self-sponsored. Their ideas and experiences challenge the perception that China's post-80s generation relies heavily on their parents and cannot handle the difficulties by themselves. However, the consequence of 'freedom of choice' is that individuals are forced to take full responsibility by themselves. As Shen suggested, he might be unable to face the failure. As a result, the majority of people appear to follow the suggestions of their parents, or at the very least, cooperate with their wishes.

For example, although Zu resigned from a well-paid job in Shanghai to backpack around New Zealand for a year, he emphasised that 'I always knew what to do after I returned'. His biggest concern was to feel alienated from mainstream society after returning. When backpacking in New Zealand, Zu also completed application to a postgraduate program in the UK. He went to the UK immediately after the 'gap year'. Zu indicated that the reason as to why his parents were not opposed to his backpacking trip was because they were happy with his post-trip plan. Zu hoped to be a college lecturer in the future, choosing his parents' suggestions over personal interests when the two parties came into conflict. Zu said that he wanted to be a volunteer teacher after graduating from college. He was passionate about teaching and also thought that

he could help children in remote and impoverished areas in China. Although it was only a one-year contract, his parents strongly disagreed with the idea. They, along with Zu's uncle, flew to Shanghai, in an attempt to persuade him to change his mind. Eventually, Zu gave up and chose to work at an international accounting firm. Later on, he resigned from the job, took a gap year and studied in the UK. He thought that his life path was a result of 'negotiating with parents'.

It is also important to note that this study did not encounter any backpacker who continued travelling for years without going home or returning to their base city. Although a few young people - such as Ning, Meng, Long, Di, Shen, and Lv - chose to pursue alternative ways of living compared to their friends and classmates settling down in the cities, these participants attempted to find alternative forms of security, such as taking small jobs and selling handmade objects. Alternative seekers understood that they were challenging some of the most influential traditional values within their culture, such as the importance of being filial, and settling down when reaching the age of thirty. Moreover, these perspectives are supported by an increasingly individualised Chinese society, as discussed earlier. Therefore, these participants worked very hard to ensure their independence and freedom. This study contends that this may be the cost of refusing to be an obedient child.

7.7. Why do social class, travel experience and current life stage matter?

The classification employed by this study also reflects how different types of backpackers possess different socio-demographic backgrounds. In general, most amateurs were urban middle class and college students. The amateurs can be considered as somewhat similar to the kinetic elites previously suggested by Bauman (1998, 2000). As they perceive backpacking as a regular part of life, they have relatively plenty of leisure time and disposable income to explore the world with, and to escape from the dull routine of mainstream life. Although college students usually have less disposable money, they most often possess high cultural self-confidence (Graburn, 1983) and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). As discussed in Chapter Four, the freedom regarding travel admired by the young Chinese middle classes

consistently represents the privilege and power their status gains them within Chinese society (Bauman, 1988; Urry, 2007).

The majority of dreamers also have a relatively privileged background, as there always exist preconditions of 'doing what you love'. As Zu stated: 'Both of my parents have stable jobs, and they have pensions for their retirement. I don't need to support them. This is the precondition of the statement: I can do whatever I want. In my case, I only need to be responsible for myself.' By contrast, Zang, the migrant worker from rural China, said, 'I definitely want to keep travelling, but it's impossible. I can't do it all my life. I have parents to support when they are old. I may backpack for several years, but have to settle down anyway. I should be filial'. As highlighted earlier in Chapter Two, the Chinese path to individualisation is arguably even more 'individualised' than this process in the West, as Chinese society lacks a social safety net. This is precisely why family can be considered to be so important to Chinese people. Evidently, the underprivileged have much less life choices and opportunities to realise their dreams through. People with privileged backgrounds, such as a good education, a well-paid job, and no requirement to support their parents, have more opportunities to pursue and do what they love.

This thesis finds that the social backgrounds of escapers and alternative seekers are mixed. It is noteworthy that not only middle class participants such as Fong turned to backpacking when facing a life crisis; Peng, who came from the rural area and had a son to raise, also chose backpacking as a way to overcome a life crisis. Peng's argument with his mother regarding the necessity to take a trip illustrates the differences in values existing between generations. Peng believed that self-reflection was the key to future success. Again, it shows that the role of 'self' is significant within an individualised society, and this idea is believed by people from all kinds of different social backgrounds. Amateurs also frequently refer to the notion of 'examining oneself'. As discussed in Chapter Two, 'searching for the self' can be considered as one of the most important travel motivations for backpackers within late modern societies. However, this study finds that - instead of searching for 'an authentic self' (Wang, 1999; Reisinger and Steiner, 2006) - escapers tend to search for an powerful self instead.

There are two notable groups within the category of alternative seekers. One is made up of young people from the urban middle classes, exemplified by Long, Meng and Shen. Another

is made up of young people from humble backgrounds, such as Ning, Di and Lv. I suggest that people within the first group choose to pursue an alternative lifestyle, while people in the second are forced to do so. As discussed earlier, there exist both pull and push factors. Young people from the urban middle classes are influenced more by the pull factor, as they prefer a freewheeling lifestyle to a stable one. Long's family promised that he could take on the seafood shop they owned if he wanted to after graduating. Meng and Shen easily found good jobs in cities. However, for those from humble backgrounds, the push factor is much more influential and thus significant. Those with underprivileged backgrounds seemingly realised that it was extremely difficult to succeed in such a socially and economically competitive climate, without an impressive resume or strong support from parents. Their pursuit of an alternative way of living is a type of critique of the stratification of social classes in China.

However, it is incorrect to contend that middle class young people are influenced solely by the pull factor, and vice versa. Within this study, young backpackers with different backgrounds all criticised social problems related to rapid development in China, such as overcrowded cities, materialism, and the widening gap between the rich and the poor. In general, their pursuit of an alternative way of living did show that some young people are critical to the achievements of modernisation, as discussed in Chapter Two. This thus shows the possibility of the emergence of 'reflexive modernisation' (Han and Shim, 2010; Calhoun, 2010) in China.

Although backpackers' types are strongly connected to their socio-demographic backgrounds, it does not mean that they are defined by their socio-demographic backgrounds. This study also finds that travel experience and the current life stage of a backpacker greatly influence how they perceive the role of travelling within their lives. In other words, backpackers' motivations - and their perception of mainstream society - change as a consequence of travel experiences and process of ageing and the development attached to it. Along with changes in life stages and travel experience, this study finds that the transformation between different backpacker types is not unusual.

For example, some backpackers - who originally planned to go backpacking just once - became amateurs or alternative seekers after the first trip. Ning's life well illustrates this point: she planned one trip to escape from her 'dull life' and to relax. However, after time she became an alternative seeker, and chose Dali as her base city. Fong is another example. His

journey was initiated by a career crisis; however, compared to his previous life as a sale manager, Fong said that he was much happier to be a freelancer. He stated that happiness did not necessarily result from job security or a good income, but from a passion for what you do. Chi, who took a long trip by cycling from Shanghai to Tibet to fulfil a childhood dream, became an amateur backpacker. After the trip, he decided to conduct independent travel regularly because he enjoyed the first trip so much. Chi said that he began to start a personal 'foundation for travel' after the journey by saving some money every month. In relation, Uriely and his colleagues (2002) also found that an initial backpacking experience would generate subsequent multiple backpacking trips in many cases.

Apart from travel experiences, the significant differences in attitudes towards the relationship between travel and life may result from age. Mature adults are more likely to regard backpacking as a part of life, while the young may regard it as a stage of life or a way of living. Most often, mature adults already had plans for after the trip, while younger participants continued to search for the meaning of life, or the true self. For example, Ting (male, 40), who travelled globally, had a post-trip plan when setting off at the beginning. Peng (male, 28), who travelled to escape from a life crisis, also stated that he knew what he would do after the trip ended. On the contrary, Peng's three other travel partners - Beibei, Zang and Liao - who were younger and unmarried, did not have any plans for after arriving at their destination. Furthermore, the majority of alternative seekers were in their early twenties, so it is expected that their views on freedom and their life attitudes might change over time and experience. The fact that they were alternative seekers when interviewed does not necessarily mean that they will remain alternative seekers for the rest of the lives.

The idea that 'in different stages of life, one has different priorities' was mentioned by many interviewed backpackers, when explaining how they tried to strike a balance between individual interests and family expectations. The idea implies that one allows for the development of some interests when they are not constrained by social commitments, such as marriage or filial piety. However, it is expected that when one reaches a certain age, they need to take on social responsibility, as the proverb, 'a man should be steadfast at the age of thirty' indicates. Accordingly, the stage of life is always critical to Chinese backpackers.

As introduced in Chapter Five, Ke (male, 27) was a travel enthusiast and a shutterbug. He worked in a state-owned enterprise in Xi'an. He had travelled on every public holiday over the past four years; even on weekends, he travelled to nearby cities and towns. However, he found that his parents' attitudes towards his lifestyle changed over the last year. Ke explained this change:

> *In the first three years of working, I was carefree. I could do whatever I want. However, my parents were not happy about my attitudes on life when they found out that I was enchanted with travelling. Since 2013, they repeatedly asked me to change jobs and move back to my hometown. You know, Xi'an is quite far from my hometown. In November of 2014, I resigned and went back…I am their only child. All of their attention is given to me. I am aware of their expectations, such as getting married, having children, and so on. I have felt pressured by them over these two years, and now I have to change my former lifestyle.*
>
> (Ke, backpacker, male, 27)

Under pressure from his parents, Ke travelled much less after moving back in with his parents. The situation of dreamers mentioned above is similar. Some went backpacking precisely because their life might soon move onto 'another stage', and it would be too late if they did not realise their travel dream. For example, Chi said that he would not risk cycling to Tibet if he was married. Zhi, the fourth-year college student backpacker, also said that he would not travel as much after graduation, as work would become the focus in his new life. However, Zhi dreamed of the possibility of international travel, stating, 'when I have enough money and retire, like at 50 years old [I'll travel]'.

In regard to alternative seekers who transformed into the category of amateurs and settled down, it is interesting to discover how the majority of these participants took up jobs related to tourism, such as managing youth hostels, selling outdoor equipment, or being tour guides. Ji was quite typical, contending:

> *I didn't know what to do until I found my passion for youth hostel management. This is what I like to do and what I know I can do well. You know, I kept travelling*

> *from 2008 to 2010. I returned home and found jobs from time to time, but I could never stay for a long time… I used to work in a youth hostel for several months, as a volunteer. During one trip, I worked there in exchange for accommodation and food. I loved that work. So, several months later, when the boss of the hostel asked if I would like to return as a formal employee, I thought, why not? Then I settled down…two years ago, I met my husband. He also loves travelling. Nowadays, we backpack on holidays together.*
>
> (Ji, experienced backpacker and youth hostel manager, female, 34)

It is noteworthy that Ji emphasised that her reason for settling down was due to obtaining her ideal job, rather than the pressure from families or a partner. She noted that this change in her life path happened spontaneously. In her case, past travel experiences helped her to reintegrate into mainstream society. Many alternative seekers believed that one should do what you love, and the narratives of Meng and Ji demonstrate this perspective found in backpackers in China. In Chapter Four, many non-backpackers demonstrated that they admired people who were able to pursue their dreams and desires, regardless of dominant mainstream lifestyles. Under the circumstances, backpackers who are able to create careers shaped around their passions have been found by this study to be widely respected by other young Chinese people.

7.8. Summary

The amateur, the dreamer, the escaper, and the alternative seeker are four different types of backpackers proposed by this study. The amateur and the dreamer acknowledge the vital role of home and consistent and stable employment in their lives; as a result, backpacking is adopted as a way to escape from the daily routine and find self-fulfilment through a meaningful activity. In contrast, the categories of the escaper and the alternative seeker tend to question mainstream values; accordingly, their journeys seek to examine the self, and help find a personal way to measure success and happiness in backpackers' lives.

Significantly, this study shows how motivations for travel are multifaceted, and not mutually exclusive. It is true that backpackers travel in order to enrich life, adjust the state of mind, seek

life meanings, and find other possibilities for life. However, it is also true that not all of the participants in this study fully understood what drove them to put on the backpack - nor do they know what is waiting for them on the road. Some backpackers, in particular the younger participants, transformed their way of living as a result of their travel experiences.

Furthermore, these backpackers' life stories have shown that backpackers with different social backgrounds tend to perceive and approach the role of backpacking differently. Their attitudes towards mainstream society greatly influence their life choices. In turn, their life choices are constrained by their social backgrounds. However, although backpackers' types are highly connected to their socio-demographic backgrounds, this does not mean that their socio-demographic backgrounds necessarily define their types. Backpackers, representing individuals living within late modern Chinese society, change their way of living according to specific life circumstances.

As a result, a new classification of the backpacker, based on the findings of this study, was proposed here. It creates a novel way with which to understand the similarities and differences among backpackers, through examining backpackers' physical distance to their home, and their psychological distance to mainstream society, namely, to the stable and routine life. This form of classification not only examines backpackers' travel behaviours (how far and for how long they travel), but also demonstrates how their life attitudes influence the way in which they perceive backpacking within their own lives.

8. Conclusion

8.1. Introduction

This chapter addresses how the objectives of the thesis have been met, and to draw out the implications of the study's findings. In doing so, the first section summarises four significant findings of this study. Moreover, by comparing these findings with the results from previous studies, this section analyses how these findings can contribute to the study of Chinese backpackers and the wider backpacker culture in China.

Following the summary of the findings, the second section of the chapter further discusses the implications of these findings, and the contributions they make to broader academic knowledge. This thesis argues that young Chinese people's emphasis on freedom results from the developing individualisation of Chinese society. In addition, previous studies on the individualisation of Chinese society primarily focus on the emerging enterprising self within the post-reform era. However, this study reveals that – other than the enterprising self – there exists a 'self' associated with increasing reflexivity, as developed by the younger generation. Furthermore, this thesis analyses how the risk of pursuing an alternative lifestyle within the context of China is evident. As a result, young Chinese backpackers adopt a 'staged individualism' in order to balance individual interests/desires with wider social obligations. The young Chinese population are constituted as subjects who negotiate traditional values and life patterns. The final section of the chapter outlines the future research directions suggested by this study.

8.2. A summary of findings and how they challenge previous studies of Chinese backpackers

This empirical study sought to answer the following questions, as proposed in Chapter Three: (1) how is backpacking perceived and practised by young Chinese people? (2) Are there any

differences among young backpackers regarding travel motivations and life attitudes? The thesis presented four key findings on Chinese backpackers and backpacker culture in China which differed from what had previously been noted in studies on backpacking and backpackers in China, in the following ways.

First of all, this study highlighted how 'freedom' and 'independence' were consistently regarded as the core characteristics of backpacker culture in China, while previous studies had focused extensively on the demographic characteristics and travel behaviours of Chinese backpackers - through the quantitative approach - and neglected the identity of Chinese backpackers (Luo et al., 2014; Ong and du Cros, 2012; Zhu, 2007). Furthermore, this finding reflected the similarities and differences between Chinese backpackers and their Western counterparts, as the latter were usually regarded as those who pursued 'authenticity' (MacCannell, 1973; Cohen, 1988; Wang, 1999) and 'the self' (Cohen, 2011). Moreover, the majority of previous studies regarded backpacking as a kind of consumption-led mobility, as backpackers were usually seen as a special kind of tourist (Wang, 2002, 2004; Zhu, 2007; Chen et al., 2014; Xu and Wu, 2016). However, this study showed that backpacking was employed as a process of reflexive awareness by backpackers, and as a debate amongst young people on the norms and values of a worthwhile life. The following section will further discuss how the pursuit of 'freedom' and 'independence' reflects the path of individualisation within China (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Elliott and Lemert, 2009; Yan, 2010).

Secondly, there previously existed no research that examined non-backpackers' understandings and attitudes towards backpacking and backpackers in China; furthermore, most studies assumed that backpacking was a positively-perceived activity in China, due to the popularity of backpacking (Zhu, 2007; Zhang, 2008; Yu, 2012) and the increase in the number of independent travellers over recent years (Zhang, 2011b; Xiang, 2013; Depthsky, 2014). However, according to the findings of this study, young people's understandings of backpacking were multileveled, and their attitudes towards backpacking were complicated. The majority of non-backpackers in this study possessed respect for backpackers who pursued freedom and dreams, and they also expressed envy towards backpackers' perceived freedom. However, this does not necessarily mean that they would freely choose this way of travelling or form of lifestyle. As a form of travelling, backpacking was perceived to be lonely and tiring by non-backpackers in this study, as most non-backpackers preferred travelling with friends

and family for the purpose of relaxation. Moreover, if backpackers spend many years travelling without a stable job, their lifestyle is considered to be alternative to Chinese conventions, as the traditional belief is that a man should settle down and have a stable career by the age of thirty. The freewheeling backpacking lifestyle also presented an alternative to the conventional lifestyle proposed by the urban middle classes: a stable job, a house, a car, some extra money for self-organised holidays, to settle down in the city, get married and have a child. Long-term backpackers were thus perceived as somewhat self-centred and lacked ambition by non-backpackers of this study.

The perspectives of non-backpackers, namely the young professionals and college students in this study, are of great importance. They are the contemporaries of backpackers, so their opinions demonstrate how backpacking as an alternative culture has challenged the public thought in China. Non-backpackers' complex attitudes towards backpacking reflect how the generation, living during times of extensive social transformation within China, is influenced by different and even conflicting values. Young Chinese people entering adulthood have to negotiate these values, and their choices have been deeply influenced by their social backgrounds and personal experiences. Accordingly, the following section will also discuss why and in what way the life choices of some backpackers challenge the prevailing account, and the idea that the younger generation in China are self-centred and allowed to create a life of their own (Yan, 2010, 2006; Wang, 2008; Ren, 2010; Hansen and Svarverud, 2010; Settles et al., 2013; Rosen, 2004, 2009) is problematic.

Thirdly, the results of this study challenge the idea that Chinese backpackers have a strong group orientation due to the influence of collectivism in China (Luo et al., 2014; Ong and du Cros, 2012; Zhu, 2007). Interviewed backpackers of this study rarely worried about travelling alone, no matter whether they were male or female backpackers. Significantly, they did not want to travel with family or friends. Some preferred looking for travel companions in youth hostels, and some even enjoyed the freedom and solitude resulting specifically from travelling alone. Previous studies heavily relied on established backpacking networks when sampling, and thus neglected individual travellers; yet, this study adopted various sampling methods and was able to obtain a more diverse sample. However, this study reveals that a network of backpacking constructed by youth hostels, smartphones and backpacker enclaves allows more and more people with less travel experience to travel as individuals. Moreover, the study is the

first to draw attention to how the popularity of youth hostels and smartphones among the younger generation is also due to the 'in-between' nature of their character, which allows for the establishment of mobile and open relationships (Elliott and Lemert, 2009; Bauman, 2008). Youth hostels create a space that sits between strangeness and familiarity, and they encourage comradeship but allows for flexibility. Smartphones connecting to the Internet constantly change and challenge backpackers' experience of 'being alone' and 'being away from home'. Again, these elements of youth hostels and smartphones mirror the demands of people living within a highly individualised society. As discussed in Chapter Six, the individualist culture extensively promotes the flexibility rules, and people extremely desire a relationship that is close, but not that close (Elliott and Lemert, 2009). If travelled with friends and family, backpackers in this study felt pressure as they recognised that they had to take care of others and to compromise when there was a dispute.

Fourthly, due to the various sampling methods used, this research not only revealed the diversity of backpackers' backgrounds, but also proposed a new classification of the backpacker. For example, this study found that, other than students and people who had full-time jobs, 20 out of 30 participating backpackers had resigned from their job before setting off to conduct a long-term independent trip. Although their reasons for resigning, and their motivations for backpacking differed from one another, it was crucial to note that backpacking was not a hobby for them, but more like a process of reflexive awareness and the construction of identity, as discussed above. In addition, inspired by previous classifications of tourists (Cohen, 1972; Loker-Murphy, 1997), as well as the qualitative data gathered here, this study proposed a four-quadrant classification of the backpacker, in order to show the similarities and differences among backpackers.

The classification is based on two dimensions: backpackers' physical distance to their home, and their psychological distance to mainstream conventional society. The mainstream society refers to the stable and routine life possessed by many young Chinese. The mainstream 'dream', as shown in earlier chapters, is to fulfil a middle class ideal: a house, a car, a stable family, and disposable income for leisure activities. As a result, four types of backpackers, namely the amateur, the dreamer, the escaper and the alternative seeker, are identified by this study. Trips taken by amateurs and escapers are usually shorter when compared to that of dreamers and alternative seekers. Furthermore, amateurs and dreamers tend to perceive home

and work as the centre of their lives, while escapers and alternative seekers tend to challenge and question mainstream values such as the middle class ideal mentioned above. The long-term backpackers within this classification, namely alternative seekers and dreamers, are rarely mentioned in previous studies.

As shown in Chapter Seven, this classification can partly reflect backpackers' socio-demographic backgrounds, as it is based on their life attitudes and travel patterns. It is also important to note that a backpacker is able to transfer to another classification, due to a change in life circumstances or specific experiences. To conclude, the classification provides a novel way with which to distinguish and classify backpackers. Furthermore, by investigating the differences between backpackers, it helps to understand how young people's life choices are influenced by their social background. In doing so, it provides a critical view of the path of individualisation within the context of China, as stated below.

8.3. Findings, implications and contributions to academic knowledge

As noted in the introductory chapter, there are two primary research objectives of this work: firstly, by investigating how an activity originating from Western societies is perceived and practised within China's context, the study aims to depict the younger generation's life choices specifically within the context of individualisation and self-identity (Giddens, 1991; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Elliott and Lemert, 2009; Yan, 2010; Barbalet, 2016). Secondly, by exploring the differences between backpackers and non-backpackers, as well as the differences among backpackers themselves, this study tends to examine the diversity of backpacker culture and the differentiation of the post-80s generation in China. In doing so, it seeks to discuss how the situation within China provides a critical view of the theory of individualisation (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002).

Based on the findings of the study, the following two sections will present two arguments. The first is that 'the pursuit of freedom' is perceived as the core of backpacker culture within China's context. Previous studies of individualisation in Chinese society have primarily focused on the emerging enterprising self within the post-reform era, which has been aimed at

achieving success (Fong, 2004; Chang, 2009; Liu, 2008; Yan, 2010; Wang and Nehring, 2014); However, this study reveals that, apart from the enterprising self, there is a 'self' associated with increasing reflexivity, developed by the younger generation. The self of reflexivity is primarily concerned with the freedom of choice and individual responsibilities, and this is precisely why young backpackers place 'independence' as the precondition of 'freedom'. A notable example in this study is that student backpackers were motivated to achieve financial independence when their parents did not support their dreams of travelling.

The second argument is that the concept of freedom not only relates to privilege and choice, but also to insecurity, and the problem of insecurity becomes unprecedentedly important within an individualised society (Elliott and Lemert, 2009; Beck and Grande, 2010). Beck and Grande (2010) previously suggested that there were types of risk insurance that are able to be distinguished in theory, namely a statist model, a societal model, and a neoliberal model, and the basic institutions of the former two models has been eroded under second modernity. It is worthwhile to examine whether Chinese people adopt a neoliberal model. In this study, most young Chinese participants, particularly the urban middle class, were found to be conservative regarding life choices. They tended to cooperate with their parents in order to reduce risks. The situation is closely related to the social conditions within current Chinese society, and 'family' has continually been regarded as the most important safety net. As a result, 'the pursuit of freedom' constantly causes anxiety for those who place individual interests as the priority.

8.3.1. The pursuit of freedom and the emerging self of reflexivity

Chapter Four notes that non-backpackers regarded 'the pursuit of freedom' as the primary character of backpackers. Moreover, most non-backpackers valued backpacking as a free way to travel, as 'freedom' represents strong individual capabilities, high social status and high efficiency, from the perspective of the prospective middle class. In Chapter Five, the study highlights that, although backpackers thought that 'independence' was the most essential character of backpackers, the very reason that they placed much emphasis on 'independence' was that independence was so often perceived as a precondition of freedom. Therefore, 'the

pursuit of freedom' can be recognised as sitting at the core of backpacker culture within China's context. Accordingly, it is crucial to explore why it is that 'freedom' is so appreciated by the younger generation in China. So, why is it so appreciated?

Previous studies primarily focused on how the emerging enterprising self - calculated, proactive, and self-disciplined – made use of the freedom of mobility, and searched for opportunities for success. For example, the longstanding perception of travel within traditional Chinese society, represented by the Confucian stipulation, *'fumu zai, bu yuanyou, you bi you fang'*[56], has been widely discarded by the second generation of migrant workers, who left their rural hometowns to pursue financial independence and romantic love in cities (Chang, 2009). There exists an ever-growing number of young people who travel overseas to obtain a degree (Xiang and Shen, 2009). First of all, this study reveals that the popularity of backpacking among the younger generation corresponds with the demands of the enterprising self. Backpacking is widely accepted as an alternative 'university of travel' (Pearce and Foster, 2007). Through travelling, backpackers improve their abilities such as identifying and solving problems, managing time well and communicating with a range of audiences, and these abilities are believed as relevant to future employment.

Within the study, backpackers were often regarded as individuals with ability and flexibility, as they travel independently with a flexible schedule. As showed in Chapter Four, non-backpackers, namely the prospective middle class, highlighted their willingness to control their trip, as they preferred *ziyou xing* (自由行, independent travel). Backpackers, as typical independent travellers, are perceived to enjoy greater freedom during the journey when compared to mass tourists. Independent travel requires that one has either spare time, money, or excellent capabilities to arrange the trip according to travellers' specific demands, compared to mass tourists who buy standardised travel packages from agencies. For example, the global traveller Ting and the dreamer Chi spent years preparing their trip, indicating that they are highly self-disciplined and well-organised. Accordingly, independent travellers can be considered as the mobile elites by nature (Bauman, 1998, 1996), and tourists with high 'cultural self-confidence' (Graburn, 1983).

[56] 父母在, 不远游, 游必有方. When his parents are alive, a son should not go far away; or if he does, he must let them know where he goes.

The popularity of *qiong you* (穷游, budget travel) over the last five years can be regarded as part of the increasing democratisation of backpacking within China. In the 1990s, the affluent middle class conducted backpacking in order to fulfil their interests in outdoor activities and enhance their social status (Zhu, 2007). However, it seems that budget travellers are more concerned with individual capabilities than social status. By emphasising a budgeted way of travelling, they gained status among other backpackers. As shown in Chapter Five, although Di was thin and small, she always carried her big and heavy backpack by herself. Although Ming could afford a private single room, she stayed in a dorm in order to be accepted by the backpacker community. Many young Chinese citizens with limited resources employ travelling as a way to educate and develop themselves. Although it is possible that they are making a virtue of necessity as discussed in Chapter Five, budget travellers claim that they gain greater authentic experiences, and develop excellent communication skills by getting the best value.

As the younger generation became more concerned with individual capabilities regarding travel, their purposes for travelling were more likely to relate to self-improvement, rather than solely pleasure-seeking. Accordingly, the idea *qiong yi ke you* challenges the traditional travel culture *qiongjia fulu* [57], as the traditional idea focuses on having a luxurious experience during the trip. As this study indicates, the different understandings of the purpose of travelling caused conflicts between generations. Student backpackers Zhi and Li placed much emphasis on the educational function of backpacking, while their parents thought that sitting in the classroom was the correct way to learn.

Accordingly, the idea that backpacking contributes to the enterprising self is one of the primary reasons that backpacking has become so popular among the younger generation. Young Chinese citizens living in the new millennium appreciate the ability to deal with uncertainty and change, as they understand that it is essential to achieving success in contemporary society. For example, some non-backpackers perceived backpackers as adventurous and outgoing, and considered these two characters as important in a society valuing creativity and communication skills. However, it is also important to point out that, although many backpackers and some non-backpackers recognised this perspective, there are

[57] '*Qiong yi ke you*', 穷亦可游. one can travel even though he/she is poor. '*Qiong jia fu lu*', 穷家富路, one should treat oneself well when travelling.

still many people in China who do not recognise it, such as the parents of Zhi and Li, and Peng's mother. According to this study, the culture of 'travelling for fun' still has great influence. For example, non-backpackers themselves preferred travelling with friends and family in order to relax. Also, the parents' generation places emphasis on having fun regarding travel.

Significantly, this study finds that, besides the enterprising self, a 'self' associated with reflexivity is found among the younger generation in China. Self-reflexivity has long been regarded as the essential character of late modernity, as shown in Chapter Two (Giddens, 1991; Elliott and Lemert, 2009). Giddens suggests that reflexivity is highlighted in 'fateful moments' (1991), while Elliott and Lemert contend that self-reflexivity 'will be all the more intense and essential when the changing world all about is filled with risks' (Elliott and Lemert, 2009, p.174). However, few studies on the younger generation in China perceived them as reflective subjects (Cockain, 2012c). In this study, backpackers' self-reflexivity primarily reflects two aspects: the first is their emphasis on freedom of choice, and the second is their emphasis on individual responsibility. Backpacker constantly referred to 'the self' when they had to choose as there was no undoubted principle to refer to; as a result, it was believed that 'the self' should take full responsible for the consequences of the choice.

This study finds that participants possessing different backgrounds employed backpacking as a way to reflect and examine the self, exemplified by classified escapers such as Fong and Peng. As noted earlier, Peng believed that to reflect and look back on the self was the better way to develop, although his mother did not agree. It is notable that 'the self', rather than any authority or social institutions, is regarded as the key to solving life crisis. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim indicate that within an individualised society, that traditional social order is in decline (2002); in relation, Giddens (1991) notes that the 'internal referential' becomes the most important rule for judgement. Fong, a participant in this study, interpreted his success in finding a new career and starting a new life - namely becoming a travel writer - as a consequence of 'following your heart and doing what you love'. According to Fong, because he referred to himself when facing a crisis, he eventually found out the solutions.

'Do what you love' is a phrase frequently mentioned by other backpackers in the study, such as Shen, Zu and Jin. Young people motivated by this idea insist on what they love, and often

go against parents' will, such as backpackers Zhi and Long. As shown in Chapter Four, although most non-backpackers implied that they would not like to live as a backpacker, they expressed their admiration for people were connected and faithful to their own feelings, and pursued their own personal dreams regardless of societal or parental rewards. It is believed by participants in this study that people who are fully engaged and fulfilled in what they do must be happy. Accordingly, the importance of 'do what I love' to a worthwhile life is like that of a 'pure relationship' to a happy life, as suggested by Giddens (1991). In this case, the self becomes the key to defining who you are and what you want to do; this is what freedom of choice means in this study.

It is independence that ensures the freedom of choice. As the case of student backpackers indicated, the mechanism of *xiao* (filial piety) in China changed to some extent. Today's filial relations are less concerned with authority, and more directed to financial and emotional support. The once unconditional duty of a child to obey and support the parents has changed into conditional. As long as young adults can be financially independent, it is possible for them to have the freedom to pursue what they want. This finding corresponds to several other studies of today's Chinese family (Cockain, 2012a; Shen, 2016; Qi, 2016). On the contrary, when young adults have to rely on their parents, they have to consider parents' opinion regarding life choices.

The enterprising self drives individuals to success. Furthermore, there seems to exist a consistent standard definition of success throughout previous studies on Chinese citizens living within a post-reform society (Fong, 2004; Chang, 2009; Liu, 2008; Yan, 2010; Wang and Nehring, 2014): they are found to work hard in order to gain more money and have a happy family. However, in this study, interviewed backpackers consistently question and challenge this conventional definition of success and happiness. The stories of backpackers classified as alternative seekers best illustrate that there are young people who value things other than money and a family. Young adults such as Long, Meng and Shen from middle class families refused to settle down and take up a stable job. On the contrary, they all chose to follow the mantra 'do what you love', believing that true happiness results from doing things you love. Moreover, not only young people with privileged backgrounds believed that they had freedom of choice, but also young people with underprivileged backgrounds reflected on mainstream values and tried to 'live a life of my own'. Young migrant workers such as Ning

and Di escaped from cities and chose to carry out a potentially endless journey. What united their view of 'freedom' is freedom of choice, namely, everyone has the right to decide the way he/she wants to live.

The idea of 'do what you love' not only questions conventional ideas of what constitutes a 'happy life' as stated above, but also challenges the prevailing idea that 'a man should be steadfast at the age of thirty' and that 'people in different life stages have different tasks'. In fact, the established ideas and norms are all challenged by the idea 'do what you love', as 'the self' becomes the primary judge of what one wants to do and should do. Alternative seekers adopt a constructive view of life and identity. Their reflections on these mainstream values mirror an increasing diversification of values in China, such as the rise of DINK (dual-income-no-kids) families (Hu and Scott, 2016). Also, as showed in the introductory chapter, the younger generation in China tend to judge their jobs and lives based on dimensions other than simply money, as they are concerned more with the 'meaning of the job', and want to 'work with people you like', compared to older generations (Chen and Lian, 2015; Lian, 2014). As China's cities have become prosperous and cosmopolitan - and as its youth have put greater emphasis on individual freedom and quality of life - the mantra 'do what you love' may be accepted by more young people, as this study indicated. In this study, some non-backpackers admired backpackers because they were not living for wealth or fame, but for their dreams. The image of dreamers and alternative seekers did fulfil non-backpackers' imagination, although the percentage of these two types were much smaller than amateurs in this study.

Escapers' self-reflections are most often triggered by life crises; it is important to examine the common factors that drive these young backpackers to reflect on their way of living. The first factor is the Internet. Many studies have noted that the Internet has played the most significant role in the making of all kinds of subculture in China (Lim, 2009; Varis and Wang, 2011; Ho, 2009; Yang, 2009), although the Chinese government consistently attempts to censor and control online spaces (Qiu, 2004; Yang, 2009). The result of this study further shows how the Internet not only plays a vital role in the formation of Chinese backpacker culture, but also encourages people to imagine a larger world. As shown in Chapter Six, most of Zang and Beibei's friends and colleagues had married in their early twenties and saved money for their family, but the two did not want to live in the same way. Their imagination of an 'alternative

lifestyle' was partly created by the Internet and the media. They knew the idea of backpacking from the Internet, and they found travel companions through the social media. Moreover, they relied on the Internet to gather information and prepare for the trip. The Internet plays a crucial role in their activity.

The second significant factor is the popularity of youth hostels, and the existence of places such as Dali. As shown in Chapter Seven, some backpackers were not expecting their transformation into backpackers classified as alternative seekers. They self-identified as 'kind of lost [their goals in life]' when setting off, and were searching for something unknown and ambiguous. People such as Ning and Meng were deeply influenced by long-haul backpackers they met on the road; they began to question whether the 'standard way of living' in China was what they wanted. Moreover, as shown in Chapter Six, the close relationships among long-haul backpackers - for example how they shared 'secret gardens' in Dali - provided emotional support for those who wanted to pursue an alternative way of living. In addition, youth hostels have created one of the biggest forms of institutional support for backpackers, providing cheap accommodation and a social atmosphere, as well as part-time jobs.

Moreover, many backpackers in the study criticised the routine of lives lived in cities, and described feelings of alienation and isolation within everyday life. Furthermore, they criticised the horrible living conditions in cities such as pollution, congestion and high cost of living. For example, Lv escaped from the city and stayed in Dali, claiming that he wanted to 'be more human'. This critique corresponds with earlier discussions of 'reflexive modernisation' (Han and Shim, 2010; Calhoun, 2010) occurring in East Asia, where people have suffered from the consequences of compressed modernity (Han and Shim, 2010). Han and Shim argue that 'the wisdom of balance' has been destroyed, as all people desperately want 'more' (2010, p.474). However, backpackers such as Xiao, the high school teacher, and Ting, the global traveller, both mentioned that making more money did not bring them greater happiness. As noted earlier, non-backpackers in focus groups also perceived backpackers as people valuing a more balanced way of living. Accordingly, the young generation becomes critical of the supposed achievements of modernisation and is concerned more about how to live a balanced life.

As a result, backpackers' pursuit of freedom can also be understood in regard to the framework of the search for an authentic self, as discussed in Chapter Three. Wang indicated

that the ‘authentic self’ - as pursuing existential authenticity - can be characterised through senses of nostalgia or romanticism. This study finds that some are searching for a freer, more spontaneous, purer, and truer self (nostalgia), while some are searching for a self to resist the constraints of reason and rationality within modernity (romanticism). For example, many backpackers mentioned that they were more likely to trust strangers when travelling, and that they always appreciated acts of kindness from strangers. These stories reflect the contention that backpackers are searching for a purer and truer self during their travels. The story of Lv can be interpreted as the search for a more romantic, authentic self. In some cases, people want freedom not as a good in and of itself, but because it allows them the space to find their ‘authentic’ self.

To conclude, this study contends that one of the biggest changes to occur over the last decade is that, presently, Chinese citizens are not only able to choose between various ways in which to achieve success, but can also choose their own approach to defining success. This is part of the critical thought processes referred by Ji when she describes the essential character of the backpacker. As people possess freedom of choice, they realise that the responsibility of doing so accompanies choice. Contrary to previous studies that suggest that the younger generation in China is made up of ‘frail pragmatists’ (Yan, 2006) or is a ‘strawberry generation’ (Lian, 2014) unable to bear hardships, this study asserts that the post-80s generation highly values independence. Stories such as those of the students who have challenged their parents’ authority and achieved financial independence when travelling, or backpackers choosing to travel globally rather than possess a stable job, demonstrate this argument. The college drop-out Nao mentioned one friend who was forced to give up his dream of travelling globally, due to his parents’ opposition. Nao thought that the biggest problem was that the young man could not afford the trip by himself. After telling the story, Nao concluded, ‘It was fair, as the parents are not supposed to pay for your dream’. However, when individuals are responsible for every choice they make, anxiety consistently accompanies emancipation. In the next section, I will discuss why, and in which way, most young Chinese citizens choose to cooperate with their parents, and develop ‘staged individualism’, a term coined by this study.

8.3.2. Staged individualism: Individualisation with Chinese characteristics

Although it is true that some young people follow the mantra ‘do what you want’ and possess their own definition of success within contemporary China, it is also true that the majority of young people do not consider backpacking as an appropriate and long-term way of living. As discussed in Chapter Four, preferences are for a stable life, individual ambition, traditional cultural values, and relevant social systems, which serve as the primary factors challenging the idea of backpacking as a permanent lifestyle. Although most non-backpackers suggested that lifestyle was a personal choice, they evidently thought that a responsible choice was never solely the outcome of personal preferences. In extension, backpackers who choose to live in an alternative way face criticisms of being unfilial and lacking ambition.

Moreover, in this study, it was found to be common that people work in places far away from their hometown, no matter whether they are young professionals or migrant workers. As stated above, the idea that ‘when his parents are alive, a son should not go far away’ is discarded by the younger generation. It appears that one is allowed to leave their parents for the purpose of working; however, if one wants to leave their parents for the purpose of ‘having a holiday’, the child may be criticised as unfilial and irresponsible. For example, when Peng wanted to conduct a long-term trip in order to recover from a life crisis, his mother insisted that it was a waste of time, concluding that Peng was unfilial. His mother believed that the only purpose for travel was to have fun. In focus group discussions, many young professionals pointed out, due to the situation that they stayed far away from parents, they had to go back home to visit parents during Golden Week Holidays. As a result, they had no holiday in which they could take a relatively long trip.

In this study, most backpackers did not consider backpacking as a proper way of living. The idea that all backpackers are idealists who pursue their dreams regardless of other’s ideas is arguably a romanticisation of the backpacker, as most participating backpackers are amateurs, dreamers and escapers. Except for a few alternative seekers, the majority of the participants in this study chose their parents, family and career over individual interests. As noted earlier, alternative seekers attempt to challenge the idea that ‘people in different life stages have different tasks’, and that ‘a man should be established in a career at thirty’. However, the majority of participants in this study - including both backpackers and non-backpackers -

tended to agree with these two statements.

In order to balance individual interests and family obligations, young people adopt ‘staged individualism’. This term has been coined by this study, and is used to refer to the idea that life has several stages, and that young people in China tend to be individualistic before getting married, and after retiring. For example, Chi insisted that he should act out his dream – cycling to Tibet – before getting married. Jin conducted a long-haul independent trip as a farewell to her youth. Zhi said that he would not travel so much once he began to work. Amateurs such as Ke and Zhi indicated that the role of backpacking in their lives continually changed. When one is young and single, he/she is allowed to prioritise individual interests; however, when one needs to fulfil wider social obligations and develop a career, he/she may have to sacrifice these individual interests. Zhi and non-backpackers such as Ling (female, 22, undergraduate) and Yan (female, 28, young professional) suggested that when retired, they wanted to travel globally and prioritise their individual interests.

It is common to find that people recognise the existence of several ‘stages’ of life. Within China, the most famous one is proposed by Confucius*: Shiyouwu er zhiyuxue, sanshi erli* (十五而志于学，三十而立)[58], which contends that one should set the heart up learning at the age of fifteen and be established at thirty. The age of thirty is thus widely accepted as a turning point within human life. In Western societies, the phrase ‘One man in his time plays many parts. His acts being seven ages…’; written by Shakespeare (n.d.), is also well known as a classic description of the different roles one should play at different stages in their life. However, this study finds that young Chinese people not only recognise that life possesses several stages, but also clearly indicates that some stages belong to ‘the self’, while others belong to ‘the family/society’. By developing ‘staged individualism’, they strike a balance between individual interests/desires and family obligations. Significantly, the moment that many young people demonstrated that they had sacrificed their own personal interests, it was indicated that they felt an internal conflict between individual interests and wider social obligations.

[58] The complete sentence is 吾十有五，而志于学。三十而立，四十而不惑，五十而知天命，六十而耳顺，七十而从心所欲。不逾矩. The translation is: At fifteen I set my heart upon learning. At thirty, I had planted my feet firm upon the ground. At forty, I no longer suffered from perplexities. At fifty, I knew what were the biddings of Heaven. At sixty, I heard them with docile ear. At seventy, I could follow the dictates of my own heart; for what I desired no longer overstepped the boundaries of right (Coward et al., 2007, p.281).

Bauman pointed out that within late modernity, the 'middle classes have not achieved their utopia of the "perfect balance" between equally coveted freedom and security. Instead, instability of social location and the ensuing "existential uncertainty" has become a universal human condition' (2008, p.1). In this study, the most anxious type of backpacker was not the young migrant workers. Most young migrant workers said that they did not gain much from their parents, as they were not the only child within the family,[59] and that their parents did not have many resources which could give to them. Moreover, they got used to the nature of unstable life. It was middle class children such as Shen and Zu - also elite college graduates - who felt extremely anxious. As highlighted in Chapter Seven, Shen gave up his 'naturally' middle class life in order to pursue what he wanted, and follow the mantra of 'doing what you love'. He emphasised that he had to take full responsibility for his life, as he had no one to blame if he failed. Zu stated that a good post-travel plan, namely how to reintegrate into society, was the precondition of setting off. According to him, if one did not have a plan about how to reintegrate into society, he would lose himself during the trip. He would not recognise the goal of life and just wonder around. In this case, one would waste his/her time and become the loser. It is true that those exposed to 'completed freedom', namely 'living my own life', often suffered from existential uncertainty, particularly those who came from middle class families, born with the privilege of possessing more than one life choice.

Although young people such as Ke did feel unhappy when their parents pressured them into giving up the hobby of backpacking when as they approached thirty years old, this study has found that the majority of participants chose to follow their parents' advice. Their pragmatic attitudes towards life correspond with a recent study on young Chinese citizens searching for jobs (Hoffman, 2008). The college graduates were found to sacrifice and marginalise personal interests for the sake of instrumental purposes, exemplified by the growing number of young people eagerly applying to be party members of CPC, and taking the Civil Servants' Examination (Hoffman, 2008). Their motivations for making such choices was to live a better life by entering the public sector, rather than adhering to patriotism (Rosen, 2004; Yan, 2006; Liu, 2008). In this case, some young people put 'working with people you like' and 'doing an important job' aside, instead choosing 'a stable job with no risk' as the most important factor.

[59] Most of them came from the rural parts in China, where the policy is less strictly implemented compared to the urban areas (Settles et al., 2013; Wong, 2016).

Accordingly, this study was forced to ask, why is 'stability' still of great importance to the younger generation? Why do the majority of people still place great emphasis on 'family obligation' and 'filial piety'? The answer to these questions is relevant to the social conditions in China. The most important factor is that increasing individualisation within China forces family members to work together in order to reduce risks and harm. Beck and Grande (2010) note that the process of reflexive modernisation has eroded social security systems in Western Europe and Japan. As a result, it seems that a neoliberal model, meaning that the individual has to cope with risks alone, is adopted globally. However, the situation in China slightly differs. As noted in Chapter Two, Yan (2010) contends that the distinct character of individualisation in China is related to how the nation does not possess an institutionally secured framework founded on civil, political and social basic rights, which was achieved by Europe during first modernity. Moreover, the former social safety nets of Chinese state socialism were also removed because of the economic reform. Young people who were born, educated, and worked in post-reform China faced the privatisation of housing, and the marketisation of education and medical care (Yan, 2010).

Moreover, as noted in the introductory chapter, the increasing price of commodities, as well as the high costs of housing loans and children's education has made the lives of the urban middle class more difficult over recent years (Yang, 2010; Wang, 2008). For the younger post-80s and post-90s generations who have entered the labour market since the 2010s, it is increasingly difficult to find a job, with the largest population of college graduates ever recorded, and even less proposed job positions (China Economic Website, 2013). Without help from parents, it is almost impossible for young people to settle down in big cities in China. It has taken many parents' entire life savings to make the down payment on an apartment; in these cases, their children must pay the mortgage. Chinese citizens are also responsible for taking care of their grandchildren, as both the mother and father must work in order to cover the expenses of having a family, and the cost of hiring a babysitter is too high (Wang and Fong, 2009).

In return, children are expected to undertake a stable job and settle down; here, a stable job not merely means a stable income to pay the mortgage. Moreover, according to the Chinese household registration system, a stable job and a private flat give you access to social welfare in a city. For example, your child can be enrolled at a nearby public school without paying

extra money, and you can enjoy public health services (Chan and Buckingham, 2008). As a result, you may possess the capabilities to take care of the parents when they are getting old. This is why Long, the college drop-out and alternative seeker, claimed that his parents and the whole social system wanted to discipline and control him by forcing him to get a college diploma, find a job, get married, and have a child. Long escaped, but most people choose to live in this way, and do not necessarily think of it as discipline. This interdependent relationship shared with parents appears to ease their anxieties. Therefore, what we 'want' to do is shaped socially, but it is not necessarily experienced as a sacrifice.

The findings of this study correspond with Jack Barbalet's observation of the individualised process in China, as he contended: 'The political and economic significance of the family continues to be highly salient during the reform era on a number of levels, maintaining and enforcing its social significance' (2016, p.20). For many young Chinese citizens, fulfilling family responsibilities and parents' expectations remain crucial. This is not only because they are influenced by traditional Chinese culture, but relates to how parents and children are forced to be interdependent - financially and emotionally - in order to reduce risks in life and make sure the interests of family members are harmonised and optimised (Qi, 2016). Here, the family also means emotional support. Although youth hostels and Dali act like 'home' to backpackers, they differ from their real, first 'home'. Although participants such as Fong and Che temporarily escaped from home to overcome a life crisis, they both returned, as they recognised the love provided to them from their family members.

Moreover, as the only-child generation, the relationships formed between parents and children are arguably closer. The single child is unable to escape and avoid family obligations, as they receive all kinds of support from parents, and even grandparents. It is true that there is always intergenerational tension due to cultural changes, as the conflict between student backpackers and their parents demonstrates in this study. However, Zhi, the young man who went backpacking against his mother's wishes, clearly stated that he would reduce the time he would spend travelling after graduating, as he agreed with his parents that one should put their career first. As noted earlier, many backpackers and non-backpackers in this study agreed that they ought to take on social and family related responsibility after graduating. This is how 'staged individualism' is adopted. The difference between the post-80s generation and their parents lies in how the younger generation evidently recognise that they have their own

interests and dreams besides fulfilling their role for family members; but the older generation may take this ‘sacrifice’ as granted. Therefore, part of the younger generation hopes that they can fulfil individual dreams after retiring, rather than taking care of their grandchildren, as their parents do.

The post-80s and post-90s generations were labelled as ‘little emperors’ when they were children, and it is contended that the extensive care and investment from parents and grandparents made them individualistic and self-centred (Wang and Fong, 2009). However, this study shows that when this generation begins to enter adulthood, the Chinese path of individualism forced them to be family-oriented. As a result, the risk of pursuing an alternative lifestyle is obvious within China’s context. Without a social safety net or family support, the cost of undertaking an alternative lifestyle will have to be paid for solely by the individual. This is precisely why young backpackers with middle class backgrounds were highly concerned with post-trip plans, as they worried about being alienated after returning to mainstream society.

In addition, individualisation in China is not an equally distributed process; social reform is state-sanctioned in China and led by the party. The resources and wealth were thus still extensively concentrated within the party and the government. This is precisely why jobs ‘within the institution’ (体制内), such as with the government, SOEs and a range of public institutions are extremely popular in China, as these employees enjoy greater welfare regarding medical care, pension and job security, than people working ‘outside of the institution’ (体制外), such as at private companies, foreign investment companies, or are self-employed. As a result, the risks are not equally distributed among Chinese people. Many people want to be civil servants for this reason, and jobs ‘within the institution’ are very difficult to obtain. Many people within China have realised how insecure their job is, and that the only way to ensure greater security is to work hard. Those within the institution may be more relaxed and comfortable. The majority working outside of the institution have to ‘continually strive to be more efficient, faster, leaner, inventive and self-actualizing’ (Elliott and Lemert, 2009, p.3), as their contemporaries living in other parts of the world have done. This is precisely why young professionals in this study’s focus groups said that they worked overtime on holidays, and carefully handled personal relationships in companies in order to

keep their job or receive a promotion. As they worked so hard and fulfilled the family/social obligation, they wished to do what they love after retired as the compensation.

To conclude, differing from the attitude that 'the trip is on my own', as shown in Chapter Five, the majority of the younger generation found it difficult to realise the dream of creating a life of my own. At first glance, they conformed to the traditional cultural value filial piety. However, this is a choice against the background of individualisation in China. By returning to the family, the younger generation gained greater security, resources and emotional support from their parents. In return, young people took account of their parents' advice and needs when making life choices. Importantly, this study reveals that the parent-child relationship in contemporary China is less concerned with authority and more concerned with mutual benefit, which was also evidenced in Qi's (2016) study of the family bond and family obligation in contemporary China. For alternative seekers who choose to refuse help from parents, they may be able to create a life of their own. However, in most situations, the social conditions drive one to be primarily family-oriented.

Staged individualism is a scheme developed by young Chinese citizens as a response to the question of - as Bauman interpreted it - how to be 'individually, together' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). Elliott and Lemert ask how it is possible to lead a meaningful, yet also autonomous, life (2009). In this study, young people evidently separate their lives into different stages, and set different purposes for every stage. One can be individualistic before getting married and after retiring, but one has to be family-oriented between these two stages.

8.4. Future research directions

The first point of exploration for developing this research would be to further investigate youth culture, other than backpacking, in China. This research has revealed how young backpackers' experiences and choices were influenced by individual factors, such as personal backgrounds and life attitudes. It also highlighted how backpackers' choices and lives were largely constructed by the state (regarding travel policy), the market (regarding the travel business such as youth hostels), international society (regarding Western culture), and

technologies (regarding mobile Internet). Moreover, this study did not overlook the continuities across generations within families and societies, particularly linked to social class, when emphasising generational characteristics. Thus, one future research direction would be to examine youth culture in China.

The second direction is to further explore the lives of alternative seekers, as they were the most radical group in this study. Alternative seekers can be understood as similar to 'lifestyle travellers' (Cohen, 2011), or the 'new global nomads' (Richards, 2015) in Western societies. They represent the diversification of China's culture. However, this group is rarely examined (Xu and Wu, 2016). Significantly, due to the increased living costs and the worsening environment in cities, the Chinese middle classes were found to escape from cities and search for cleaner and slower lives in remote areas (The Economist, 2014). Again, the city of Dali was one of their favourite choices. Accordingly, this city was found to be an ideal location for research, with an ethnographic approach used to investigate cultural changes within contemporary China.

The third direction would be to study foreign backpackers, through an application of the new proposed classification of the backpacker. Although the classification is generated from the study of Chinese backpackers, it creatively takes backpackers' travel motivations, travel behaviours and life attitudes into account. Therefore, it is worthwhile to explore whether the differences are eliminated or highlighted within the context of other countries. For example, this study shows that, within the context of China, backpackers' attitudes towards mainstream society have a substantial influence on their travel motivations and behaviours. However, it needs to be examined whether this connection is legitimate in other countries. As a result, one potential research plan is to explore whether the classification can contribute to deeper understandings of the heterogeneity of the backpacker phenomenon on a global scale.

8.5. Final remarks

The story of Chinese backpackers is a story about what it means to be free and independent within an increasingly individualised society. Chinese backpackers begin their journeys due to

their desire to pursue freedom, and employ backpacking as a process of reflexive awareness. During the journey, they learn new skills, examine the self and question the norms and values of a worthwhile life. As a result, backpacking not only nourishes the enterprising self, but also a 'self' associated with reflexivity. It indicates that the younger generation becomes critical of the achievements of modernisation, and shows the potential of how 'reflexive modernisation' (Han and Shim, 2010; Calhoun, 2010) may be developed in China.

Although the risk of carrying out a freewheeling lifestyle within such an individualised society drive the majority of travellers to return home, this study shows that participants do adopt a 'staged individualism'. By separating their lives into different stages and defining different purposes for each stage, the young people in China strike to balance individual interests and wider social obligations. This study also shows how the social conditions and the Chinese path of individualism make the younger generation to be family-oriented after entering adulthood. As a result, the life path of the younger generation is continually constrained by wider society. However, there nevertheless exists a small group of backpackers in China, who attempt to develop their own routine and extend backpacking into a way of living, and these identified alternative seekers draw attention to the profound cultural changes currently taking place within contemporary China.

Appendix 1 - Consent form (English and Chinese version)

University of Glasgow | College of Social Sciences

Consent Form (will be in Chinese and this is the English version)

Title of Project: Young Chinese in Social Transformation: The Making of Backpacking as an Alternative Lifestyle

Name of Researcher: Jia Xie

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the Plain Language Statement for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

3. I consent to interviews being audio-taped and acknowledge that copies of transcripts will be returned to participant for verification if requested. I know that participants will be referred to by pseudonym in any publications arising from the research.

4. I agree / do not agree (delete as applicable) to take part in the above study.

Name of Participant	Date	Signature
Name of Participant	Date	Signature

(if different from participant, eg Parent, Carer)

Note: it is appropriate to remove any reference to parent/carer if all participants are adults

Researcher	Date	Signature

1 for subject; 1 for researcher
Note: for some research it may be more appropriate to develop separate consent forms for the child and the parent/guardian if the subjects are under 18 years of age.

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同意参加研究声明

参加项目：转型社会中的中国年轻人：背包旅游作为生活方式的兴起

研究者：解佳

1. 我确认已阅读并理解此项研究的“研究说明”，有机会向研究者提出问题并得到答复。

2. 我确认本人出于完全自愿参加本项研究，并知道我在任何时候，不需要给出任何理由就可以退出研究。

3. 我确认此采访被录音，如果我需要，可以向研究者索取录音整理稿，确认其中内容。我知道基于此项研究的任何公开发表的作品中，我将被匿名，以保护隐私。

4. 我同意/不同意（请划去不用的选项）参与此项研究。

_____	_____	_____	
参与者姓名	参与日期	参与者签名	
_____	_____	_____	
研究者姓名	参与日期	研究者签名	

注：本同意声明一式两份，一份归参与者保存，一份归研究者存档。

Appendix 2 - Plain language statement for interviewees (English and Chinese version)

University of Glasgow | College of Social Sciences

Plain Language Statement (will be in Chinese and this is the English version)

1. Study title and Researcher Details

Young Chinese in Social Transformation: The Making of Backpacking as an Alternative Lifestyle
Jia Xie, PhD candidate in Sociology, College of Social Sciences, University of Glasgow.

2. Invitation paragraph

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

3. What is the purpose of the study?

This study aims at learning young people's understanding of backpacking as a lifestyle as well as people's attitude towards the relationship between travel and work. It tends to explore why in today's China, a group of young people would like to choose this lifestyle. Furthermore, the study on young Chinese backpackers provides a unique perspective to view young people, who are grown up in fundamentally different circumstance with previous generations. In short, it helps to gain a deep understanding of young generation as well as contemporary society.

4. Why have I been chosen?

Young Chinese who are between 18 to 35 with some experience of backpacking are the people I am looking for. I also need ordinary young Chinese, as well as local people in backpacking destination, to talk about their opinions on backpacking as a lifestyle. In total, there will be 50 to 60 interviewees in the research.

5. Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

6. What will happen to me if I take part?

The interview will take within two hours. I would like to know your personal background, to hear your travel experience, opinion about backpacking and the relationship between travel and work. The interview will be audio-taped. If you want, I am very glad to give you one copy of manuscript which based on the audio-taping after the interview conducted within one month. You are welcome to send me any feedback on the manuscript. After the interview, if there is anything not clear to me, I would like to ask you to explain it further by phone or email.

7. Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

All information, which is collected about you during the course of the research, will be kept strictly confidential. You will be identified by a Chinese pseudonym. Any information that will disclose your identity will be replaced by certain code so that you cannot be recognised from it.

8. What will happen to the results of the research study?

The study will be part of normal academic output, such as a dissertation, journal articles, and conference papers. If you would like to read the academic product, I am very happy to send you the copy.

9. Who is organising and funding the research? (If relevant)

My PhD study is funded by the China Scholarship Council.

10. Who has reviewed the study?

It has been reviewed by the College of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, University of Glasgow.

11. Contact for Further Information

If you have any concerns regarding the conduct of the research project, please feel free to contact Jia Xie, via email: j.xie.1@research.gla.ac.uk, or call 07459193400 (UK mobile phone number) and 15951847590 (China mobile phone number).
Or you can contact Dr Muir Houston, College of Social Sciences Ethics Officer, via email: Muir.Houston@glasgow.ac.uk and Prof. Gregory Philo, my first PhD supervisor, Gregory.Philo@glasgow.ac.uk .

University of Glasgow | College of Social Sciences

研究说明

项目和负责人

项目：转型社会中的中国年轻人：背包旅游作为生活方式的兴起

负责人：解佳，格拉斯哥大学社会学在读博士

邀请函

您被邀请参与此项研究，首先请您耐心读完以下有关说明。如果您有任何问题，请与研究者讨论。如果您想知道的信息在本说明中没有提及，请您务必向研究者提出。在了解此说明后，您自由决定是否参与，非常感谢！

此项研究的目的是什么？

改革开放后出生的年轻一代与其父辈有着迥然不同的成长经历，这使得他们的人生观，世界观与价值观也与父辈有所不同，而这集中反映在他们如何选择生活方式上。这种近年来兴起的特殊生活方式，是我们了解转型社会的一扇窗口。

研究旨在了解

1）为何当下中国，会有一批年轻人选择背包旅游这种另类的生活方式；

2）普通年轻人对于背包客以及背包旅游这种生活方式的态度；

3）受访者日常工作/学习与旅游之间的关系；

4）探索旅游观念变迁背后的社会机制。

为什么我被邀请参与研究？

此项研究旨在了解改革开放后出生的中国年轻人。因此，您年满 18，具有一定的旅游经验，正是研究者所寻求的被访对象。计划中，此研究共有 60-80 人参与。

我必须同意参加吗？

您自愿决定是否参加。如果您参加，在任何时候，您不需要给出任何理由就可以退出研究。

采访包括什么？

采访会持续两小时左右。研究者将围绕您的个人背景，旅行经历展开采访，同时了解您如何看待工作/学习与旅游之间的关系。采访将被录音，如果您需要，可向研究者索要录音整理稿，进行核对确认。采访后，如果研究者有任何不清楚的地方，将通过邮件、电话等方式跟您联系，寻求确认。

如果我参与，将被匿名，以保护我的隐私吗？

是的，基于此研究的任何公开发表作品中，您都将有一个化名。任何可能泄露您身份的信息都将通过处理，以保护您的隐私。

研究结果将会以何种方式呈现？

研究结果基本上为学术作品，如博士论文，期刊论文，会议论文。如果您想了解该作品，研究者将非常乐意提供拷贝。

谁是此项研究的赞助者？

此项研究没有赞助者，但是研究者的博士项目由格拉斯哥大学和中国国家留学基金委联合赞助。

谁会审阅此项研究？

格拉斯哥大学社会科学学院研究伦理委员会将会审阅此项研究。

如何了解进一步信息？

如果您对此项研究有任何疑问，请联系解佳：j.xie.1@research.gla.ac.uk, xiejia91@gmail.com，或者拨打移动电话 13776006014(中国)，07459193400（英国）。您也可以联系格拉斯哥大学社会科学学院研究伦理委员会负责人 Muir Houston 博士（Muir.Houston@glasgow.ac.uk）和研究者的博士指导教授 Gregory Philo 教授（Gregory.Philo@glasgow.ac.uk ）。

再次感谢您！

Appendix 3 - Plain language statement for focus group participants (English and Chinese version)

University of Glasgow | College of Social Sciences

Plain Language Statement (will be in Chinese and this is the English version)

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Jia Xie, PhD candidate in Sociology, College of Social Sciences, University of Glasgow.

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4. Why have I been chosen?

Young Chinese who are between 18 to 35 are the people I am looking for. Young Chinese are welcomed to talk about their opinions on backpacking as a lifestyle. In total, there will be 50 to 60 participants in the research.

5. Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

6. What will happen to me if I take part?

The focus group discussion will take within two hours. I would like to know your personal background, to hear your travel experience, opinion about backpacking and the relationship between travel and work. The interview will be audio-taped. If you want, I am very glad to give you one copy of manuscript which based on the audio-taping after the discussion conducted within one month. You are welcome to send me any feedback on the manuscript. After the interview, if there is anything not clear to me, I would like to ask you to explain it further by phone or email.

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The study will be part of normal academic output, such as a dissertation, journal articles, and conference papers. If you would like to read the academic product, I am very happy to send you the copy.

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Or you can contact Dr Muir Houston, College of Social Sciences Ethics Officer, via email: Muir.Houston@glasgow.ac.uk and Prof. Gregory Philo, my first PhD supervisor, Gregory.Philo@glasgow.ac.uk .

University of Glasgow | College of Social Sciences

研究说明

项目和负责人

项目：转型社会中的中国年轻人：背包旅游作为生活方式的兴起

负责人：解佳，格拉斯哥大学社会学在读博士

邀请函

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研究旨在了解

1） 普通年轻人对于背包客以及背包旅游这种生活方式的态度；

2） 受访者日常工作/学习与旅游之间的关系；

为什么我被邀请参与研究？

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我必须同意参加吗？

您自愿决定是否参加。如果您参加，在任何时候，您不需要给出任何理由就可以退出研究。

焦点小组访谈包括什么？

焦点小组访谈会持续两小时左右。您将和 4-6 个其他参与者一起就研究者提出的若干问题进行讨论。讨论无对错之分，旨在了解您的观点与态度。讨论将被录音，如果您需要，可向研究者索要录音整理稿，进行核对确认。访谈后，如果研究者有任何不清楚的地方，将通过邮件、电话等方式跟您联系，寻求确认。

如果我参与，将被匿名，以保护我的隐私吗？

是的，基于此研究的任何公开发表作品中，您都将有一个化名。任何可能泄露您身份的信息都将通过处理，以保护您的隐私。

研究结果将会以何种方式呈现？

研究结果基本上为学术作品，如博士论文，期刊论文，会议论文。如果您想了解该作品，研究者将非常乐意提供拷贝。

谁是此项研究的赞助者？

此项研究没有赞助者，但是研究者的博士项目由格拉斯哥大学和中国国家留学基金委联合赞助。

谁会审阅此项研究？

格拉斯哥大学社会科学学院研究伦理委员会将会审阅此项研究。

如何了解进一步信息？

如果您对此项研究有任何疑问，请联系解佳：j.xie.1@research.gla.ac.uk, xiejia91@gmail.com，或者拨打移动电话 13776006014(中国)，07459193400（英国）。您也可以联系格拉斯哥大学社会科学学院研究伦理委员会负责人 Muir Houston 博士（Muir.Houston@glasgow.ac.uk）和研究者的博士指导教授 Gregory Philo 教授（Gregory.Philo@glasgow.ac.uk ）。

再次感谢您！

Appendix 4 - Question sheet for focus group (English and Chinese version)

Name _____Gender_____Year of Birth

Email Address

Please write your thoughts and ideas on following questions if possible（There is no 'correct' answer for these questions.）

1. Who are 'backpackers'? What is your image of a backpacker?

2. Do you think the lifestyle of backpackers is 'non-mainstream'? Why yes or why no? What's your opinion on this kind of lifestyle?

3. Do you like traveling? How often do you travel? What is your motivation of traveling? What are the barriers of travel?

姓名　　性别

出生年份

邮箱

请就以下问题简单陈述您的观点和想法（陈述无对错之分，仅为方便讨论，每题三至五句话即可，谢谢）

1，　在您的印象中，“背包客”是怎样的人？

2，　您觉得背包客的生活是一种非主流的生活方式吗？如果是，您怎么看待这种生活方式？如果不是，为什么这不是一种非主流的生活方式？

3，　您喜欢旅行吗？多久旅行一次？您旅行的目的一般是什么？什么因素阻碍您出行？（每个问题可用一两句话回答）

Appendix 5 - Detailed information of interviewed backpackers

	Name	Age	Short biology	Year of first backpacking	Time duration for the longest travel	International or domestic traveller	When backpacking 1, full time backpacker; 2, part time; 3, student
1	Fong	35	Used to be a sales manager in Shanghai; resigned in 2009; backpacked and became a freelance writer; published three travel books	2010	One month	International traveller	Full time
2	Ting	40	Used to be a manager in Beijing; resigned in 2010 to fulfil the dream of traveling around the world	2011	Five months	International traveller	Full time
3	Jin	29	Changed several jobs between 2009 and 2014; resigned in 2014; conducting a long-term travel before getting pregnant	2014	Two months	Domestic traveller	Full time
4	Zhao	29	Backpacked a lot as a college student; resigned after working in a company for several years; working in a youth hostel to gain relevant experience in order to open a youth hostel	2009	Six months	Domestic traveller	Full time
5	Shen	25	Backpacked a lot as a college student; resigned after working in a company for eight months; working in a youth hostel when interviewed	2010	Three months	Domestic traveller	Student
6	Meng	25	Backpacked after graduated in 2012; changed several jobs in 2013; resigned and backpacked around the Southeast Asia in 2013; sojourning in Dali as a self-employed artist	2012	Nine months	International traveller	Full time
7	Beibei	25	Used to work as a foot masseuse with a low income; met Zang, Peng and Liao through the Internet; resigned in 2014 in order to backpack to Tibet	2014	Two months	Domestic traveller	Full time
8	Zang	26	Changed several jobs after graduated from vocational high school; met Beibei, Peng and Liao through the Internet; resigned in 2014 in order to backpack to Tibet	2014	Three months	Domestic traveller	Full time
9	Peng	28	Began to work at 16; Used to be a millionaire starting from scratch; divorced due to business failure; met Beibei, Zang and Liao through the Internet; backpacking to Tibet to investigate oneself	2014	Two months	Domestic traveller	Full time
10	Liao	25	Changed several jobs after graduated from a 'third-tier' college; met Beibei, Peng and Zang through the Internet; resigned in 2014 in order to backpack to Tibet	2014	Three months	Domestic traveller	Full time

11	Zu	26	Backpacked a lot as a college student; Used to work in an international accounting firm in Shanghai; resigned in 2012 for conducting a gap year in New Zealand; studying in UK after finished the gap year	2010	One year	International traveller	Full time
12	Yuan	26	Backpacked a lot as a college student	2011	19 days	Domestic traveller	Student
13	Ruan	26	Backpacked around the Southeast Asia after graduated; worked as a salesman for two years and resigned; backpacked around the Southeast Asia again in 2013; worked again for a year after returned; resigned and prepared for the next trip	2010	Six months	International traveller	Full time
14	Chi	29	Used to work in a travel agency; resigned in 2013 and cycled from Shanghai to Tibet to fulfil the dream; working in a travel-related company after the trip	2013	Three months	Domestic traveller	Full time
15	Bao	28	Backpacked a lot as a college student; working in a travel-related company and conducting short-term trip during holidays	2008	One month	Domestic traveller	Part time
16	Xiao	34	Working in a high school as an English teacher; backpacked a lot during holidays	2009	40 days	Domestic traveller	Part time
17	Long	20	Quitted college after one-year's study in 2014; criticized middle-class family and middle-class lifestyle; conducting a long-term travel in order to seek for an alternative lifestyle	2014	Six months	Domestic traveller	Full time
18	Di	26	Used to be a young migrant worker in a clothing company; resigned in 2013 to conduct a long-term trip; sojourning in Dali as a self-employed artist	2013	Two years	International traveller	Full time
19	Nao	21	Quitted college after one-year's study in 2014 and backpacked to Tibet; sojourning in Dali as a self-employed saleswoman	2014	Six months	International traveller	Full time
20	Li	23	Backpacked a lot as a college student	2012	One month	Domestic traveller	Student
21	Che	29	Used to work in a state-owned enterprise; resigned in 2011 due to the love of cycling and opened a bicycle shop; divorced in 2013 and closed the shop; backpacked to Nepal in 2013	2010	Six months	International traveller	Part time and Full time
22	Lv	25	Backpacked after graduated in 2012; worked in a delivery company for a year and resigned in 2014; backpacking in China	2012	Three months	Domestic traveller	Full time

23	Ming	24	Opened a clothing shop after graduated; closed the shop and backpacked to Tibet in 2014; sojourning in Dali and working in a local clothing shop when interviewed	2014	Three months	Domestic traveller	Full time
24	Zhimi	24	Backpacked a lot as college student; resigned after worked for a year in 2013 and backpacked to Tibet; working in a youth hostel when interviewed	2011	Five months	Domestic traveller	Full time
25	Ji	34	Resigned and backpacked in 2005; resigned and backpacked again in 2008; resigned and backpacked in 2010; working in a youth hostel from 2011 until now	2005	Five months	Domestic traveller	Full time
26	Ning	27	Used to be a young migrant worker; resigned and backpacked in 2010 and 2011; returned home and began to backpack again in 2012 and 2013; sojourning in Dali and managing a youth hostel now	2010	Seven months	International traveller	Full time
27	Fanqi	27	Backpacked for one month within China in 2011 after graduated from college; backpacked a lot in UK when studied as a postgraduate student in 2012	2011	One month	International traveller	Student
28	Ke	27	Backpacked a lot during holidays when worked in Xi'an from 2010 to 2014	2010	20 days	Domestic traveller	Part time
29	Pengyi	31	Backpacked a lot in UK when studied as a postgraduate student in 2007; travelled a lot when worked in foreign companies; opening a bakery in 2013	2006	20 days	International traveller	Part time
30	Zhi	23	Backpacking a lot as a college student	2013	One month	Domestic traveller	Student

Glossary of terms

Yuan	人民币, Renminbi
Baling hou	八零后, The post-1980s generation
Beibao ke	背包客, Backpacker
Da Xia	大侠, Knight-errant
Danwei	单位, Work unit. A work unit is the name given to a place of employment in China.
Donkey friend	驴友, Outdoor adventure tourists
Du wanjuan shu, xing wanli lu	读万卷书, 行万里路, Read ten thousand books and travel ten thousand miles
Fuerdai	富二代, The second generation of the rich
Fumu zai, bu yuanyou, you bi you fang	父母在, 不远游, 游必有方, When his parents are alive, a son should not go far away; if he does, he must let them know where he goes.
Fuanerdai	官二代, The second generation of the cadre
Huangjin zhou	黄金周, Golden Weeks, referring the weeklong public holidays
Jiuling hou	九零后, The post-90s generation
Lv xing	旅行, To travel and to walk/practise
Lv you	旅游, To travel and to play
Qingchun fan	青春饭, Rice bowl of youth

Qiong yi ke you	穷亦可游, One can travel even though he/she is poor.
Qiong you	穷游, Budget travel
Qiong youer	穷游者, Budget traveller
Qiongerdai	穷二代, The second generation of the poor
Qiongjia fulu	穷家富路, One should make every penny count at home, but should treat oneself well when travelling.
Shiyouwu er zhiyuxue, sanshi erli	十有五而志于学，三十而立, One should set the heart up learning at the age of fifteen and be established in a career at thirty
Tie fanwan	铁饭碗, Iron rice bowl, referring to an occupation with guaranteed job security, as well as steady income and benefits.
Wang you	网友, Internet friends
Xiao	孝, Filial piety
Yizu	蚁族, ant tribe, referring college graduates who lived on low income or desperately search jobs in big cities, habituating in areas of high density and poor conditions, in order to save money.
You xue	游学, To study by travelling
Zhengda Zongyi	正大综艺, Zhengda Variety Show, a popular national TV program
Ziyou xing	自由行, Independent travel

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