

## Understanding *Guimi* Holidays of Young Chinese Females: Evidence from Cyber Communities

### Abstract

The Chinese word *guimi* holiday literally refers to a female's travel with her best same-sex friend. This study aims to provide insights into young Chinese females' *guimi* holiday (闺蜜游) experience. They are distinctively female Chinese born between the 1980s and 2000s, raised under the one-child policy, lacking brothers or sisters. Aided in part by the diffusion of the internet, *guimi* related TV shows and movies, the *guimi* holiday has flourished in China. For this study, a qualitative methodology was employed to analyze travel blogs of *guimi* holidays collected from popular Chinese online travel communities. The findings reveal several elements that shape the *guimi* holiday experience: the *guimi* style of bonding, pursuing me and my authentic time, and multiple support. This study concludes with a discussion of operational implications and recommendations for the marketing of the *guimi* holiday experience for the tourism industry.

### Keywords

*Guimi* holiday; young Chinese female; grounded theory; friendship travel; travel blogs

### Introduction

Traveling with or visiting friends has long been a common practice in human history (Seaton, 2017). Even so, being away from home was not available for Chinese females until the liberation of Chinese women in the 1950s. The Chinese word *guimi* metaphors the narrowness of women's social interactions in imperial China with only a few limited female intimate friends of the same age. The word "mi" (蜜) means honey, which is also homophonic with another Chinese word "密" meaning secret or intimate. "*Guimi*" (闺蜜) as a whole means "female friends in boudoir" which refers to the best, intimate and talkative confidantes of a woman, but they are not based on blood ties, nor sexual appeal. This intensive friendship shares some similarities with women's romantic

friendship as depicted by Diamond (2000). The friendship usually includes the same emotional and behavioral characteristics as romantic relationships and has the characteristics of exclusiveness, inseparability, jealousy, hand holding, and embracing (Diamond, 2002). *Guimi* holiday as a whole represents female travel with the same-sex best friend.

With the Reform and Opening-up policies of China, Chinese females are challenging the traditional social norms of staying in the ‘boudoirs’ (*gui* in Mandarin) and are widely involved in business and leisure activities (World Economic Forum, 2018), though several constraints still exist. The 2018 report by the World Economic Forum shows that Chinese female labor force participation reaches up to 64% which is higher than the US (35%), Japan (36%) and the average level globally (50%) (World Economic Forum, 2018). Chinese female tourists are the main force of China's domestic tourism market (Xinhua, 2017). Per China's 2018 outbound tourism report, the number of Chinese female tourists exceeds males in taking oversea DIY holidays (Xinhua, 2018). Additionally, more and more young Chinese females are now traveling independently in same-sex friendship pairs on a *guimi* holiday (闺蜜出游), instead of joining in a package tour.

As a subgroup of global girlfriend getaways, the Chinese *guimi* holiday shares some similarities with the girlfriend getaways, for example, female-only, escapism and empowerment (Berdychevsky, Gibson, & Bell, 2013), but they also have characteristics which make them distinct. For instance, Chinese *guimi* have been found to travel in a small group size (usually two) with close, even best friends only (Chang, 2018; Che, 2016). Moreover, girlfriend getaways seem to be more popular among retirees and pre-retirees with an age over 50 in Western countries according to Brophy (2018). But the *guimi* holiday enjoys popularity among young Chinese females. The term “*guimi* holiday” is used in this paper to refer to Chinese girlfriend getaways. Despite the popularity of *guimi* holidays and increasing studies on girlfriend getaways in Western countries, little is known about Chinese girlfriend getaways in terms of the *guimi* holiday. Thus, this study seeks to provide insights into the *gumi* holiday experience performed by young Chinese females. First, a background to the research and a review of relevant literature on Chinese female tourists, *guimi* holidays and girlfriend getaways

are presented. With the literature gap identified, the netnographic approach was pursued to analyze travel blogs of *guimi* holiday collected from the most popularly used online communities. The findings are then discussed in comparison with previous studies and theories, and the paper concludes with implications, limitations and directions for further research.

## **Background**

### ***Policy, Socio-cultural Change and Chinese Women***

Looking back on history, Chinese women have gone through a long struggle for their freedom and rights. Arising from China's Reform and Opening-up policies in 1980s and the movement of feminism globally, Chinese women had gotten rid of foot-binding and the confinement of women to the home and boudoirs, then gradually entering the public social spaces that were not accessible for them in imperial China (Hong, 2013). Nowadays Chinese women have been continuously involved in political, economic and social affairs and are able to speak out their voice and pursue their own life goals.

However, the fight for women's rights is still not over, because they still must deal with sexism as well as fighting for the right to have babies, for the establishment of a career, and simply for happiness, etc. (Zurndorfer, 2018). Despite the rapid growth of the Chinese economy during the last thirty years, Chinese gender relations that are deeply rooted in patriarchal discourse seem to reveal a new combination of old and new ideals that lead to resurgences of gender inequality (Fincher, 2016). In addition, the one-child policy that lasted for decades has left most Chinese in their mid-30s or younger without siblings. They received all the attention and love from their parents and grandparents, whilst relatively isolated from their peers (Short & Fengying, 1998). (Hesketh, Lu, & Xing, 2005). The rapidly changing society has led to a "trust crisis", a sense of isolation and a lack of socialization among the younger generation (Rosen, 2009; Wang, 2003). Under such circumstances, a large number of Chinese women feel the pressure to find their position within new types of social commitments and new normative ideals with regarding gender roles, marriage, and personal fulfillment (Fincher, 2016). The lack of siblings and the low marriage rate in China also leads Chinese women to search for other sources of social support by which *guimi* of almost the same age and viewed as

extended family members may meet these needs for social interaction and support, just like in a recent news report that seven *guimis* built a house in the suburbs of Guangzhou and decided to live together after retiring (Sina, 2019).

### ***The Influence of Social Media***

Despite the support of the women's liberation policy and the influence of neighboring areas such as Hong Kong, Japan and Korea, the popularity of *guimi* holidays and the *guimi* economy is also attributed to the propagation and proliferation of social media (Netease, 2018). Since 2000, a series of movies, TV dramas, reality shows, and micro films about *guimi* have been filmed and produced one after another (Netease, 2018). Some examples include: *Hana and Alice* (花与爱丽丝) in 2004; *Nana* (娜娜) in 2005; *Tokyo Friends: The Movie* (东京朋友) in 2006; *Sunny* (阳光姐妹淘) in 2011; *Dear Galileo* (亲爱的伽利略) in 2009; the *Tiny Times I to IV* (小时代 1-4) since 2013; *Girls I to II* (闺蜜 1-2) since 2014; *Girls VS Gangsters I and II* (阳光姐妹淘) in 2018, etc. *Guimi* holidays would not be so popular today if not for the prevalence of the social media. Additionally, females who were born between the 1980s and 2000s are the main *guimi* holiday takers and are characterized by the extensive use of and reliance on the internet (Rosen, 2009). Some of them prefer recording their travel itineraries, sharing their emotions, memorable moments, and experience online by using photos, videos, and texts.

### **Literature Review**

This section provides the review of extant studies of Chinese female tourists, *guimi* related literature in Chinese, and the highly related literature of *guimi* holiday which is termed as girlfriend getaways in English. Specifically, The Chinese literature was accessed through CNKI which is China's largest online academic library. The information on publications related to the girlfriend getaway was collected from Science Direct (<http://www.sciencedirect.com>), EBSCOHost (<http://search.ebscohost.com>), and Google Scholar (<http://scholar.google.com.hk>). Science Direct and EBSCOHost are the two largest online databases while Google Scholar is the most popular search engine. The searching keywords included "girlfriend getaways", "all female travel" and "Chinese females/women". In addition, attempts

were made to trace references cited in published articles. The relevant articles of girlfriend getaways were shown in Table 1.

### ***Chinese female travelers and guimi holiday***

Modern Chinese females are more independent in terms of economic, political and social status (Guo, 2014), compared to former times. Modern Chinese women are widely involved in various leisure and tourism activities. A noticeable phenomenon is that more and more Chinese females nowadays are now traveling unchaperoned by a male companion or not on an organized packaged tour by which Stanford (2017) defined as female independent travellers. The *guimi* holiday referring to female same-sex companions of traveling represents a way to cope with potential travel risks and constraints. In addition, the traveling spaces of Chinese women expands from home nearby (in the form of garden tourism) in ancient times, to domestic travel and international travel nowadays (M. Li, Wen, & Leung, 2011).

Despite the increasing number of Chinese female tourists traveling domestically and internationally, tourism and leisure studies on this potential niche market are still scant and immature (Xu & Gu, 2018). To bridge the gap, *Journal of China Tourism Research* released a special issue on *Gender and Tourism in China* in 2018. However, none of the eight articles of the special issue mentioned the Chinese female tourist. To the best of the author's knowledge, the author is only aware of five to six studies that specifically focuses on Chinese female tourists. The early study by Hwang (2007) surveyed with 289 Chinese female tourists and argued that hotel services are male-dominated in China and suggested that the hotel industry should take measures to meet the expectations of female tourists. M. Li et al. (2011) examined the motivations of Chinese female outbound tourists and concluded that there are four push factors and five pull factors motivating Chinese women traveling abroad. Specifically, the push factors are; pursuing knowledge and prestige, enhancing social relationships, rest and relaxation, adventure and excitement. The pull factors include modern image, natural environment and attractions, safety and cleanliness, ease of tour arrangements, and shopping. Using travel blogs as data sources, Zhang and Hitchcock (2017) stated that the mainland Chinese female tourism to Macau is not only for leisure but also to bond with family and friends. It could be inferred that Mainland Chinese female tourists to

Macau did not travel alone but with family members and friends as bonding plays a central role beyond leisure. Taking an intersectionality perspective, Gao and Kerstetter (2016) investigated old Chinese female's perceived travel constraints and coping strategies. A total of eight types of constraints were observed: "limited knowledge of tourism," "health and safety concerns," "culture shock," "lack of travel partners," "low quality service facilities," "limited availability of information," "negative reputation of tour guide," and "few employer-paid vacations" (Gao & Kerstetter, 2016, p. 128). The coping strategies that are commonly used for old Chinese females include: group travel with friends, finding partners through square dancing, and taking donkey travel, etc. In addition, there are studies discussing Asian females by incorporating Chinese female tourists as a sub-segment. The main focus of these studies on Asian women is also about travel constraints and risks (see Yang, Khoo-Lattimore, & Arcodia, 2018 for example). Based on the aforementioned studies, it can be concluded that travel safety and security are still the major concerns for both Chinese females and females from other countries.

The academic literature of the *guimi* holiday in both Chinese and English is limited although tourism industries input tremendous efforts to market *guimi* holidays. For example, Y. Li (2014) listed the top ten *guimi* holiday destinations in China. Che (2016) depicted the *guimi* holiday experience in Hua Hin, Thailand and noted that it was a fully relaxing and memorable experience. Jiang (2015) posited that a *guimi* holiday is a real holiday for women and it is the time to get rid of the job, housework, husband and children but to be with their *guimi* to enjoy oneself with feasting and other kinds of entertainment. Shi (2015, p. 43) described, "the holiday with a *guimi* is an up-and-go trip and *guimi* walked out hand in hand along the street, talking about minds, sharing secrets, gossiping, and occasionally laughing loudly without being afraid of losing faces". However, all of these articles are descriptive and conceptual. More knowledge in terms of empirical studies is needed to understand the *guimi* travel phenomenon.

### ***Girlfriend getaways***

Girlfriend getaways is a contested term in academia (Berdychevsky, Gibson, & Bell, 2016). Song (2017) and Khoo-Lattimore and Prayag (2015) simply refer to it as "all-female tours". Specifically speaking, a girlfriend getaway refers to females traveling with only their female friends, family members, colleagues, sporting team members,

and fellow members from organizations to which they belong (Gibson, Berdychevsky, & Bell, 2012; Khoo-Lattimore & Gibson, 2018). Girlfriend getaways have enjoyed very rapid growth in recent leisure and tourism literature (Cavallari, 2008; Khoo-Lattimore & Prayag, 2018; Mirehie, Gibson, Khoo-Lattimore, & Prayag, 2018) and industrial practice. For example, the website [girlfriendsgetaways.com](http://girlfriendsgetaways.com) is solely dedicated to travel with female friends. Several online travel agencies have been designing girlfriend getaways routes, services, and products. Some hotels like Hilton, have already set up women-only floors.

A review on the research themes shows that motivations, satisfaction, accommodation preference, activities, well-being, and related discourses are the main sub research areas. Khoo-Lattimore and her several co-authors extensively focused on examining accommodation preferences, motivations, and satisfaction in girlfriend getaways by taking a quantitative approach. The conclusions of these studies are: Though the demographic characteristics of the girlfriend getaways market are homogeneous, the needs of the girlfriend getaways market are heterogeneous in terms of accommodation and service preferences (Khoo-Lattimore & Prayag, 2015). Women's actual self-image influences their preferences for accommodation and satisfaction with hotel services, and further influences loyalty (Khoo-Lattimore & Prayag, 2016). The main motivations for the girlfriend getaways are: feminine comforts, bonding with friends, safety, shopping, the use of discount promotions with girlfriend getaways (Khoo-Lattimore & Gibson, 2018) getting rid of daily routines, or to celebrate some special moments of life (Mirehie et al., 2018). The gradual popularity of girlfriend getaways can actually facilitate social bonding by providing feminine comforts and can also overcome the travel constraints of safety (Khoo-Lattimore & Gibson, 2018). The motivations for girlfriend getaways and the accommodation preferences are varied across nationalities and ethnicities (Khoo-Lattimore & Prayag, 2018). Moreover, three segments could be observed, namely socializers, enjoyers, and rejoicers (Khoo-Lattimore, Prayag, & Disegna, 2018).

In contrast, Berdychevsky and her co-authors take a qualitative approach in examining the meanings, experiences, well-being, and discourse of girlfriend getaways. For example, Gibson et al. (2012) take a phenomenological qualitative approach in examining the meanings and experience of girlfriend getaways within a social

constructivist paradigm, which seems to be a methodological innovation in studying women's girlfriend getaway holiday experiences. The findings of this study indicate that girlfriend getaways satisfied diverse psychological needs through various life stages of females with some common themes, including escaping from stress and routines, dealing with life transitions and re-bonding with friends. Berdychevsky et al. (2013) studied the importance and contributions of girlfriend getaways on women's well-being, concluding that women gained temporary freedom, empowerment, and escapism from girlfriend getaways. Moreover, Berdychevsky et al. (2016) interviewed 83 American and Canadian women using discourse analysis. The authors concluded that the phrase "girlfriend getaways" was a contested term. While some women deemed it an adequate and suitable term to depict their all-female travel, there were other women who thought it was stereotypical and inadequate to describe their travel experience. In addition, the study by Song (2017) examined the top activities of all-female travel of Hong Kong women and concluded that wellness and relaxation, food and entertainment, city sightseeing are the favorite activities of Hong Kong females. Moreover, Durko and Stone (2017) argue that girlfriend getaways provide benefits to healthy relationships and the holiday satisfaction of girlfriend getaways is usually lower if ones' partners participate.

**[Insert Table 1 here]**

It should be noted that the girlfriend getaway is very much related to the Chinese *guimi* holiday, because both are associated with the phenomena of all-female travel in tourism. But there are several differences between girlfriend getaways and *guimi* holidays. First, a girlfriend getaway is simply defined as all-female travel and has no clear boundaries except excluding males while *guimi* are usually close female friends with almost the same age but excluding female strangers, general female friends and female family members like mothers. Second, in terms of group sizes of travel, girlfriend getaways usually involve larger numbers of female travelers (e.g. the Red Hat Society in the US) while a *guimi* holiday is with one or two female confidantes. Third, girlfriend getaways are preferred by and targeted at women of retirement age in Western countries, but *guimi* holidays are more popular among young females in China (Peterman, 2017).



## **Research Methods**

The lack of existing research into the Chinese *guimi* holiday led the researchers to choose grounded theory as the method. Grounded theory enables a gain in theoretical sensitivity especially in the exploration of a new research field (Charmaz, 2006). The aim of this study is not to test preconceived hypotheses. Instead, it is to provide insights into the emerging phenomenon. The researchers acknowledge their inevitable impacts on the data collection and the associated data analysis, detaching from the dominant scientific realism whilst moving toward a more contextualized perspective of reality (Hirschorn & Hefferon, 2013). According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005, p. 24), the constructivist paradigm “assumes a relativist ontology (there are multiple realities), a subjectivist epistemology (knower and respondent co-create understandings), and a naturalistic (in the natural world) set of methodological procedures”. Accordingly, as suggested by Gibson et al. (2012, p. 38), “a constructivist, women-sensitive approach” and grounded theory was adopted in this study.

Travel blog is defined as “online diaries that describe tourists’ experiences of their travel” (Bosangit, McCabe, & Hibbert, 2009, p. 62) which include texts, photos, and videos, etc. (Costello, McDermott, & Wallace, 2017), whilst bloggers are “self-reflexive individuals who tell their stories and explain their actions using their own words, which are useful in understanding the hedonic and subjective dimensions of experience” (Bosangit, Hibbert, & McCabe, 2015, p. 5). This qualitative study uses online communities as the place for fieldwork with travel blogs as the data source (Bryman, 2016) for the following reasons. First, travel blogs are regarded as an under-utilized resource for studies of tourist experiences (Bosangit et al., 2015). Second, the use of documents can provide a spontaneous, unfiltered viewpoint of the topic under investigation. Third, several researchers have attempted to analyze user-generated content (UGC) to study tourist experiences and behaviors (e.g. Bosangit et al., 2015; Mkono & Markwell, 2014).

### ***Data Collection***

Blogging enjoys popularity among young Chinese people who are committed to recording and sharing their vacation experiences online. Chinese tourists’ travel blogs

have been used to explore various tourism issues. For example, Wu and Pearce (2014) studied Chinese recreational vehicle drivers' motivations in Australia by using images and text generated by 22 Chinese bloggers. In another study by Wu (2015), she examined the safety concerns and coping strategies of Chinese recreational vehicle drivers in Australia by using 37 blogs posted on Qyer.com and Sina.com. Using 102 Chinese travel blogs related to five tourist cities in China, J. Li and Pearce (2016) identified various types of tourist scams against Chinese domestic tourists in popular tourist cities of China. Using Chinese travel blogs as a data source with content analysis, Sun, Ryan, and Pan (2015) investigated New Zealand's destination image as perceived by Chinese tourists. In a recent study, Jin, Moscardo, and Murphy (2019) collected 40 Chinese travel blogs to examine the features of Chinese tourist shopping behavior in Australia using social practice as the theoretical framework.

Accordingly, tourist generated blogs can provide researchers with rich *guimi* holiday narratives. To ensure the reliability and consistency of the data set, the search of blogs was firstly through input of the keywords “gui mi chu you (闺蜜出游)” “jie mei tao (姐妹淘)” in Mandarin through the most popular three travel blog websites in China, Blog.sina.com.cn, Mafengwo.com, and Qyer.com (Sun et al., 2015). All of the aforementioned websites are well known for their large number of users and massive user-generated content. They are popular websites that had been chosen by other tourism scholars in their studies (Wu & Pearce, 2014).

The data collection and related data analysis were conducted from January 2019 to April 2019. The first author of this study collected all the travel blogs, as she is familiar with Blog.sina.com.cn, Mafengwo.com, and Qunar.com and is a registered member on these platforms. The first author searched for “gui mi lv you (闺蜜旅游)” or “jie mei tao (姐妹淘)” after logging in to the website of blog.sina.com.cn and categorized all the travel blogs associated with *guimi* holidays. Then the author read all of the relevant travel blogs. Texts were copied and pasted into Word documents, and the related images were stored in separate folders. The same procedures were applied to travel blogs on Mafengwo.com, and Qunar.com.

**[Insert Table 2 Here]**

In order to keep in line with the guidelines of exploratory qualitative research, purposive sampling was used in this study to generate adequate elements for theoretical saturation (Suri, 2011). The authors tried to get consent from selected bloggers to use their blog postings for research purposes by leaving messages in the comments sections. A total of twenty travel blog entries were retrieved, with six blogs from blog.sina.com websites, seven each from Mafengwo.cn and Qyer.com. The authors built contacts with the twenty bloggers via WeChat to further confirm the content posted on the internet and to gather personal information (Ma, Hardy, & Ooi, 2019). Table 2 presented the profiles of these bloggers, based on information from their profile pages and message exchanges via WeChat. NVivo 11 was then used to assist for coding and classifying the texts (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). The guidelines of coding suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006) were followed to conduct thematic analysis. Each author conducted the coding independently by fragmenting the texts into sentences, phrases, and words and then indexing the discrete units based on shared or different meanings. After the initial individual coding, a brief meeting was held to deal with the discrepancy of codings and to achieve an agreement. The examples of codes, categories, and themes related to data extraction were shown in Table 3.

**[Insert Table 3 Here]**

## **Findings and Discussions**

*Guimi* holiday takers blogged the episodic memories of both their friendship and the holidays. The data analysis from this study showed three elements of the *guimi* holiday experience. Me and my authentic time, *guimi* style of bonding and multiple support. Several sub-elements were revealed under each main element. Also, verbatim quotes are employed to support participants' arguments wherever possible. The findings are presented and discussed in consideration of the broader scholastic literature.

### **Me and my authentic time**

The me and my authentic time is a representation of self-identity and individuality, when young Chinese female tourists enter into a spatial enclave where they can be their authentic selves. This finding is not surprising in the sense that the search for the self

and meaning and identity reconstruction have been revealed in previous research (Khoo-Lattimore et al., 2018). The *guimi* travel pattern is, however, different from that reported for girlfriend getaways in Western countries traveling in large package groups (e.g. the Red Hat) by including both female acquaintances and strangers (Gibson et al., 2012; van Bohemen, van Zoonen, & Aupers, 2014). *Guimi* holidays are based on strong social ties (*guanxi*) and is a trip with one's intimate female friend, as a result, the authenticity and high self-disclosure arises because of the trusting, confidant intimacy granted in their shared time and space. Most travel bloggers described that a *guimi* holiday represents a self-organized activity at a special time and space. They do not have much opportunity to engage in this type of holiday but once they have successfully designed such a holiday, they behave totally differently than they do at home. They enjoy themselves very much and they became closer to their authentic selves. A number of interpretive codes were found in the collected travel blogs. Some of the examples include: "my own holiday", "my fun moment", "out of daily routine", "relaxation occasion", "get rid of family responsibility", "perfect break" and so on. These are all descriptions of how the participants give special meanings with the *guimi* holiday. Two blogs illustrate this:

It is my own holiday that I can go shopping and chat with my female best friends. It is to celebrate something. It is the occasions of sharing our stories about the past few days, months and years. It is the time to escape from the responsibilities to children and husband, those kinds of things. To do something different from your daily life. We seldom have time to be together. For this holiday, we planned for a long time. (Zhang)

We planned to do something special with my female friends to make this trip memorable. The pajamas party is one part of it. My friend Yueyue prepared various headdresses, earrings, necklaces, including rabbit-like and cat-ear styles for me in advance to organize a pajamas party. And four of us wear pajamas and took photos in the hotel room together, which we think it was a special ritual for us and it was something that we never did before. After many years, we might be able to remember the sceneries there, but we shall not forget the pajamas party. (Han)

In addition, such a kind of holiday were viewed as something that distinguishes the time with family or work from the time of one's own. The *guimi* holiday experience

was an opportunity for young Chinese female tourists to relax, to be authentic selves. This is coincident with what Green (1998) had mentioned, that the friendship itself is “a site for leisure and relaxation” (p.181). Also, it is regarded as a self-reward for their hard working at home and company during the day and night. As explained in one of the bloggers:

During the past few months, I have been continuously working on a project at the company while after working, I have to tutor my son’s homework. I really need a holiday. At that time, Lin sent me a message through WeChat saying that there was some discount of air tickets to Thailand. We then booked the ticket and left it all behind... And this is the only time that I feel I get off from my job and family to relax. (Xiao)

### ***Guimi* style of bonding**

The term bonding refers to an individual’s emotional attachment and commitment to his or her various social relationships (e.g. parents, peers, siblings, romantic partners) (Lee & Lok, 2012). Heimtun and Abelsen (2012) posit that bonding is gendered and females pay more attention to and need more bonding than men, however, there is a lack of research on how bonding influences the tourist experience. Lee and Lok (2012) noted that the influence of culture should be considered when examining the phenomenon of bonding. The findings of this study show that the bonding of a *guimi* holiday is a hybridity of gender and elements of Chinese culture. Specifically, the performance of bonding is through the practice of intimacy, femininity, and interpersonal harmony. More specifically, the practice of intimacy and femininity is performed through non-sexual touching (e.g. cuddling, hugging, hand holding, etc.), sharing secrets and feelings, discussing common interests, or simply being together and listening to one’s emotional needs. For example, Qiu mentioned in her blog:

The destination is actually not important for me. The most important thing is to be with my friend. Most time of the holiday, we just stay in the hotel and chat for hours. Sometimes both of us do not want to go out. Then at night, we went out for dinner, going shopping and photographing together, and we relaxed in Lijiang. We were foodies and actually found great food over there. (Qiu)

Liu noted sharing secrecy, emotions and feelings through bedtime chat:

Bedtime chat (卧谈会) is also one of the main holiday activities...., we talk about a lot of things all night long. It is our spiritual time. I talked about everything good and bad about myself to her, my friend knows all my disgraces, but she keeps my secrecy for my good image...(Liu)

The important role of talking and sharing secrecy between *guimi* while on holiday is not surprising, as Johnson and Aries (1983, p. 353) noted, “talk is central to close friendships between women.” However, a *guimi* holiday offers a more relaxing atmosphere for talking. Additionally, the practice of intimacy and femininity was through sharing cosmetics, snacks, drinks, trying each other's clothes, jewelry, sharing one bed, and giving suggestions on dressing and making-up. For example, Lu and Zou described in their blogs:

One of the things about traveling with my female friend is we do not need to bring too much stuff, my friend has everything I need in her luggage..., it's like a treasure box..., I do not even need to bring my clothes, as we wear clothes of the same size, not to mention cosmetics, we are almost sharing everything.... (Lu)

The night market in Taiwan provides hundreds of thousands of delicious food. We want to try all of them. But obviously, our stomachs could hold so much. We made the strategy to buy only one snack at each stall and share with each other, and we even drink one cup of mango ice together, though the hawker reluctantly gave us two straws... (Zou)

Tacit understanding, in Chinese *moqi* (默契) was also mentioned by bloggers. A close, intimate friend is also called *Zhiji* (知己) in China. By referring to one as a *Zhiji*, is to describe a friend that is hard to find in life which represents the highest realm of friendships. *Moqi* is often mentioned by *guimi* that based on such kinds of friendship in the travel blogs with phrases like “we can always have the same idea and understanding”, “we know each other's likes and dislikes”. For instance, Xu wrote,

Cui, Zhou, and Li were my roommates when we were university students seven years ago. We thought about organizing a reunion trip of *guimi*. Actually, we have not seen each other face to face during the past few years. Even though we did not meet with each other for so long time, we still remember each other's favorite food and taste ...we do not have to negotiate with other each when ordering food. (Xu)

This point is in line with Merkin (2018)'s notion that tacit understanding provides friends in collectivistic cultures with mutual support. However, the pursuit of moqi does not mean that conflicts do not exist on a *guimi* holiday. The findings also show that superficial harmony was achieved through compromising and forbearance by *guimi*. As indicated by Hong,

Zhou used to be my best friend, but this trip makes me know her much better. Lots of inharmonious things happened during our trip. I tried to be more patient, I tried my best to control my temper and do not show my anger to what she had done. She did not follow our traveling schedule at all and just followed her own mood and do whatever she wanted to. We could not catch up with the train as she got up late. Though I did not say anything about this during the trip, as I want both of us to have a happy holiday, however, I do not travel with her anymore in the future.

Hong's solution to conflicts actually followed the Chinese culture of forbearance (忍), as an old Chinese saying goes: 'if you are patient in one moment of anger, you will escape a hundred days of sorrow' (忍一时风平浪静, 退一步海阔天空). However, Hong also pointed out that it is through this trip that she knew her friend much better and started to know that there are so many incompatibilities between them. The exploration of the *guimi* style of bonding in this study enriches the understanding of interpersonal harmony and women's friendship.

### **Multiple support: Social and emotional support**

Previous studies show that women's friendship provides various social support for females (Allan, 1989). Specifically, female same-sex friendship provides women with a new sense of identity, confirming their social value and promoting their personal growth that is closely linked to social capital. In this study, the *guimi* holiday gives women the social support of temporarily getting rid of family and work related responsibilities, while the emotional support is mainly through talking and the encouragement to do things that one would not have enough courage to do in daily life. Johnson and Aries (1983) highlighted the importance of talking as emotional sharing through female friendships in the context of the holiday. Likewise, "according to Green (1998), women's talk is a forum for gender identity construction that offers opportunities for resistance, self-empowerment, and feelings of autonomy, as women-

only company enables them to temporarily disregard expectations regarding gender-appropriate behavior and to ‘let their hair down’” (as cited in Gibson et al., 2012, p. 40). Women’s talk is a powerful medium in the process of friendship, the construction of personal identities and the maintenance of gender division. These points have been illustrated by the statement from one of the travel blogs:

I remember I saw someone I fell in love with at first sight at a hostel. My *guimi* said, “why not go ahead and get his contact means...”, I would not have the courage to do that if without her. Another time, it rains heavily outside, while I really do not want to stay indoors, then my friend said, let us go barefoot to the park to dance and play in the rain. Those things you want to do but worry about being too crazy and foolish, just because of a word from your female friend, it allows you to do whatever you want.” (Qiu)

A word from a *guimi* can set off hours of talking and conversation. The older I get, the more valuable I feel my female friends are. Not only because of the tacit understanding that she has with you at every moment, but also because even we are away for 20 years. Even in different working and living conditions, we can still encourage and support each other. Whenever you are happy, confused or sad, you will always have ears when you want to say or share something. Well, when you are unwilling to speak, she will not ask and just be there with you. How valuable a *guimi* should be. (Wang)

The social and emotional support also includes a sense of security with the company of *guimi*. According to Wilson and Harris (2006), women may experience the geography of fears which means there are certain areas (e.g. public male violence and harassment in some places) that a female might feel unsafe to visit alone especially in the evening. When with the company of friends, they might get the sense of empowerment which means being able to respond to travel risks and sexualized gaze. This proposition is consistent with Berdychevsky et al. (2013) who posit that girlfriend getaways offer women the empowerment to resist gendered ideology. However, the difference in the *guimi* holiday is based on close friendship and the instrumental function of friendship relates to bonding social capital in public spaces. As a whole, for the young Chinese women, bonding with female friends is a spiritual, empowering capital that reduces



travel fears while protecting them from facing unwanted sexualized gaze. The following excerpts from the travel blogs provide some illustrations.

Malaysia was not safe for holiday at that moment after the Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 and the Hijacking in Senbena, I did not disclose anything about my trip to my parents at all, because they would not allow me to travel there. But I did not worry about my safety that much, because we have two of us traveling together...(Chen)

It was dark, and we arrived late due to the delay of airlines, we have to find the hotel we reserved, because Liu is with me, I feel safer than being alone in a new country where I had never been to...(Pu)

I know Lijiang's nightclubs are very famous and I am very curious, but I dare not to go there at night by myself alone. Because I think going to nightclub is men's stuff, when women go to nightclubs, others will tag them as bad women. Also, I am afraid to be gazed in a sexual way by unknown men. To satisfy my curiosity, my friend Qi and I decide to go to a nightclub together to get an experience. And this is the first time went to a nightclub in my life... (Qiu)

However, despite providing some psychological support, it should be noted that the empowering capital is mainly symbolic, because Heimtun and Abelsen (2012) pointed out that, if the female friendship groups were attacked when they are together, they can be easily overcome based on their physical strength.

Beyond the above-mentioned the emotional, spiritual, symbolic support, there is also instrumental support that is performed by the female same-sex friend in a *guimi* holiday. The instrumental support refers to the tangible help that the female friend may provide. This kind of support can be in multiple forms including helping with packing, booking hotels, air tickets, preparing an itinerary and so on. Several blogs presented this kind of support. For instance, Zhang, a woman who was pregnant for five months, described her trip to Thailand with her *guimi*:

The night before our departure, my *guimi* came to my home to help me pack my baggage including: straw hats, skirts, slippers, bags, disposable underwear, daily nuts, calcium tablets, skin care products, cosmetics..., as the hotel does not include breakfast, Yishao got up early in the morning and went to a 7-Eleven shop to buy breakfast for me..., besides,

during the six days of traveling, Yishao never allowed me to carry a suitcase and she was always caring for me. As some places have no elevators, she had to carry two suitcases upstairs one by one. The two suitcases are neither small nor light. When ordering food, she always takes into account that I am pregnant. I think even with familial sisters, it's just like that! (Zhang)

We hadn't seen each other after graduation and this trip is a promise that we made when we were graduating. But when we try to plan our trip, we must find a time that both of us are available. Because Xia is very busy, so basically, we planned and prepared everything for her, she just needed to go directly to the airport after her work and join us. (Liu)

## **Conclusions**

This study advances our understanding of the *guimi* holiday experience of young Chinese females. Taking grounded theory as the approach, the findings of this study show that the *guimi* holidays performed by young Chinese females are multifaceted, with travel distances ranging from domestic holidays to international travel, travel periods from a short weekend to longer stays of ten days. The themes related to *guimi* holiday experiences are, the me and my authentic time, *guimi* style of bonding, and multiple support. Specifically, the me and my authentic time element is representative of a sense of authentic individuality and escapism performed by young Chinese females. This finding is in line with the research results by Berdychevsky et al. (2016) in concluding that the sense of freedom and escape are an adequate reflective of the experiences of girlfriend getaways. The *guimi* style of bonding in this study is similar to the gender dynamics of female bonding identified by Durko and Stone (2017) and Berdychevsky et al. (2013), though these two studies were conducted with women from Western countries. Multiple support has two dimensions: social-emotional support and instrumental support. Both are based on women's friendships (Chupkowski, 2007). By integrating the different themes and elements into the explanation, a final conceptual framework of *guimi* holiday experiences is developed and presented in figure 1.

**[Insert Figure 1 here]**

The *guimi* holiday experience performed by young Chinese females in this study consists of three dimensions and each of them is inter-related. Likewise, Durko and Stone (2017) found that in an all-female holiday without ones' partners, the need to get rid of the day-to-day life, bonding with female friends and partners' personal constraints are the main reasons for pursuing such a holiday experience. Therefore, women's holiday experiences are shaped by the person with whom they travel. Just as Henderson et al. (1989, p.103) mentioned, "women only groups are a way that women may experience leisure more freely because they are in a less role-restricted environment." Following Bella (1989)'s line of thought; for females, it is the bonding with like-minded friends on holiday that is more important (Heimtun & Abelsen, 2012). As such, the element of the *guimi* style of bonding, referring to doing girly things on holiday such as shopping, chatting, dressing up, etc., comprises a significant part of the *guimi* holiday experience.

In addition, comparing with existing studies that have mostly focused on Western women's holiday experience (e.g. Berdychevsky et al., 2013, 2016; Heimtun & Jordan, 2011; Khoo-Lattimore et al., 2018), this paper contributes novel understandings of what contributes to a *guimi* holiday experience, which seems to be under-voiced in academia from young Chinese females' viewpoints. Moreover, previous studies have acknowledged the all-female holiday experience as a means for benefiting women's well-being (Berdychevsky et al., 2013) and even strengthening a romantic relationship by freeing one's partner (Durko & Stone, 2017). The findings of this study also reveal the *guimi* holiday experiences performed by young Chinese females whose interactions are more intimate and closer in nature, which differ from those identified among Western girlfriend getaways. Specifically, this study extends prior findings of girlfriend getaways by revealing that the Chinese *guimi* holiday experience is not a simple, passive escaping from daily responsibilities but one where they can increase their personal growth. Also, this study provides useful managerial implications in terms of insights on how to design or package Chinese *guimi* holiday products, services and experiences. This study could help destination marketers or travel agents in terms of packaging or promoting the *guimi* holiday experiences and providing tailored services for the young Chinese female tourist segment.

Several limitations could be found in this study. First, as travel blogs include multiple forms of photographs, texts, inscriptions and videos, etc., this study only used texts taken from 20 travel blogs of *guimi* holidays posted by young Chinese females. Although these blog texts contain rich narratives, one should be cautious about generalizing the findings of this study to other types of Chinese *guimi* holidays. Furthermore, travel blogs are just one type of virtual documents that can be used as a data source. As such, the conclusions of this study are limited to the information provided by this data source, leaving a possibility that some other aspects of *guimi* holiday experiences performed by young female Chinese tourists might be missing. Therefore, further research is needed to see whether other types or dimensions of *guimi* holiday experiences performed by young female Chinese tourists exist beyond those discovered by this study. Second, though the authors tried to verify the bloggers's profiles and claims, there is still a possibility that some of the blog contents might be manipulated for various purposes, which is the common limitation of such studies (Mkono, 2012). Third, although the three dimensions of *guimi* holiday experiences were constructed in this study and provided a new and deeper understanding of the emerging travel phenomenon, these were only addressed from the perspective of young Chinese females that are below 35 years old. The *guimi* holiday experiences of the other age groups should also be considered in future studies. Moreover, future studies could also examine the influence of marriage status, the impacts of the single child per family policy on the choice and experience of the *guimi* holiday. Also, interpersonal conflicts and dynamics of female friendship dyads' travel in different cultural settings can be investigated. Additionally, quantitative methods using paired data and dyadic data analysis are also encouraged when examining female friendship dyads' travel.

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