Understanding Chinese Girlfriend Getaways: An Perspective

ABSTRACT

Tourism literature has yet to examine Chinese female tourists in general and Chinese girlfriend getaways in particular despite their contributions to China's tourism economy. This study applied dyads and interdependence theory to study Chinese girlfriend getaways. A qualitative methodology was employed to analyze girlfriend getaways related travel blogs collected from Chinese online travel communities. The findings show that Chinese girlfriend getaways perform two types of power relations, four types of mutual dependence and three types of conflicts. This study contributes to the literature on interdependence by synthesizing the specific dimensions and types of power relations, mutual dependence, and conflicts into the framework of the interdependence theory.

Keywords

Chinese girlfriend getaways, interdependence theory, guimi

1. INTRODUCTION

Beyond various forms of large groups in tourism (e.g. package group in tourism), there are many small groups of importance to researchers (e.g. small self-organized friendship travel). In sociology, a dyad is the smallest possible social group, consisting of two people. Dyads are important because according to James (1953), "73% of naturally formed groups in our society are dyads" (as cited in Kenny and Voie, 1984, p.142). Studies on group dynamics should not neglect the functions and interactions of dyads. According to Simmel (1964), who is the founder of dyads and small group research, two persons to be regarded as a dyad should meet these requirements: First, a dyad is composed of only two people. Second, there should be face-to-face, intimate relations between them. Third, the social relations (including both attraction and repulsion) must last long enough to establish an identifiable pattern of interactions. Fourth, the distinction between a dyad and two individuals is that of a relationship in which each party regards the other as functionary or representative with reference to a specific purpose. Yoon, Thye, and Lawler (2013) argue that dyads lead to greater interdependence, and consequently a high level of

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emotional attachment. The interdependency and emotional attachment derive from the fact that both parties accept responsibility for any coaction. This means each one in a dyad is confronted only with the other, and each of them has the power to destroy the relationship and the collective actions or experience.

The study of the travel dynamics of dyads and interdependence interlinks with the popularization of small self-organized group travel, by which a dyad is the smallest unit of group travel. There is a call for studies on the interactions of groups rather than individuals per the dominant Western ideology based on individualism in tourism research (Cai, Cohen, & Tribe, 2019; Cohen & Cohen, 2015; Song, Wang, & Sparks, 2018). It has recently been acknowledged that more Chinese people are enjoying traveling in small, self-organized groups (Cai et al., 2019; Song et al., 2018). A few recent studies have been conducted on the travel decisions of Chinese friendship groups (Song et al., 2018) and the group dynamics of Chinese backpackers (Cai et al., 2019). However, studies on small travel groups remain scant and overlooked in tourism literature, with those considering the smallest groups of female travelers being the rarest.

Chinese female tourists presently remain under-voiced in academia. A recent special issue by *Journal of China Tourism Research* on gender and tourism in China attempted to bridge the gap but topics related to Chinese female tourists were neglected. The only few studies include: The early study by Li, Wen, and Leung (2011) described the strong purchasing power of Chinese female outbound tourists. Zhang and Hitchcock (2017)'s study found that for young female Chinese, traveling is not just a manifestation of social identity, but also a way to enhance personal relationships. However, neither of the above-mentioned studies discussed the group behaviors or group dynamics of Chinese girlfriend getaways.

More and more modern Chinese women are getting involved in business and leisure activities nowadays (World Economic Forum, 2018). 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%). Additionally, Chinese female tourists are the main force of China's tourism market (Xinhua, 2017). More and more young Chinese females are traveling independently in same-sex friendship pairs on a guimi holiday, instead of joining in a package tour.

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The Chinese guimi holiday shares some similarities with the Western girlfriend getaways, which simply refers to all-female travel. But the guimi holiday means women's travel with their almost same-age female friends (usually two people), while traveling with females like mother or female strangers is excluded. The report by Peterman (2017) shows that Chinese women who grew up under the one-child policy (implemented in 1979) usually "turn to their girlfriends as surrogate siblings sharing similar challenges and experiences and looking for physical and emotional support from each other" (p.3). As a result, the feeling of "sisterhood" in China is stronger than in other countries, and notably, a number of women value this relationship even much higher than with their mothers (Peterman, 2017).

No official released statistics exist on the guimi holiday market. There has been an industrial report on the numbers and percentage of it. The report on Chinese Women's Travel by Lvmama (2016) indicates that traveling in pairs among female friends is the most common pattern, with a proportion of 59%, followed by friendship groups of three to four people comprising 25% (as cited in Zhihuilvyou, 2016). For Chinese female singles, the role of guimi and the associated social activities (e.g. dining, traveling, shopping, etc.) seem to be even more important (Sohu, 2018).

The study of Chinese guimi holidays as a segment of girlfriend getaways expands research on dyads and small group tourism research, while enriching female tourist studies generally, and girlfriend getaways particularly. By addressing knowledge gaps of dyads and interdependence, female tourist, guimi holidays as girlfriend getaways, this study examines the research question: How can interdependence allow for new understanding of the travel dynamics of Chinese girlfriend getaways?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Girlfriend getaways

As a relatively recent area, girlfriend getaway is regarded as a contested term in academia (Berdychevsky, Gibson, & Bell, 2016). Song (2017) and Khoo-Lattimore and Prayag (2015) refer to it as "all-female tours". Specifically, girlfriend getaways means female leisure travel among friends, colleagues, family members, fellow members, or members from social groups or organizations to which they belong (Gibson, Berdychevsky, & Bell, 2012; Khoo-Lattimore & Gibson, 2018).

Existing literature on girlfriend getaways reveals a dominance of investigations into motivations, satisfactions, accommodation preferences. For example, Khoo-Lattimore and her colleagues examined girlfriend getaways' accommodation preferences, motivations, and satisfaction through a quantitative approach (Khoo-Lattimore & Prayag, 2015, 2016, 2018; Khoo-Lattimore, Prayag, & Disegna, 2018). The conclusions of these studies are: First, there is homogeneity in demographic characteristics of the girlfriend getaway market but heterogeneity regarding accommodation and service preferences due to different motivations (Khoo-Lattimore & Prayag, 2015); second, the motivations and accommodation preferences of girlfriend getaways vary across nationalities and ethnicities (Khoo-Lattimore et al., 2018); third, women's actual self-image influences their preferences for accommodation and satisfaction with hotel services, influencing loyalty (Khoo-Lattimore & Prayag, 2016).

A second major line of research on girlfriend getaways explores the meanings of girlfriend getaways and its associations with women's wellbeing through a qualitative approach. Berdychevsky et al. (2016)'s study shows that for some respondents, the term girlfriend getaways is accurate to describe the all-female leisure travel experiences, while for others, " girlfriend getaways seems to be stereotypical, narrow/claustrophobic, "pink," inadequate, and unreflective of their unique experiences" (p.106). Gibson et al. (2012) found that girlfriend getaways could satisfy the females' psychological needs of escaping from stress and routines, dealing with life transitions and re-bonding with friends. The satisfaction of psychological needs benefits women's wellbeing in terms of temporary escapism from social structures and gendered expectations, empowerment and existential authenticity (Berdychevsky, Gibson, & Bell, 2013).

Several issues could be found within existing studies of girlfriend getaways. First, the ranges of the girlfriend getaways phenomenon are relatively narrow and consequently limited in many aspects. Most studies (Berdychevsky et al., 2013; Berdychevsky et al., 2016; Gibson et al., 2012; Mirehie, Gibson, Khoo-Lattimore, & Prayag, 2018) focus on Western women, with only two studies (Khoo-Lattimore & Prayag, 2015, 2016) discussing Asian women as a homogeneous group. Only one study examined holiday activities of Hong Kong women traveling overseas in all-female groups (Song, 2017). Yang, Khoo-Lattimore, and Arcodia (2017) mentioned this could be

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one of the major limitations as women's voices from non-Western countries could offer different contexts and perspectives for gender research. Second, the research width and depth of girlfriend getaways are constrained by quantitative survey methods with statistical analysis, despite a few studies using individual interviews and focus groups (Berdychevsky et al., 2013; Berdychevsky et al., 2016). The very limited methodological research approaches lead to the third main issue for the existing girlfriend getaways research, the lack of research on the joint or group travel experiences, behaviors, and dynamics of all-female tours on holiday.

In summation, more qualitative and mixed methods are needed to support more dedicated explanatory models illuminating the uniqueness of gendered consumption while taking girlfriend getaways as a group phenomenon. Additionally, research needs a broader context covering females from different cultural, national and ethnic backgrounds. This study attempts to address these needs by employing the sociological concept of dyads and interdependence theory to support a holistic view into the female same-sex friendship travel phenomenon.

2.2 Guimi holiday as a segment of girlfriend getaways in China

The word "guimi" composes two characters. The character "gui" (闺) means "boudoir", which refers to a woman's bedroom. The word "mi" (蜜) means honey, which is also homophonic with another Chinese word "密" meaning intimate. "Guimi" (闺蜜) as a whole refers to the best friend of a woman, but they are not lesbian. This intensive friendship involves the characteristics of exclusiveness, inseparability, jealousy, hand holding, and embracing (Diamond, 2002).

Guimi holiday means women's travel with their best female friends. Girlfriend getaways are closely related to guimi holidays but there are several differences. First, girlfriend getaway is defined as all-female travel by simply excluding males, while a guimi holiday is defined as a woman's travel with her best female friend. Second, girlfriend getaways usually involve large numbers of female travelers 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). Therefore, the guimi holiday, as a segment of girlfriend getaways needs further investigation.

2.3 Interdependence Theory

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Interdependence is defined as "the manner in which individuals influence each other's activities and outcomes" (Van Lange & Rusbult, 2012, p. 317). Constructed by Thibaut and Kelley (1959), the interdependence theory provides a framework for analyzing the social interactions and dynamics of small groups, by which dyads are the smallest unit of groups (Williams, 2010). Interdependence theory itself is not a unified theory but a collection of concepts and principles about the dynamics of social interactions. It was adopted by Thibaut and Kelley in their series of works (Kelley et al., 2003; Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959) and extended into the study of interpersonal relationships. Thompson (1967) categorizes three different types of interdependence depending on the intensity of the interactions and the behaviors needed to deliver a task: pooled interdependence, sequential interdependence, and reciprocal interdependence. Several theories on interpersonal relations have been developed based on interdependence theory, for example, the investment model by Rusbult (1980), intimacy by Reis and Shaver (1988), and risk regulation by Murray, Holmes, and Collins (2006).

The initial structure of interdependence theory presented by Thibaut and Kelley in 1959 included four dimensions: level of dependence, mutuality of dependence, basis of dependence, covariation of interests. Thibaut and Kelley (1978) extending interdependence theory by incorporating two additional dimensions: temporal structure and information certainty. Interdependence theory is a continuous developing framework rather than a concrete theory. More recently, the six dimensions of interdependence theory were rephrased by Gerpott, Balliet, Columbus, Molho, and de Vries (2017) as: power, conflict, mutual dependence, future dependence and information certainty. Power depicts the extent to which a person's thoughts or behaviors are affected by the actions of his or her partner. Mutual dependence illustrates whether members of a dyad are equally dependent upon one another. Conflict explains whether the joint activities are equally satisfying for both sides (Van Lange & Rusbult, 2012). Future interdependence describes dynamic and continuous processes of interactions between actor and partner. It describes whether and how the actions of a person and his or her partner in the current situation affect their future interactions. The final dimension is information certainty. Information certainty illustrates whether both members of a dyad possess certain or uncertain

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information about their own or the other party's outcomes from various behaviors, motives, or future interaction opportunities.

Interdependence theory in the tourism context is relatively scarce, but one could trace the lineage of interdependence theory from tourism studies that stress group dynamics, friendship travel, family tourism and co-creating experience. The recent study by Cai et al. (2019) examined the social interactions of Chinese backpackers on holiday by incorporating Chinese cultural attributes into the understanding of those group dynamics. The group dynamics were explored in two dimensions: power relations and conflict among group members, which are the two structures of interdependence theory (see Gerpott et al., 2017 for example). Thornton, Williams and Shaw (1997) posit that an individual's travel experience largely relies on the goals and expectations of a travel group, which also implies the important role of interdependence in group travel.

Social situations should be considered when deciding the type of interdependence (Gerpott et al., 2017). This study uses the three concepts from interdependence theory, namely, power, mutual dependence, and conflicts as the framework to interpret Chinese girlfriend getaways. Each dimension could be considered as a category containing many different aspects. The focus of this study is not to exhaust all the aspects of the six dimensions of interdependence theory, but to examine those aspects relating to female friendship dyads' travel.

3. METHODS

This study applies an interpretivist research paradigm of relativism. Specifically, this research is a qualitative study using online communities as the place for fieldwork with documents as the data source (Bryman, 2016). According to Flick (2006), there has been a long history of using documents in qualitative research, but the document method is generally considered to be peripheral and nonresponsive. Documents can provide a spontaneous, unfiltered viewpoint of the topic under investigation. Researchers have widely used user-generated content to study tourist experiences and behaviors (e.g.Bosangit, Hibbert, & McCabe, 2015; Mkono & Markwell, 2014).

In this study, travel blogs describing guimi holidays were collected as the data source. 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. Using 102 Chinese travel blogs related to five tourist cities in China, Li and Pearce (2016) identified various types of tourist scams against Chinese domestic tourists in popular tourist cities of China. 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.

Unlike traditional interviews, travel blogs belong to archival data and do not allow researchers' imprints (Kozinets, 2015). Travel blogs are deemed as online diaries by which tourists naturally and freely depict and describe their travel stories in detail. 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 "guī mì chū yóu (闺蜜出游)" "jiě mèi táo (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, Ryan, & Pan, 2015). All these aforementioned websites are well known for a 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 the associated data analysis of this study were divided into two stages from November 2018 to March 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. In the first stage, the first author searched "guī mì lǚ yóu (闺蜜旅游)" or "jiě mèi táo (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 the relevant travel blogs. Only the travel blogs that depicted two female friends' traveling together were included. Texts related to social interactions on holiday were copied and pasted into Word documents, and the related images were stored in separate folders. Only interaction-related texts were used in this study because interactions are the basis of interdependence. The same procedures were applied to travel blogs on Mafengwo.com, and Qunar.com.

In order to conform with the guidelines of exploratory qualitative research, purposive sampling was used to generate adequate elements for theoretical saturation (Suri, 2011). Twenty travel blog entries were retrieved, with six blogs from blog.sina.com

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websites, seven each from Mafengwo.cn and Qyer.com. NVivo 11 was used 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. The coding process was also guided by the above-mentioned framework of interdependence theory. The examples of codes, categories, and themes related to data extraction are shown in Table 1.

[Insert Table 1 here]

Subsequently, another 15 travel blogs were collected and analyzed to see if adding travel blogs could bring fresh insights into the interdependence of Chinese girlfriend getaways. The steps of collecting and analyzing data as mentioned in the first stage were repeated. As the coding process continued, the authors saw similar recurring themes and no new themes emerged. Thus, theoretical saturation had been achieved according to Glaser (1965). Therefore, no further data collection and analysis was needed.

The first author got permissions for using travel blogs academically by leaving messages to the bloggers, a final dataset of 35 travel blogs was developed based on the consent of bloggers. Specifically, six travel blogs elicited from Blog.sina.com.cn contain 16,200 words and 959 images; 17 travel blogs collected from Mafengwo.cn comprising 75,215 words and 2,184 images; 12 travel blogs generated from Qyer.com include 11,666 words and 1,137 images. The interaction-related texts were copied and used as the data source while the photos were used for triangulation (Denzin 1989). Only travel blogs written in Chinese were collected. The first author translated the contents of the blogs into English when quoting, and then another translator who is good at both Chinese and English translated the quotes back (Chen & Boore, 2010). After the translator and all the authors reached agreement, the English version of quotes was finalized.

4. FINDINGS

4.1 Power relations

Power relations is defined as "the degree to which an actor's outcomes are influenced by the partner's actions" (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2008, p. 2052). According to Hawks (1991), there are two forms of power relations: power over and power to. Power over

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means one person controls others' behaviors based on personal desires which involve dominance and force. *Power to* opposes power over as it involves caring (love), trust and cooperation. Power to refers to achieving goals through co-leadership as well as helping others set goals that are appreciated by both parties. Power to is usually performed as Tillich's (1954) idea of "power as love" (as cited in Florczak, 2016, p. 193). The collected travel blogs of Chinese girlfriend getaways were abundant with narratives of both power to and power over. For instance, Informant 16, a woman who was pregnant for five months, described her trip to Thailand with her girlfriend:

The night before our departure, my girlfriend 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 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 familial sisters, it's just like that! (Informant 16)

Besides the narratives of caring as "power as love". The *power to* of Chinese female same-sex friendship travel groups is also characterized by mutual sharing and collaborations. Mutual sharing means treating material objects as things used by close people in common (Fiske, 1992). The sharing of materials is diversified such as snacks, drinks, cosmetics, and clothes, etc. (see Figure 1) The sharing of materials, drinking in one cup of milk tea, trying each other's clothes, jewelry, sharing one bed, and giving suggestions on dressing and making-up, increases the intimacy and fun between female friends. For example, Informant 5 wrote, "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…".

[Insert Figure 1 here]

Furthermore, the analysis of travel blogs in this study shows that mutual sharing is not only limited to materials, but could also be expanded to emotions, namely, emotional

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sharing. Emotional sharing is performed during long talks about many topics. Such talking between female friends leads to an atmosphere of noncritical listening, emotional contagion, and imaginative projection (Zahavi & Rochat, 2015). For instance, Informant 25 wrote in her blog, "we don't need to spend too much time and money on travel activities, just a short two or three days of being together, eating, drinking, and chatting all night is enough…" Informant 16 also noted, "girls always have endless topics to talk about, such as travel, love, handsome guys, dreams and so on. All in all, there is no end on topics…" In addition, some bloggers mentioned bedtime chat as secrecy sharing. Informant 20 wrote, "bedtime chat (卧谈会) is also one of the main holiday activities…, we talk a lot of things. It is our spiritual time. I talked everything, good and bad about myself to her, my friend knows all my disgraces, but she keeps my secrecy for my good image…" This point expands the study by Johnson and Aries (1983) in highlighting the importance of talking as emotional sharing on female friendships in the context of the holiday.

The power relations also depend on the personality and expertise of group members. Among Chinese girlfriend getaways, members take co-responsibilities based on expertise. For instance, Informant 32 described, "Fang has lots of travel experience, she is in charge of the overall plans of the trip, while Moor has a very good sense of direction, so she is responsible for guiding us to the local shops, restaurants and places of interest..." Likewise, Informant 20 wrote, "we divide our work according to our understanding of each other. I am in charge of taking photos and booking hotels. Tingting is responsible for booking airline tickets and preparing various snacks on the way, while Hangying prepares gorgeous clothes and moisturizing skin care products for us during the journey." Hence, the group members take co-responsibilities for the collective actions and experiences on holiday. When members of the group do not take responsibilities, power over happens. One person takes over the trip arrangements based on her personal desires and her own understandings about the likes and dislikes of her friend.

4.2 Mutual dependence

Mutual dependence is one of the central dimensions of interdependence theory. A variety of mutual dependence is observed in the collected travel blogs. The sentiment of mutual dependence was expressed by Informant 8 with a sentence beside her photo with her girlfriend: "there is a friendship that will never be lost in a lifetime; there is a dependence that has become a consistent habit (有一种感情,一辈子都不会输给时间；有一种依赖,成了挥之不去的习惯)" (see Figure 2). Based on the collected travel blogs, the authors categorize mutual dependence into four types: skill dependence, time dependence, knowledge dependence, and psychological dependence. In the following section, each type of dependence is explained with examples. The four types of dependence are mutual. Taking Rose and Mary as an example, Rose depends on Mary's skill of photographing while Mary relies on Rose's skill of making-up and knowledge of geography.

[Insert Figure 2 here]

First, skill dependence. The collected travel blogs show that various skills exist within female same-sex friendship travel groups: photographing skills, making-up skills, dressing skills, communication skills, foreign language skills, etc. For example, Informant 12 reported, "we help each other do face-painting, and give suggestions to each other of what to dress every day in order to take nice photos on the day…, we are actually each other's best image designer…". Likewise, Informant 20 mentioned, "my friend understands how to take nice pictures of me to look like a celebrity. She is my patient, professional, and private photographer. She always brings a bunch of professional equipment for photographing rather than just simply using mobile phones…" Similarly, Informant 16 mentioned, "my friend is a doctor, that's the reason why I travel with her even if I am pregnant at that time. I do not have to worry about medical emergency…" Informant 26 described her girlfriend's negotiation skill writing, "Lin is very good at bargaining when we go shopping on holiday, I can always find some good quality but cheap goods." Informant 23, who had a five-day trip to Japan with her friend mentioned the language skills of her friend, "Liu can speak Japanese, but I cannot. So, most of the time, she translates lots of things to me when we travel to Japan…"

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Second, time dependence. Time dependence refers to when two parties have a time-based need or synchronization of their mutual holiday activities. The time dependence manifests in two aspects: one is before the travel in scheduling times when all parties are available, the other is during the travel. For instance, Informant 8 wrote, "we haven'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. It's unlike in university, we have summer and winter vacations at the same time. When we got work, it is very difficult to find a time that both of us are available…, we tried several times, finally we made it…." Similarly, Informant 25 wrote, "we plan to have a trip with three of us together. The first thing is to choose the travel time according to each other's time. However, Xia is very busy, so basically, we try to follow her time schedule. But this lady got low fever before we were about to depart and then suddenly announced that she was pregnant... It was impossible for her to travel with us. The three-person's trip turned into a two-person trip." Time dependence among friends also appears during the travel. Informant 9 wrote, "during the holiday, we always wait for each other to keep the same pace on all the things, activities, we never rush and just enjoy the time of being together. We indeed have a schedule (see Figure 3) but we do not take it seriously, it's like a Buddhist-style trip (佛系旅行)…let everything go as it is…".

[Insert Figure 3 here]

Third, knowledge dependence. Knowledge dependence describes the interaction processes between two or more people learning each other's strengths or expertise. The interaction creates awareness and knowledge about each other's ability to solve problems. Knowledge dependence appears in many aspects. For instance, group members who had lived, worked or studied at the destination before, or have been to the place before, have knowledge about the place visited. Informant 22 described her travel experience with her friend to Guangdong. She mentioned that her friend got her bachelor's degree in Guangzhou, therefore, she does not need to worry about anything during the trip, just keep following her to find good food and places to go. Giving suggestions on shopping could also be a kind of knowledge dependence. For example, Informant 20 mentioned her trip to Australia, "when we go shopping, my friends give me suggestions on which type of health and skin care products made in Australia are much better, because her friend had used the products and felt it was really very

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good…" Sense of direction was mentioned as knowledge dependence by Informant 8, "When we arrived, it was very late, but I know Xu has a good sense of direction…, I do not need to worry about getting lost when I am traveling with her…". Knowledge dependence is very similar to the meaning of the information certainty dimension in interdependence theory. Knowing about each other's strengths could create awareness and knowledge about each other's ability to solve problems.

Fourth, psychological dependence. Psychological dependence describes the feelings of empowerment when traveling in female groups. Informant 11 wrote, "I psychologically feel safer than traveling alone, because I know, I have a friend I can talk and discuss with…". A few similar words were found in the travel blog of Informant 5, "If I traveled alone, I would never go out at night, but when I am with Mary, we can go out despite our petite stature." The narratives of psychological dependence are more prevalent in outbound trips than domestic trips. Informant 11, who took a trip with her female friend to Auckland, wrote, "it was dark, but 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...".

4.3 Conflicts

Conflict describes those discrepancies and irreconcilable desires between the group members (Boulding, 1962) and the difficulties of satisfying the needs of both parties. Conflict can also be created when each member of a group is confronted with a choice between the motive to compete and the motive to cooperate with other group members. The commonly mentioned conflicts in the 35 travel blogs can be divided into three categories according to the frequencies described in the blogs: conflicts related to tasks, conflicts related to process, and conflicts related to relationships. These three types of conflicts are interrelated with each other.

Task or cognitive conflict

Task or cognitive conflict describes disagreements or misunderstandings about tasks (Heimtun & Jordan, 2011). Task conflicts are common and well examined in the workplace (Simons & Peterson, 2000). In the holiday context, conflict or disagreement usually relates to the use of money and time, the arrangement of travel activities and the decisions about destinations, hotels and food, etc. Some studies on

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group performance in the workplace show that moderate task conflicts lead to positive interdependence and benefit group decision making (Janssen, Van De Vliert, & Veenstra, 1999; Laal, 2013). The positive effect of task-related conflict was also found in the holiday context among female same-sex friendship dyads. Informant 12 wrote, "… in the morning I arrived at the train station at 7:30 as scheduled. I thought Shu was late, but finally I realized that I went to the wrong train station because of my misunderstandings about the information, then Shu had to wait for me alone at the appointed place…, and I had to manage to see if I can change my train ticket. Well, Shu was not angry, instead, she worried about me being alone in the wrong place, comforting me and trying to figure out how to solve the problem…, we thought, this unexpected surprise made me know how to negotiate with the train station staff and also made our trip more exciting and fun…". In the workplace, this could be a big mistake and consequently influence group efficiency, however, in a holiday context, it is regarded as an unexpected learning experience to miss a train, go to a wrong gathering place and have to change the ticket, under the autosuggestion of "a holiday is to relax, but not in a hurry". In some circumstances this type of conflict leads to positive interdependence on group members and adds additional fun events to the friendship and holiday experience.

Process-related conflict

Process-related conflict is also named as organizational conflicts by Decrop, Pecheux, and Bauvin (2004) to describe conflicts related to the process of choosing destinations. In this study, however, the process-related conflicts are not limited to destination choices before the trip but also relate to the choices of hotels, restaurants and other activities during the travel. As described by Informant 10 who complained on her travel blog about the process of choosing a suitable destination, "in the beginning, my friend proposed to go to Taiwan. I thought she had checked some basic information about Taiwan, but she did not. At last, I had to check the entrance permissions for mainland independent travelers to Taiwan, it was too late to get permissions. Then I told her to change destinations and we have to discuss again." The process-related conflicts before the trip are not so frequent compared with the conflicts during the trip based on the 35 collected travel blogs. Informant 11 depicts, "It was eight pm after dinner at night. She suggested we go to a local cinema to see a movie, but I just wanted to go to the hotel to wash my hair and clothes because we

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had to get up at 5 am in the morning tomorrow. To satisfy her wishes, I still went to the cinema with her…actually, I found it was worthwhile to go though I was a little bit tired…" Despite the conflicts on making decisions, this type of conflict does not impact much on the friendships of young Chinese females.

Relationship-related conflict

Relationship conflict relates to one's inconsistencies with the other person's preferences, personalities or values, for example, the disagreement about where and how to spend the money and time (Carothers, Vaske, & Donnelly, 2001). Studies show that relationship conflict is detrimental to individual and group performance, member satisfaction, and the likelihood the group will work together in the future (Jehn & Mannix, 2001). Moreover, relationship related conflicts are usually linked with negative emotions, such as, "fear, jealousy, tension, frustration, anger, friction and hostility" (Heimtun & Jordan, 2011, p. 274). A few travel bloggers highlighted the relationship related conflicts. Informant 15 wrote in her blog, "I have a five-day trip to Korea with my guimi. It is through this trip I noticed that we are so different, and I am not going to travel with her anymore in the future, even though we used to be very good friends. But this trip let me know we have totally different values towards money, place, people and life. She likes going shopping while I prefer going to museums and historic places. And she complains all the way that she was so tired and just wanted to stay in a coffee shop, but once she went to the coffee shop, she spent the whole morning or afternoon there just wasting time …". Similarly, Informant 20 wrote, "…the best way to test the longevity of your friendship is to have a trip with her…". Travel, on the one hand, brings friends together to rebuild their relationship by sharply shortening the physical distance between two people, but on the other hand, it also enlarges the shortcomings of each other and produces larger psychological distances. Previous tourism studies only mentioned that one of the main functions of a holiday is bonding, connectedness and travel as relationship therapy (e.g.Durko & Petrick, 2016; Heimtun & Abelsen, 2012), but neglecting that a holiday is also 'a relationship tester or even terminator'. Furthermore, neither of the informants mentioned the breaking up of the guimi relationship during the travel but only to complain on the internet or hide it in mind or maintain their view that they will travel together again. Doing so is to achieve the Chinese-style of superficial harmony (Cai et al., 2019).

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Task and process-related conflicts can be solved by negotiations and discussions. Moderate task and/or process-related conflicts are beneficial to a relationship and holiday experience. Relationship related conflicts are linked with one's personalities, habits and values, and usually result in negative emotions (e.g. anger, frustration) detrimental to friendships and holiday experiences.

[Insert Figure 4 here]

5. CONCLUSIONS

The present study draws on the interdependence theory developed by Thibaut and Kelley (1959) to examine how notions of interdependence and female friendship dyads may allow for new understandings of the travel dynamics of Chinese girlfriend getaways. The three dimensions of interdependence; power relations, mutual dependence and conflict between each of them has effects on the collective 'we' experience (see Figure 4). Specifically, power relations were performed in terms of power over and power to. Through this, each party takes co-responsibilities for the collective travel experience. When one person does not take responsibilities, power over comes to play the role, usually in a positive way by considering both parties' preferences based on the understandings of one another. This study finds four types of mutual dependence: skills, time, knowledge and psychological dependence. All these dependence types contribute to the collective travel experience. The study differentiates three aspects of conflicts between female friends on holiday: process-related conflicts, task-related conflicts, and relationship related conflicts. This study concludes that the influences of process-related conflicts and task related conflicts are not as strong as the relationship conflicts. Moderate task and/or process-related conflicts benefit the friendship and the collective travel experience. Only relationship related conflicts are detrimental to friendships and holiday experiences. These findings differ from the conceptualizations and conclusions by Heimtun and Jordan (2011) illustrating that women's holiday conflicts usually destroy friendships and holiday experiences. The travel blogs by Chinese girlfriend getaways show how they actually have fun in those conflicts as moderate task and/or process-related conflicts strengthen their friendships by knowing each other better through the joint travel activity. This study also confirms that the process of traveling is more important than the destinations. In summation, the research results from the view of dyads and

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interdependence provide new insights into the collective travel experience of Chinese girlfriend getaways.

Theoretical contributions

This study contributes to theory by uncovering the travel dynamics of interdependence among female same-sex friendship dyads and linkages with the collective travel experience of 'we', in contrast with bundles of previous studies focusing on the group dynamics of more than three people especially in the setting of package trips (Cai et al., 2019; Tucker, 2005; Yarnal & Kerstetter, 2005). This study synthesizes the dimensions and types of power relations, mutual dependence and conflict into the framework of the interdependence theory. Specifically, the study synthesized power over and power to into the dimension of power relations, four types of dependence into the dimension of mutual dependence, three types of conflicts into the dimension of conflict based on the interdependence theory (see Figure 4). Additionally, this study provides an interpretation of the interdependent travel of female same-sex friendship dyads in the context of China.

This paper also contributes to female tourist literature. This study explores the interdependent nature of female friendship dyads' travel as a niche group of girlfriend getaways. This paper adds to the female tourist literature from the perspective of small groups, specifically focusing on the travel dynamics of dyads rather than the individual experiences addressed in previous studies (Loker-Murphy & Pearce, 1995; Sørensen, 2003). Chinese girlfriend getaways usually travel in friendship pairs, dyads that provide new understanding to the current development of girlfriend getaways studies. Based on the sociological concept of dyads (Becker & Useem, 1942), and women's friendship, this paper not only reveals and contributes new understanding of the interdependent nature of female friendship dyads' travel (Simmel, 1964), but also differs from previous research that focused on the meanings, experience, and accommodation preferences of girlfriend getaways in Western countries through analysis of individual female tourist perspectives, despite girlfriend getaways emphasizing group travel (Berdychevsky et al., 2016; Khoo-Lattimore & Prayag, 2015). By showing the interdependent nature and the travel dynamics of female friendship dyads, this study contributes novel understanding of a diverse girlfriend getaways segment in the context of China.

Practical implications

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This study invites practical implications. Firstly, the popularity of travel in friendship pairs and sharing things among young Chinese females enables tourism service providers to promote that shared identity and sense of equality. Sharing products and tastes among female same-sex friends could work as acquaintance endorsement for tourism services or destination marketing. That is to serve, promote and sell tourism products in pairs. For example, hotels could provide twins' rooms specifically designed for two female friends. Secondly, service managers can create an all-female environment to unload female roles as mother or wife. Thirdly, by emphasizing the liminoid state of female same-sex friendship holiday settings, the social gender roles can be balanced. Hotels, scenic spots and destinations could intensify the ritualistic shift from daily gender roles to the 'chora' interactive consumption space through 'girly' or 'womanhood' decorations, colorful doorways, rooms, lights and festival symbols such as artistic performances.

This study acknowledges several limitations. First, these research results are based on examinations of texts and images describing interactions within female same-sex friendship pairs taken from 35 travel blogs posted by Chinese females. Although these blogs contain rich narratives, one should be cautious about generalizing the findings of this study to other types of Chinese girlfriend getaways. Furthermore, travel blogs are just one type of virtual documents that can be used as a data source. The conclusions of this study are limited to the information provided by this data source, leaving a possibility that some other aspects of interdependence performed by female Chinese tourists might be missing. Therefore, further research is needed to see whether other types or dimensions of interdependence exist among female Chinese tourist beyond those discovered by this study. Second, although the three dimensions of interdependence theory were operationalized in this study and provided a new and deeper understanding of the travel dynamics of girlfriend getaways, these were only addressed from the perspective of young Chinese female tourists. Further studies could examine the dynamics of female friendship dyads' travel in other cultural settings. Quantitative methods by using paired data and dyadic data analysis are also encouraged.

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