Hao, F., Zhang, S., & Xiao, H. (2021). A return to innocence: Guimi tourism and women empowerment. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, https://doi.org/10.1002/jtr.2457.

A Return to Innocence: *Guimi Tourism* and Women Empowerment

Abstract

Influenced by the Confucian culture, clan-family structure, and communist ideology, gender inequality still widely exist in modern China. On reflection of the socio-cultural framework that shaped the Chinese gender lens, this study took a "power to" perspective on women empowerment by investigating 28 *Guimi-tourists'* embodied experience. Upon identifying the core experience of "return to innocence", a resources-agency-achievements framework was constructed to depict the underlying mechanism through which *Guimi tourism* empowered women to counteract sociocultural constraints. The study offered a context-specific understanding of *Guimi tourism* and theoretically contributed to women empowerment and tourism, as well as Chinese cultural studies.

Keywords: *Guimi tourism*; women empowerment; gender equality; Confucianism; China; Resources-Agency-Achievements

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INTRODUCTION

Gender inequality has been a historical issue in China. As the biggest developing country occupying one-fifth population of the world, gender equality in China is a focal concern of global sustainability. Deeply rooted Confucian culture, clan-family structure, and communist ideology have resulted in the long-standing underprivileged role of women, which still prevails in today's society (Branisa, Klasen, Ziegler, Drechsler, & Jütting, 2014). In traditional Chinese families, women were well-defined as subordinate to their families and male family members. The main value of women was associated with procreation and taking care of family members (Hu & Scott, 2016). A repressive practice in the old society was foot binding at age three to control women's freedom of mobility. Since 1949, the Chinese Communist Party endeavored to challenge traditional beliefs and achieve gender equality both legally and socially. Irrespective of abundant efforts to guarantee women's equal access to education and the labor market, traditional social norms remain to disempower women domestically and socially in contemporary China (Hu & Scott, 2016). The *Global Gender Gap Report* issued by the *World Economic Forum* illustrated a dramatic decline of China's gender gap ranking from the 57th in 2008 (Hausmann, Tyson, & Zahidi, 2008) to the 106th in 2020 (Schwab, 2020). *The Third Survey Report on the Status of Chinese Women* in 2010 also illustrated relatively lower treatment of Chinese women than men in income, education, health, and social involvement (ACWF, 2011). More importantly, women, in general, were unconsciously voluntary to shoulder heavier domestic burdens than men in livelihood responsibility (Guo, 2014). To promote deep women emancipation in China and fulfill the United Nations' fifth goal "of achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls" for sustainable development by 2030 (Rosa, 2017), context-specific studies that explore ways to empower Chinese women consciously are warranted.

The last two decades have suggested tourism playing a critical role in women empowerment (Abou-Shouk, Mannaa, & Elbaz, 2021; Harris & Wilson, 2007). Different from traditional top-down ("power over") approaches that rely on legislation, economy, and education, tourism empowered women via a bottom-up ("power to") path at an individual level (Doran, 2016). Engagement in tourism can improve women's gender awareness, and thereby family and social status (Berdychevsky, Gibson, & Bell, 2016). While previous research on tourism and empowerment extensively focused on women employed in the tourism industry (Aghazamani & Hunt, 2017), an emerging line of research concerned female tourists (Doran, 2016; Seow & Brown,

2018). Female travel as a result of historical battles against societal restrictions on women, has been meaningful for their empowerment in widely western contexts (Wilson & Harris, 2006). For instance, female tourists in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States were identified to become more confident and independent after engaging in adventurous travel (Doran, 2016). Among many other different types of female travel, girlfriend getaway (all-female leisure travel) showed particularly huge potential to empower women from a "power to" perspective (Berdychevsky, Gibson, & Bell, 2013). For one thing, girlfriend getaway can prevent the extension of house care that women were often involved in during family travel (Chiang, 2006; Small, 2005). For another, girlfriend getaway can reduce "fears relating to others' perceptions, a susceptibility to vulnerability, a sense of restricted access, and a feeling of conspicuousness", which appear in solo women travel (Wilson & Little, 2008, p.167). However, whether this specific travel form can promote women empowerment in the China context remains underexplored (Chen & Mak, 2020).

Independent female travel is less encouraged than male travel in China owing to traditional gender norms, and is thus seldomly examined (Guo, 2014). However, the recent years have witnessed an increasing trend of independent Chinese female travel, such as the uprising phenomenon of "*Guimi tourism*". As a counterpart of the western notion of "girlfriend getaway", *Guimi tourism* signifies a new era of female tourism in China, which needs more investigation. In ancient China, unmarried girls were forbidden from socialization and were only allowed to make friends with a few girls of similar age. Those young female friends were called "*Guimi*" (guī mì, 闺蜜). In the modern era, the word '*Guimi*' is used as a popular term to describe a woman's close female friends regardless of age (and even gender in some circumstances). In this research, *Guimi tourism* is defined as "shared travel among best female friends" (Chen, Mak, & Calder, 2020, p.1). The past years have witnessed a rapid growth of *Guimi tourism* in China. According to the *Chinese Women Travel Report of 2016* (Lvmama, 2016), 63% of the participants perceived *Guimis* as the best travel companion, 95% experienced *Guimi tourism* from 2014 to 2016, and 72% planned to travel with *Guimis* in 2017. The popularity of *Guimi tourism* can be seen from another recent survey, *Travel Consumption Report of Women Users in 2019* (Lvmama, 2019), which reported about 40% of the participants traveling with family, 35% traveling with *Guimi,* and 21% traveling alone. *Guimi tourism* has become the second-largest female tourist segment in contemporary China. Despite its promising development, there is little research on this phenomenon, except for Chen and Mak (2020) who explored *Guimi-tourists'* experience through blog analysis. While this

pioneering study highlighted changing power relations in *Guimi tourism*, its effects on women empowerment and underlying mechanism remain unknown.

This research aims to explore the potential of *Guimi tourism* in promoting women empowerment and the underlying mechanism through a holistic interpretation of 28 *Guimi-tourists'* embodied experience and their life-history narratives. The constructivist gender theory suggests that the inferior role of female is constructed by social processes and individual experiences, which means women (dis)empowerment is a dynamic process (Jule, 2014). However, the majority of empowerment theories focus on the measurements rather than the process of empowerment (Aghazamani & Hunt, 2017). An exception is Kabeer's (2005) empowerment framework that embraces resources, agency, and achievements, which interprets women empowerment as a dynamic process and emphasizes the underlying rationale. Guided by Kabeer's work, a context-specific resources-agency-achievements framework of women empowerment is constructed. *Guimi tourism* is characterized as an experience of "Return to Innocence", indicating a "burden-free and worry-free" liminal phenomenon and the "being able to be one's authentic self" state of mind. Through this "Return to Innocence" experience and a series of agencies (i.e., power within, power with, and power to, as detailed in the following sections), *Guimi-tourists* empowered themselves to counteract traditional social norms and achieve autonomy in both trips and daily life.

Theoretically, this study contributes to women empowerment by adding a "power to" approach. Concerning the dynamic process and mechanism of women empowerment through *Guimi tourism*, this research enriches gender theory and empowerment theory, and expands Kabeer's (2005) work by constructing a context-specific resources-agency-achievements framework of women empowerment. The study also adds knowledge to tourism literature with a grounded interpretation of female travel in developing countries like China. It challenges the traditional hedonic-oriented understanding of *Guimi tourism* by highlighting the notions of women empowerment and gender equality. Therefore, *Guimi tourism* is endowed with profound sociological and psychological functionality beyond simply spa-sun-and-fun with dine-wine, and shop-until-you-drop activities (Berdychevsky et al., 2016). Furthermore, this study highlights the mechanism through which Chinese cultural norms and contextual constraints for women are coped with. It demonstrates a context-specific analysis by studying women empowerment through the Chinese gender lens, and thus contributes to Chinese cultural studies. The practical implication of this study lies in its contributions to women empowerment in China and gender equality worldwide.

By adding to more understanding of the in-depth demand of women for *Guimi tourism*, this study can guide authorities and industry practitioners to develop destinations, products, and services that cater better to *Guimi tourists.*

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Gender inequality has been a long-standing global issue. Early essentialist feminists like Michelle (1984) posited physical differences as the fundamental cause for inequality, whereas increasing modern sociologists took constructivist views of gender differences and ascribed inequality to social, historical, and cultural factors (Fraser & Nicholson, 1988; Jule, 2014), such as patriarchal restrictions on Arab women (Zuhur, 2003) and Confucian traditions in China. From the constructivist view of gender theory, distinct social status of male and female were constructed by the specific society rather than by physical constructs (Jule, 2014). Women empowerment to achieve gender equality, as a common goal for humankind, should be promoted and examined in its corresponding context. Hence, although common efforts in women emancipation have been made through policy and education worldwide over the past century, the consequences vary across regions (Yount, Dijkerman, Zureick-Brown & VanderEnde, 2014). For instance, while women in western countries enjoyed freedom in the marriage and labor market, girls in Southern Asia still face the risk of marrying in childhood (Barman, 2019). Particularly in developing countries like China, gender inequality remains an overarching issue for sustainable human development as a whole. Only by putting gender issue in its specific socio-cultural context can profound women empowerment and the generalized mechanisms be achieved.

Women empowerment has been a long-standing focus of concern amongst the empowerment theorists. Despite wide discussions in various social science areas, there are still no unified definitions of empowerment (Aghazamani & Hunt, 2017). Kebeer (2005) defined empowerment as “the processes by which those who have been denied the ability to make choices acquire such an ability” (p.13). This seminal definition was restated by the World Bank as “the process of enhancing an individual’s or group’s capacity to make purposive choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes” (Alsop, Bertelsen, & Holland, 2005, p.1). Ganle, Afriyie, and Segbefia (2015) further developed the definition into “a process of change by which individuals or groups with limited choice, freedom, and power are enabled to gain and leverage the power that enhances their ability to exercise choice and freedom in ways that positively contribute

to their well-being" (p.66). Irrespective of variations, these definitions suggested two common ideas: 1) empowerment involves a dynamic process that entails a change from the disempowered to the empowered; and 2) empowerment is centered on the acquisition of certain ability (e.g., choice-making and action-taking) or certain resources (e.g., power and freedom).

Given women empowerment as a dynamic process to obtain ability or resources, two main approaches emerged from gender-power studies (Cornwall & Rivas, 2015). One is the "power over" approach which focuses on the antagonism of men and women to interpret empowerment as the capability of women to control resources over men (Ali, 2014; Alsop et al., 2005). Influenced by Foucault's (1982) post-structuralist view which underlines the map of power as continuous conflicts, negotiations, and compromises within intricate social networks, previous studies have been predominantly taking the "power over" approach to explore women empowerment by granting them equal access to resources through legislation, education and employment (Mosedale, 2005). While ensuring a certain level of equal rights, these "power over" solutions have been criticized for ignoring the influences of deep-rooted social norms, which resulted in discrepancies among people in transforming resources into abilities (Goltz, Buche, & Pathak, 2015).

The other "power to" approach was proposed by the constructivists in the late 1980s (Wartenberg, 1990). This approach emphasizes that changes in power relations should be formed from an individual's consciousness other than fighting for power with the opposite sex. As Miller (1992) argued, "women may want to be powerful in ways that simultaneously enhance, rather than diminish, the power of others" (p.247-248). Accordingly, women empowerment can be regarded as a process to be self-awakening to make choices, obtain authority, identify solutions, and work out creativity (Kabeer, 2005). In the same vein, Ali (2014) interpreted women empowerment as an intimate and personal journey to improve self-consciousness, self-respect, and dignity, as well as the subtle and strategic balance between social expectations and self-demands. It means empowerment on the "power to" basis is distinctive from the "power over" approach. The latter relies on external enforces but the former depends on changes in women's inner mind. However, empirical exploration of the "power to" approach lags behind its significance in counteracting socio-cultural constraints of women empowerment (Cornwall & Rivas, 2015). Hence, this study intends to understand women empowerment process from a "power to" perspective.

Existing social science including tourism studies mainly concerned the outcomes rather than the process of women empowerment (Aghazamani & Hunt, 2017). For instance, most theories

adopted in tourism-related studies were about measurements of women empowerment (Abou-Shouk et al., 2021; Richardson, 2018). Few has interpreted empowerment as a dynamic process and probed into the underlying mechanism. Kabeer's (2005) framework that aims to unravel the process and mechanism of empowerment is an exception, and is thus introduced and adapted in this study (Figure 1). Kabeer's framework contains three major components: resource, agency, and achievements. The core element of agency indicates the procedure by which choices are made and put into effect, while resources represent the enabling factors through which agency is carried out, and achievements refer to the outcomes of the agency. Kabeer (2005) highlighted the interactive effects among the three components in exercising the empowerment process. Resources support the function of the agency to acquire achievements of empowerment, which can consequently improve women's access to new resources, and thus form a virtuous circle (Hook, 2010). Additionally, the "agency" component embraces different approaches. Other than "power over", this study focuses on "power to", which centers on achieving abilities to make decisions and take actions (Townsend, Zapata, Rowlands, Alberti, & Mercado, 1999). Besides, Kabeer (2005) postulated that "power to" often begins with "power within" which refers to the provocation of self-reflexivity, the arousal of self-worth, and the awareness of inequality. Besides, self-reflection can be enhanced by "power with", which means actors take actions with others to achieve strength for common goals collectively. These different approaches together enact a dynamic process through which women empower themselves from being aware of the inequalities, to collaborate with other women to strive for gender equality collectively, and to obtain the abilities to change and reinforce the balance of gender power. Although this framework has been discussed in the literature, its full process has rarely been explored in tourism studies to unravel the dynamic mechanism of women empowerment through travels. This study intends to bridge the gap.

Additionally, a context component that specifies constraints for empowerment was added to the framework since women's disempowerment was context specific. Accordingly, empowerment is also a multifaceted social process that diverges in the political, cultural, and socio-economic settings in which it is embodied (Richardson, 2018). Actions and perceptions of women empowerment in one social setting may be invalid in another (Mason & Smith, 2003). Any attempt to generalize the universal measurement and strategies runs the risk of over-simplification. Therefore, women empowerment should be explored in its socio-cultural context. The precondition

to start an examination of women empowerment is the clarification of constraints of actions (denied ability) in the corresponding context (Mosedale, 2005).

【Insert Figure 1 here】

GIRLFRIEND GETAWAY AND GUIMI TOURISM

Social context and norms have a significant influence on gender relations, as well as travel traditions. Traditional images of independent travelers in the west such as "adventurers" and "explorers" were generally attributed to men (Aghazamani & Hunt, 2017). However, women in modern societies did find their ways to travel, which has been widely examined as a predictor of empowerment (Abou-Shouk, et, al., 2021). Female travel in western countries is found to benefit women with freedom and flexibility, self-empowerment, independence, and social interaction (Osman, et, al., 2020). Compared with other forms of female travel, girlfriend getaway, which is defined as all-female tourism characterized by spa-sun-and-fun with dine-wine and shop-until-you-drop activities (Berdychevsky et al., 2016), has received adequate attention due to its uniqueness. In contrast to family travels, women in girlfriend getaway temporarily emancipate themselves from caregiving roles (Gibson, Berdychevsky, & Bell, 2012) to enjoy physical and mental relaxation (Berdychevsky et al., 2013). Compared to solo women travel, girlfriend getaway provides women with opportunities to strengthen their female bonds and develop collective strategies to cope with the difficulties of "being female and alone" (Chiang, 2006; Wilson & Harris, 2006). These features make girlfriend getaway a valuable experience for women's well-being that deserves academic attention.

Some studies highlighted girlfriend getaways' contributions to women's ability and interpersonal skills, which are important for empowerment. For instance, Junek, Binney, and Winn (2006) identified benefits of all-female travel, including a tranquil, congenial, and intimate atmosphere, exchanging comparable interests and relieving from competition and stress. Gibson *et al.* (2012) perceived girlfriend getaways as rites for women to pass through life stages and satisfy different psychological desires, such as escaping from routine, strengthening female bonds, and living through life challenges. Berdychevsky *et al.* (2013) even revealed the therapeutic nature of girlfriend getaways for women. Through letting women walk out of their comfort zone, accomplish goals, enrich the experience, broaden minds, and get in charge, girlfriend getaways help women develop a sense of freedom and individuality, as well as social connections, which can finally

empower them in daily life (Durko & Stone, 2017; Jordan & Gibson, 2005; Wilson & Harris, 2006). Whether this similar experience in China can relieve women from traditional patriarchal social norms is of critical concern to this undertaking.

In the Confucian socio-cultural context like China, independent female travel was not favored until the recent decade. Female travel was perceived as against "Asian descent" (Osman, et, al., 2020, p.248). For instance, "historically, Chinese women have been left out of the social history of leisure and travel" (Guo, 2014, p.179), thus leaving female travel a relative lacuna area in research. However, the recent years have witnessed an increasing popular and significant phenomenon – *Guimi tourism* – in China. As the counterpart of "girlfriend getaway", *Guimi tourism* represents a new trend of Chinese female travel. Despite its rapid growth, *Guimi tourism* has received little attention (Chen & Mak, 2020; Chen et al., 2020). Chen and her colleagues investigated core components of *Guimi-tourists'* experience through blog analysis. Amongst others, pal bonding, pursuing authentic self and time, and social supports are key elements that illustrated similar traits as "girlfriend getaways". Moreover, Chen and Mak (2020) highlighted power relations, dependence, and conflicts between Chinese *Guimi tourists*, which necessitate an examination of relations between *Guimi tourism* and women empowerment. Given the lack or lag of awareness of gender (in)equality in the Chinese and even Asian society, this study could be of both theoretical and practical significance. By resorting to the conceptual framework built on Kabeer (2005) (Figure 1), this research aims to explore *Guimi-tourists'* meaning-making of their travel experience by answering two questions: 1) what the constraints to action in the context of *Guimi tourism* are, and 2) if and how Chinese women are empowered by *Guimi tourism* to counteract the contextual constraints for equality.

RESEARCH METHOD

Data collection

Semi-structured interviews with *Guimi tourists*' detailed descriptions of lived experiences were used to capture their meaning-making through their narratives (Bertaux & Thompson, 2017; Friedman, 2016). Participants were selected purposefully and recruited through a snowball technique to capture the rich experiences of a specific group (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Specifically, Chinese women who were born before 1975 and have experienced *Guimi tourism* more than once during the past two years were selected for this study. The rationale for this selection lies in the

fact that this group is the most significant segment of the Chinese *Guimi tourism* market (Lvmama, 2019). Besides, they have rich experience and knowledge about changes in Chinese society and their life course.

Data was collected via semi-structural interviews from January 2018 to March 2019. Building rapport with participants is identified as an effective tool for an exploratory study (Clarke, 2006). During data collection, researchers are encouraged to present personal identity and share information with participants to form non-hierarchical relationships with them and create smooth communication (Devault, 1990). In this regard, the investigators became WeChat friends with participants around three months before formal interviews. WeChat is one of the most popular social media platforms in China. The rationale of being friends with participants through WeChat lies in, firstly, being friends through WeChat allows the investigators to conduct informal conversations with participants in a relaxing way and at the lowest cost to construct mutual trust. This trust can facilitate participants' sincere sharing of stories and experiences during formal interviews. Secondly, being friends through WeChat helps the investigators build a "Close but Not Too Close" relationship with participants, and thus get to know them in a meaningful and authentic manner (Owton & Allen-Collinson, 2014, p.283). The understanding of participants through daily posts in WeChat (i.e., Moments) helps the researchers better interpret the content of formal interviews with them. To ensure privacy and confidentiality of the participants, only information in formal interview and those with their permissions were released in the study.

Major interview questions were about participants' *Guimi-tourist* experience. (Un)supported environment, awareness, and practices of gender equality were inquired under the umbrella of the investigation topic. For example, related questions such as "How do you define *Guimi*?", "Why did you choose to travel with *Guimi* instead of family members?", "How do you make sense of your *Guimi-tourist* experience?", "How do you make sense of people's attitude towards your trip?", "Who paid for your trip?", "Who was responsible for the housework, taking care of the child and the elderly while you were away?", and "How do you make sense of the responsibility division?" were asked. Deep reflections were triggered by keeping probing on "how and why" at the proper time. Additionally, demographic information was collected at the end of each interview. Interviews were conducted in Chinese and taped with participants' permission.

In total, 28 participants that fulfilled the requirements of this study were recruited (Table 1). Their birth years range from 1959 to 1972, with an average age of 55. Thirteen participants were already retired, while others were still working or at the end of their career; 18 out of 26 had monthly income between RMB5,000-10,000 (US$711-1,422). Almost half of them held a bachelor's degree or above. Participants' geographic locations were scattered in Northeast, Northwest, Southeast, Southwest, and Central China. Owing to the country's One-Child Policy, 22 participants have only one child. Two extra interviews were conducted when data reached saturation for further confirmation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). The 28 interviews lasted 45-90 minutes each.

【Insert Table 1 here】

Data analysis

All interview records were transcribed verbatim and coded in their original linguistic form. Thematic analysis, "a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within the data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.79), was adopted for its capability to minimally organize and describe information in rich detail (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). Thematic analyses for this inquiry have followed seven steps (Ayres, Kavanaugh, & Knafl, 2003). It started from going through all interviews multiple times to sketch the lived experience of *Guimi-tourists* as a whole, which was followed by an in-depth immersion into each statement in its context to highlight significant narratives. The interview text in this stage was decontextualized, sorted, and organized into fragments of meaning (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). In the third step, the researchers aimed to distinguish "information relevant to all participants" from "those aspects of the experience that are exclusive to particular informants" (Ayres et al., 2003, pp.871-872). Fourthly, authors reflect upon the corpus of the significant statements within and across cases to generate major themes, which were subsequently reintegrated and recontextualized to develop an essential structure of the story in the fifth step. The sixth step is an essential process that requires authors to interpret participants' meaning-making of Guimi-tourist experience through the Chinese gender lens. The final step is the synthesis of participants' experiences based on their expressions.

To ensure credibility and trustworthiness, data analysis and interpretation were triangulated among the three authors (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). The first author transcribed the records, categorized the transcripts into themes, identified significant statements within each theme, and translated the significant statements into English. This process was repeated by the second author

and triangulated with the first author (Ayres *et al.*, 2003). The third author brought reflexivity to the thematic analysis and interpretation. Themes were developed based on a consensus amongst the authors (Flick, 2004).

THE CHINESE GENDER LENS

"Chinese gender lens" in this study focuses on the socio-cultural framework through which gender-related norms and contextual constraints of *Guimi tourism* are formed. Three pillars of the "gender lens" are discussed in this section: Confucian tradition, Clan-family structure, and Communist ideology, which resulted in the six main constraints – suppression, invisibility, double-burden, caregiving, ignorance, and devaluation.

Confucianism is a religious ideology, philosophic tradition, political order, and socio-economic system that dominates China and other East Asian countries such as Korea, Japan, and Vietnam (Chon & Hao, 2020). Beneath the harmonious surface of a Confucian family, there are conflicts of power, domination, and centrality on a deeper level (Slote & De Vos, 1998). A long history of Confucian tradition has induced deeply rooted patriarchal norms in Chinese society. "Man is superior to woman" and "three obedience[1] and four virtues" were the main principles in ancient China (Zeng, Pang, Zhang, Medina, & Rozelle, 2014). Hence, Chinese women's voices and needs in families were usually suppressed (Slote & De Vos, 1998); men's demands and opinions are top priorities. Moreover, Confucianism has been criticized as a restriction on women's freedom of mobility (Wantono & McKercher, 2020). Women are encouraged to "stay indoors all the time". Invisibility in the social sphere is deemed as a virtue for Chinese women, especially for the senior generation (Ko & Taylor, 1995). By contrast, behaviors like traveling are socially depreciated for women: "*If I travel too much, people may judge me as showing off in the public space*" (S04, 57, higher institution educator, Beijing). Also, China held a longstanding tradition of a patriarchal economy in which men supported the family in economic terms while women provide domestic caring (Li, Sato, & Sicular, 2013). Even in modern times, it is still widely accepted that "men dominate the outside, women dominate the inside" so that housework has defaulted as the responsibilities of women (Hu & Scott, 2016). Despite making increasing economic contributions to their families, women nowadays are still expected to be "an obedient wife and a kind mother"

[1] It means women should obey their father before marriage, obey their husband during married life, and obey their sons in widowhood.

after work. This results in the work-house double burden for women (Kashima, et al., 1995; Lee, 2002), which can be the biggest barrier for them to participate in Guimi tourism: "*This is our Chinese tradition. I get used to staying at home and taking all the housework. I don't need help from my husband. When I can enjoy life and travel, but my husband has to take care of the house, I feel guilty*" (S10, 57, worker, Inner Mongolia).

The clan-family structure adds to the challenge for women to participate in *Guimi tourism*. Historically, the living space of Chinese families is hierarchically arranged to host "four generations under the same one roof". Compared to women in western countries which favor nuclear family structure with better public welfare system, Chinese women shouldered heavier family burden (Hook, 2010). In modern times, although Chinese married couples are not necessarily required to live with their parents, women are still obliged to take care of their (grand)children and parents (in-law). This caregiver role leads to Chinese women's endless family burden throughout their whole lifetime (Hu & Scott, 2016). Therefore, the ten years after retirement are often perceived as the "golden years" for *Guimi-tourists*: *"Previously, we were busy with our kids and work, so we did not have time and mindset to travel. Ten years later, we have to stay home to look after the elderly and grandchildren. We need to seize 'the ten golden years' now. We cannot wait to plan for the next travel before we finished the current trip. We will overcome all the barriers to travel around the world, never rest our feet"* (S09, 57, educator, Sichuan).

Past communist education encourages individuals to sacrifice for the collective. Individuals' needs are ignored. People, particularly women, feel guilty to take hedonic activities. For instance, leisure travel can be perceived as hedonistic and selfish. Such feeling of guilty is expressed in many participants' narratives, "*how can I travel when my kid is still young? How can I travel when my family needs me? Do not imagine me as that type of woman"* (S14, 49, educator, Hunan). Moreover, even though both women and men contribute equally to the shared family account, women's self-enjoyment is devaluated in the allocation of family resources (Qi & SØrensen, 2016). Many participants felt ashamed to use the family saving for *Guimi tourism*: "I *thought it was a waste to spend money on myself. I always wanted to save money for the kids and family"* (S06, 49, pharmacist, Hubei).

Due to these contextual constraints, women empowerment in China is not only about legislation or political advocacy, but also a cultural matter that "cannot be solved by simply

appealing to the amorphous idea of gender equality borrowed from liberal philosophers" but relies on self-awareness (Afshar, 1998).

EMPOWERMENT THROUGH GUIMI TOURISM -- RESOURCES

Reflecting on the gender lens and corresponding contextual constraints, *Guimi tourism* was identified to empower women and promote gender equality through embodied *Guimi-tourist* experience. In particular, the core of the *Guimi-tourist* experience, as resources that empower women, was identified as a "Return to Innocence", indicating a "burden-free and worry-free" liminal experience and the state-of-mind of "being able to be one's authentic self". It is a state that women are free from daily duties and enjoy themselves, as in their innocent childhood time. *Guimi* on some occasions are friends that grew up together with shared childhood memories. Traveling with childhood friends provided women an imaginary journey of going back to the age they got to know each other and being their authentic selves: *"Traveling with Guimi is one of the very few moments that I feel burden-free and worry-free. It brought us back to our childhood days when we knew nothing but play"* (S05, 59, Self-employed, Yunnan). This liminal state of "Return to Innocence" consists of a series of psychological experiences including "carefree", "being oneself", "going wild", "attention", and "appreciation". These psychological enjoyments work together to empower and liberate women from deep-rooted socio-cultural constraints.

Engaging in *Guimi tourism* allows women to temporarily escape from the social role of being the caregiver, and thus they can be free from the work-family double-burden to embrace their "carefree" leisure time for a while: *"Guimi tourism provided a fully care-free period when I can leave all the responsibilities including housework behind and truly enjoy my life"* (S18, 49, Doctor, Gansu). Without caring duties, they themselves were the only focus of concern. Echoing with Chen *et al.* (2020) that *Guimi tourism* opens the door for women to pursue "me and my" authentic-time, participants in this study expressed enjoyments of "being myself" during *Guimi travels*: *"When we stay with our families and colleagues, we need to play multiple social roles according to people's expectations. But my Guimis and I knew each other when we were little girls. We have nothing to hide. I can be myself" (*S04, 57, higher educator, Beijing). Moreover, many participants experienced the exciting moment of "going wild". They joked, played, and enjoyed over-night talks to release their suppressed nature and demand: "*We were so high when we traveled together. We went to a club together. We were all more than 50 years old, and it was our first time visiting a*

club. We danced with young people. It was such a crazy and happy memory" (S09, 57, educator, Sichuan).

The enjoyments during Guimi travels aroused women's "attention" to themselves, as a strategy to cope with the ignorance from their family members: "*Our generation did not receive attention at a young age. During Guimi tours, we only focus on each other and listen to each other's stories"* (S08, 56, civic servant, Shandong). Further, the gaze from surroundings also met women's demand for social attention: *"once when we all dressed in traditional Chinese Cheongsam, all people around looked at us, and we became the focus. We enjoyed the feeling of getting attention and being praised"* (S19, 56, retired manager, Jiangsu). Public visibility broadened women's scope from family to social sphere. Additionally, *Guimi tourism* provided women an opportunity to "appreciate" the beauty of each other and thereby endowed self-devalued women with the confidence to display their feminine charm. During their childhood, beauty was criticized as a bourgeoisie lifestyle rather than something that added to one's value. At their young age, women were covered in standard, military-style, and blue-green-grey monochrome uniforms to reduce female sexual characteristics. While on *Guimi* tours, women gave dedicated efforts to cloth matching and photographs to obtain outside appreciation, *"We gathered in the same room every night to discuss what we should wear the next day. It is so good to be young, and we want to stay young forever. When we were young, society didn't allow us to dress up because it could cause big troubles. Now we are making up for what we have missed in our youth"* (S20, 59, higher educator, Beijing).

Overall, *Guimi tourist* experience signified a break from routine life and brought participants psychological changes, based on which social contextual constraints can be confronted through an application of power agency.

EMPOWERMENT THROUGH GUIMI TOURISM -- AGENCY

From participants' narratives, the power agency that women applied to achieve power (*power to*) for managing their ingrained social norms through *Guimi tourist* experience has gone through processes from self-reflection (*power within*) to group collaboration (*power with*).

Power Within

On reflection of the increasing popularity of *Guimi tourism,* traditional gender norms binding women were shaken. Firstly, participants were eager to travel, and justified travel motivations by a "group effect": "*The society is changing. Nowadays all my retired female friends traveled with their Guimis. Guimi tourism has become one of the must-do things on our agenda"* (S09, 57, educator, Sichuan). *Guimi tourism* has gradually become normalized and socially acceptable in China as a beneficial leisure activity. Women, as well as the whole society, are reflecting on social norms and becoming more tolerant for women "showing off outside" to enjoy the freedom of mobility and engagement in social activities: *"In the past, people believed if a woman travels a lot, she must be hedonistic and not worthy of respect. However, I feel more and more people admire my life. They think I'm capable and brave enough to explore the world. The environment will become more supportive, and society will show more respect for women"* (S04, 57, higher educator, Beijing).

Besides, some participants started to think about the balance between effort and reward. *Guimi tourism* was rationalized as their "deserved rewards" for decades of devoting to the family. They spent their whole youth nourishing children and supporting parents(in-law) and their spouses. It is time for them to transform from a caregiver role to a self-caring person, especially when their kids went to university, their parents were still healthy, and their careers approached the end: "*I think I've done enough for my family. I spent all my life to take care of everyone. I deserve to travel with my Guimis"* (S09, 57, educator, Sichuan).

Furthermore, *Guimi tourism* triggered deep "self-introspection" for some participants. Through thoughtful reflections on their deprived status in the family, women claimed equal right to enjoy life: "*Women in our age spent our whole life to take care of others. By the end, we even feel guilty to enjoy our own life. Our families are spoiled. They think we should stay at home to take care of them. They never think that we are also human beings, and we also need to be taken care of"* (S05, 59, self-employed, Yunnan). As well, some participants realized their equal rights to share family resources: "*This is the money I earned with my husband together. Why can't I spend the money on myself?*" (S17, 55, manager, Guangdong). The "self-introspection" on deserved rights demonstrated women's self-awareness to challenge unequal social gender norms.

Power With

Self-awareness was further enhanced by supports from *Guimis*. Although participants sometimes were stopped from traveling due to potential gender gaze and latent threats (Brown & Osman, 2017), *Guimi tourism* gave them a safety net to counteract fear and uncertainty through "accompanying each other": "*My families did not want me to go out because they feel the outside world is hazardous. We use our actions to prove we can travel on ourselves together. Being women doesn't make us vulnerable"* (S06, 49, pharmacist, Hubei). Traveling together with *Guimis* helped participants overcome loneliness and add fun to the journey: "*I don't want to travel by myself because it's insecure, lonely, and boring. My Guimis provide me company. We talk all the time, play poker, and share home-made food on the train. Time passed faster and became more interesting."* (S08, 56, civic servant, Shandong).

Guimi tourism also acted as a therapeutic process for women through "mutual understanding". Upon a shared space and time for deep communication, empathy was achieved among *Guimis*: "*My Guimi and I have similar troubles in life. Only women of our age and in our situation can understand each other. We are happy to share our happiness and sadness"* (S05, 59, self-employed, Yunnan). For instance, many participants experienced unpleasant menopause, yet it was difficult to share their anxiety with families. *Guimis* with similar embodied experience can comfort each other in this helpless situation: "*I have the anxiety that I'm getting old and useless. I can feel the wrinkles growing around my eyes. I got hot flashes, night sweats, and sleep problems. My kid found a job in another city, and my husband is still at work. I'm very lonely at home by myself all day long. My Guimis made me feel I'm not alone. Only we can understand each other and encourage each other. I'm glad to talk with my Guimis and change the environment during the trip. We became stronger together"* (S08, 56, civic servant, Shandong). Sharing experience with each other helped participants relieve from depressions and restore power for self-confidence.

Guimi tourism was a journey through which women "built a micro-cosmos" of themselves. The micro-cosmos enabled women to liberate and strengthen themselves both externally and internally. From an external perspective, *Guimi tourism* provided women a collective space-time to confront social pressure and set them free from daily caregiver roles: "*When I travel with Guimi, I feel I was set free. When I travel with my family, I feel it was just a change in the environment to do my housework. All the pressure still follows me"* (S07, 47, doctor, Guangdong). Many participants felt relieved to be true to themselves during traveling with *Guimis*: "*I'm supposed to*

bear everything in silence in daily life. But I can be the real me with my Guimis. Guimi tourism creates a special time and space just for us" (S06, 49, pharmacist, Hubei). From an internal perspective, conversations with *Guimis* and observations of each other's life facilitated women to reflect on gender relations: "*My Guimis are like my mirrors. I can reflect on myself by witnessing their life, then I can understand what is equal and what is not. My Guimis make me realize that I also need care and I also have the right to enjoy life. It is a fundamental liberation for me"* (S05, 59, self-employed, Yunnan). In this micro-cosmos, participants illustrated collective power to support each other and fight against the traditional social norms that constrained and deprived women.

Power To

Self-retrospection and collective support during *Guimi tourism* paved the way for participants to achieve abilities that can demonstrate their equal social status and power as men. Participation in *Guimi tourism* means a group of women living together for some time without male supports. Women had to "make decisions" from choosing accommodation, dining, attractions, and transports to coping with risks and emergencies, a process during which their abilities were enhanced: *"When I travel with my husband, he is the one that makes decisions and I just follow him. But when I travel with my Guimis, we carry luggage on our shoulders, plan the trip together, solve problems together, and take care of each other. I feel I'm more involved, energetic, and responsible. I believe I'm stronger and more independent than what I thought"* (S05, 59, Self-employed, Yunnan).

One of the main motivations for participants to take *Guimi tourism* is social involvement. With a long-time immersion in family life, women found themselves disconnected from the outside world. Particularly for those who were retired, they felt lonely and bored at home and eager to reconnect with society. Hence, participants showed passion to "take responsibilities" and make contributions to the group. *Guimi tours* were organized in such a way that each group member could assume different duties. Some acted as group leaders in charge of the trip arrangement, some as accountants responsible for expenses, and some as photographers to choose cloth and take photos: "*Everyone has a role in this team, and everyone is very responsible. One of my Guimis was very passionate about photography. Once at the seaside in Iceland, she was hit by a big wave while taking photos for us. However, she kept taking photos for us the next day in harsh pain. When we went back, it turned out she had a fracture of the lumbar vertebra. You can imagine the suffering*

she had. But she was so responsible and fulfilled her duty perfectly. We were moved by her attitude and honored her as our leader. She was also very proud of herself" (S01, 58, higher educator, Shandong). Appreciations received from *Guimis* refreshed participants' views about their values and abilities.

To overcome barriers to attending *Guimi tourism*, many participants deployed diplomatic strategies to negotiate with family members for supports. The commonly applied strategies include soft ones like well-organized trip duration and advanced housework arrangements: *"I attended Guimi tourism twice every year and I always come back within one week. Before I left, I made dumplings for my husband and my mom. Once I came back, I cleaned up the house to make up for my absence. If I can arrange everything well, my family have no objection to my travel"* (S11, 48, freelancer, Fujian). With the increased travel frequency, soft strategies may become less efficient, and thus some participants had to take hard ones such as straightforward confrontation and travel without permission. For instance, participant S22 took frequent *Guimi tourism,* and sometimes the trips had to be scheduled secretly due to disagreements of family members: "*When my mother heard about my trip from my husband 'by accident', my mother told me her blood pressure turned to 190. I had to postpone the trip and take care of her. I don't know if her sickness was real. She doesn't want me to go out. Whenever I told her my trip in advance, she always stopped me with different excuses. I have to change this situation. I should better travel secretly"* (S22, 57, nurse, Beijing). Negotiation strategies from soft to hard have also been applied to others during travel; these demonstrated participants' increased power in resisting social norms that devaluated and suppressed them. The power, in the long run, can help them achieve gender equality in a broader sense.

EMPOWERMENT THROUGH GUIMI TOURISM -- ACHIEVEMENTS

Participants indeed expressed empowerment as achievements through the *Guimi tourist* experience and application of power agency in the process. Participations in *Guimi tourism* added to women's "autonomy", which refers to their independence and capability to act following their own needs. The increased "autonomy" can be represented by various aspects of changes in their daily life. First of all, participants reported enhanced "control over family resources": "*I felt guilty to use the family saving on myself before. Now I feel I have the right to enjoy life and spend money on my happiness.*

If I save money for my kid, I would spoil her. If I save money for my husband, he would get a young mistress. Then I could have nothing but misery" (S06, 49, pharmacist, Hubei).

Second, reflection and enjoyments beyond work-family routines during *Guimi* tours elicited women's sense of "self-worth". They re-discovered themselves through "returning to innocence": "*For twenty years my life was occupied by work and my son. Suddenly I realized I never had my own life, and I had no clue how to live by myself. When my Guimis and I order food in the restaurant, we realized we never knew what we like to eat. We always ordered dishes for our kids or husbands. After the trip, I started to reconsider my life. I want to spend more time on myself, to make myself happier, to make myself healthier, and to regain my hobbies"* (S04, 57, higher educator, Beijing). Moreover, attention and appreciation from each other encouraged them to be more self-valuated. For instance, photo-taking was one of the essential activities in *Guimi tourism* to present their beauty: "*We are so fond of travel and taking photos because photography can magnify beauty, so we look better in photos. We appreciate each other and encourage each other. When we come back, we become more confident and feel 'liberated'"* (S22, 57, nurse, Beijing).

Along with women's awakening of "self-worth", their "self-efficiency" was enhanced as well. Some participants evaluated themselves higher afterward and became more confident in work due to successful leadership: *"Because I'm very responsible and capable, my Guimis call me 'big boss' and tell me they will follow me wherever I go. I become more confident and positive. Guimi tourism makes me realize I'm important and valuable in life"* (S01, 58, higher educator, Shandong).

"Self-growth" is also a significant achievement expressed through *Guimi tourism.* Exposure to continuous challenges equipped participants with a higher capability to comprehend, negotiate, and cope with new situations: "*Guimi tourism is an excellent opportunity to improve my skills. Now we are all very professional in photography. We learned from each other the enthusiasm about life and the expertise in work and hobbies"* (S01, 58, higher educator, Shandong). Motivated by *Guimi tourism*, women's pursuit for self-growth even continued after a trip: *"The breath-taking landscape inspired us, so we realized we need to improve our literary ability to describe them. We set a WeChat group to share poems after the trip. I have not read for decades, I almost forgot how talented and artistic I used to be"* (S21, 56, worker, Hebei).

Additionally, participants showed improved "environmental mastery" as achievements from *Guimi* tours. It not only means their freedom of mobility and time usage but more importantly women's willingness and capacities to educate the next generations for gender equality: *"Most of*

us gave up ourselves at a young age and sacrificed our whole life to serve our families. [During Guimi travels], we encouraged each other to value ourselves more. We regret that we realized this too late. Women should live as men at the very beginning. We have been tortured in our past. Therefore, we should talk to our children, tell the boys to cherish and respect women, and tell the girls to love themselves more and don't sacrifice for the family. Don't repeat our lives" (S20, 59, higher educator, Beijing).

As can be seen from these embodied and lived experiences from *Guimi tourists*, continuous *Guimi* trips and communication enhanced Chinese women's gender awareness at a personal level and thereby demonstrated a collective level of women empowerment, which can eventually lead to gender equality at a wider, more global level.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

"Do not be afraid to be weak
Do not be too proud to be strong
Just look into your heart my friend
That will be the return to yourself
The return to innocence"

Lyrics, Return to Innocence, Enigma

In contemporary China and many other countries and regions over the world, women empowerment no longer means a battle between the oppressed and the oppressor to obtain dominance and control, but a journey to awaken awareness of gender equality. "It is creative; and hence it is an affecting and transforming power but not a controlling power" (Hoagland, 1988, p.118). "Power is everywhere" and "comes from everywhere" (Foucault, 1998, p.63). Empowerment cannot be solely done over or for women but has to emerge from themselves upon reflection on existing social norms and constraints (Afshar, 1998) because "the power to grow is inherent in the seed" (Starhawk, 1987, p.8). Hence, this study took a "power to" perspective instead of the "power over" tradition to examine women empowerment through a Chinese gender lens.

In responding to the significant yet unanswered question "how leisure and travel provide space for Chinese women empowerment in contemporary times" (Guo, 2014, p.180), this research explored the potential and underlying mechanism of women empowerment through 28 Guimi-tourists' embodied experience and their life-history narratives. Based on Kabeer's (2005) resource-

agency-achievement framework of empowerment, the process and rationale through which *Guimi tourists* achieved the abilities they have been denied in life was depicted in Figure 2. Although Chinese women usually suffer from need suppression, invisibility in the public sphere, house-work double burden, caregiver roles, ignorance, and devaluation in family, *Guimi tourism* demonstrates as a powerful resource for them to apply agency to overcome these social norms constraints and finally achieve empowerment.

【Insert Figure 2 here】

The key resource that *Guimi tourists* retained is an experience of "return to innocence", back to a state of an authentic self as Enigma's lyric described; this liminal state consists of psychological enjoyments including carefree, being myself, going wild, attention, and appreciation. *Guimi tourism* allowed women to escape from the work-house double burden and release their suppressed needs. As Chen et al. (2020) illustrated, women pursued an authentic self and time in the carefree state; they undressed their masks of "an obedient wife and kind mother" to be self-concerned and let themselves go wild in the anonymous tourism encounters. Substantial attention and appreciation received from partners and others make Chinese women visible and valued again in the social sphere, which lays the basis for final empowerment (Wartenberg, 1990).

Women on *Guimi* tours achieved the power to confront their ingrained social norms in three interactional agencies: the power within, power with, and power to. The "power within" process based on self-introspection challenged long-lasting social norms and roles held by women and rationalized *Guimi tourism* as a decent and beneficial leisure activity. In alignment with Chen and Mak's (2020) argument that women were dependent on each other, this study figured out a "micro-cosmos" that *Guimi tourists* constructed together. Within this "micro-cosmos", women acted collectively to "power with" each other to resist the patriarchal socio-cultural norms (Hu & Scott, 2016). By exposing to continuous self-awareness and collaboration, women were finally equipped with the "power to" to make decisions, take responsibilities, and negotiate with others, the abilities that have been deprived long in history (Blumberg, 1988). Similar to western "girlfriend getaway" (Berdychevsky *et al.*, 2013; 2016), *Guimi tourism* could empower women with increased "autonomy" in daily life, including improved control over family resources, sense of self-worth, self-efficiency, self-growth, and environmental mastery. These achievements in (re)turn created higher accessibilities and better circumstances for women to enjoy *Guimi* tours, thereby constituting a virtuous circle of empowerment, which can finally lead to wider gender equality.

Theoretical and Managerial Implications

Despite similarities in women empowerment, *Guimi tourism* in the Chinese socio-cultural context can be differentiated from the western notion of "girlfriend getaway" in notable ways. First, "girlfriend getaway" is all-women leisure travel (Berdychevsky *et al.*, 2013), while *Guimi tourism* narrows down the scope to a more intimate circle – all-female leisure travel with best friends – indicating closer relationships and sharing. Second, the Chinese gender lens creates unique social constraints for women's travel. Besides, immersed in the collectivist culture, Chinese women (especially the senior segment) have a higher demand for the travel companions to counteract fear and loneliness (Fu, Cai, & Lehto, 2015). Moreover, Chinese *Guimi-tourists* are deeply fond of unique activities such as photo-taking and dressing up in bright colors as a team. Besides, *Guimi-tourists* have distinct meaning-making of all-female travel experience from their counterparts. For example, the "unwanted male gaze" (Doran, 2016, p.5) in the western context was interpreted as pleasant social attention for Chinese *Guimi-tourists*. To name just a few, these discrepancies demonstrate *Guimi tourism* is a promising line of inquiry that deserves further social-psychological observations and investigations.

Theoretically, this study enriches the women empowerment literature by adding a "power to" approach with empirical investigations of the emerging niche market – *Guimi tourism*. In responding to the constructivist view of gender theory, modernized experience of independent female travel is conducive to consciously awakening women from deprived gender roles and achieving awareness-driven gender equality. Based on Kabeer's (2005) work, a context-specific resources-agency-achievements framework depicting the mechanism of empowerment through *Guimi tourist* experience was established to bridge the gap between tourism and empowerment through reflecting the dynamic process of women empowerment, as well as adding a developing country perspective through the Chinese gender lens. The framework and findings of this study could serve as a departure for future research on this topic in other East Asian (Confucian) countries and regions, where women's mobility and gender equality are hindered by cultural norms and social expectations rather than institutional factors such as legislation and education.

From a managerial perspective, this study provides an alternative approach – *Guimi tourism* – to promoting gender equality. For government departments concerning gender relations, official *Guimi tours* can be encouraged or organized as strategies to improve women's gender awareness and promote gender equality. Cultural departments can collaborate with tourism development

bureaus to promote and market *Guimi tourism* as an approach to sustainability and wellbeing. Destinations and industry practitioners can develop *Guimi tourism* products and accommodation options, like *"Guimi suites"* to cater to this growing and promising market. According to *Guimi tourists'* special needs, comfortable and intimate itineraries can be provided. Amongst various considerations, privacy, group activities with *Guimi* costumes, and photo-taking services are critical for a satisfactory and memorable experience.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has a few limitations. In terms of the sampled population, the study only focused on *Guimi-tourists* in their late 40s to early 60s. Future research could extend the age range and explore differences in motivation, expectation, behavioral patterns, and empowerment across different *Guimi-tourist* segments. Besides, due to limited time and resources, this study is only based on 28 Chinese participants' narratives; future studies can broaden the sample size and explore *Guimi tourism* across culture to enhance the depth of interpretation and generalization. Another limitation lies in the data collection method. Future studies can take anthropological/ethnographic approaches to acquiring longitudinal observations of gender-related issues. It would also be meaningful to conduct large-scale surveys to broaden the understanding of *Guimi tourism* and to verify the empowerment model quantitatively. In addition, future studies can extend the understanding of *Guimi tourism* by investigating topics such as travel arrangements, dining and accommodation preferences, inter-group interactions, visitor/user satisfaction, and participants' subjective well-being. Lastly, the current COVID-19 pandemic represents a human tragedy that has shaken the global economy and threatens the well-being of humanity (Hao, et, al., 2020). It would be meaningful to explore women's renewed demands for *Guimi tourism* and its influence on women's well-being in the post-pandemic era.

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Table 1. **Profile of the interviewees**

	Age	Occupation	If retired	Income (RMB, where 1=.142USD)	Education	Province	No. of children
S01	58	Higher educator	Yes	10,000-20,000	Bachelor	Shandong	One
S02	57	Educator	Yes	5,000-10,000	Bachelor	Guangdong	One
S03	56	Higher educator	No	10,000-20,000	College	Shandong	One
S04	57	Higher educator	No	10,000-20,000	Master	Beijing	One
S05	59	Self-employed	No	10,000-20,000	College	Yunnan	Two
S06	49	Pharmacist	No	20,000-30,000	Bachelor	Hubei	Two
S07	47	Doctor	No	20,000-30,000	Bachelor	Guangdong	Two
S08	56	Civic servant	Yes	3,000-5,000	College	Shandong	One
S09	57	Educator	Yes	3,000-5,000	College	Sichuan	One
S10	57	Worker	Yes	3,000-5,000	College	Inner Mongolia	One
S11	48	Freelancer	No	10,000-20,000	Bachelor	Fujian	One
S12	60	Accountant	Yes	3,000-5,000	College	Yunnan	One
S13	53	Manager	No	5,000-10,000	Bachelor	Fujian	One
S14	49	Educator	No	5,000-10,000	College	Hunan	One
S15	47	Doctor	No	20,000-30,000	Master	Guangdong	Two
S16	55	Higher educator	No	10,000-20,000	Doctor	Sichuan	One
S17	55	Manager	No	10,000-20,000	College	Guangdong	One
S18	49	Doctor	No	5,000-10,000	Bachelor	Gansu	One
S19	56	Retired manager	Yes	5,000-10,000	College	Jiangsu	One
S20	59	Higher educator	No	20,000-30,000	Doctor	Beijing	One
S21	56	Worker	Yes	3,000-5,000	College	Hebei	One
S22	57	Nurse	Yes	10,000-20,000	College	Beijing	One
S23	59	Freelancer	No	5,000-10,000	College	Zhejiang	Two
S24	56	Civic servant	Yes	5,000-10,000	College	Shandong	One
S25	56	Self-employed	No	5,000-10,000	College	Hubei	One
S26	60	Civic servant	Yes	5,000-10,000	College	Jiangsu	One
S27	55	Worker	Yes	3,000-5,000	College	Shandong	One
S28	52	Self-employed	Yes	10,000-20,000	College	Hainan	Two

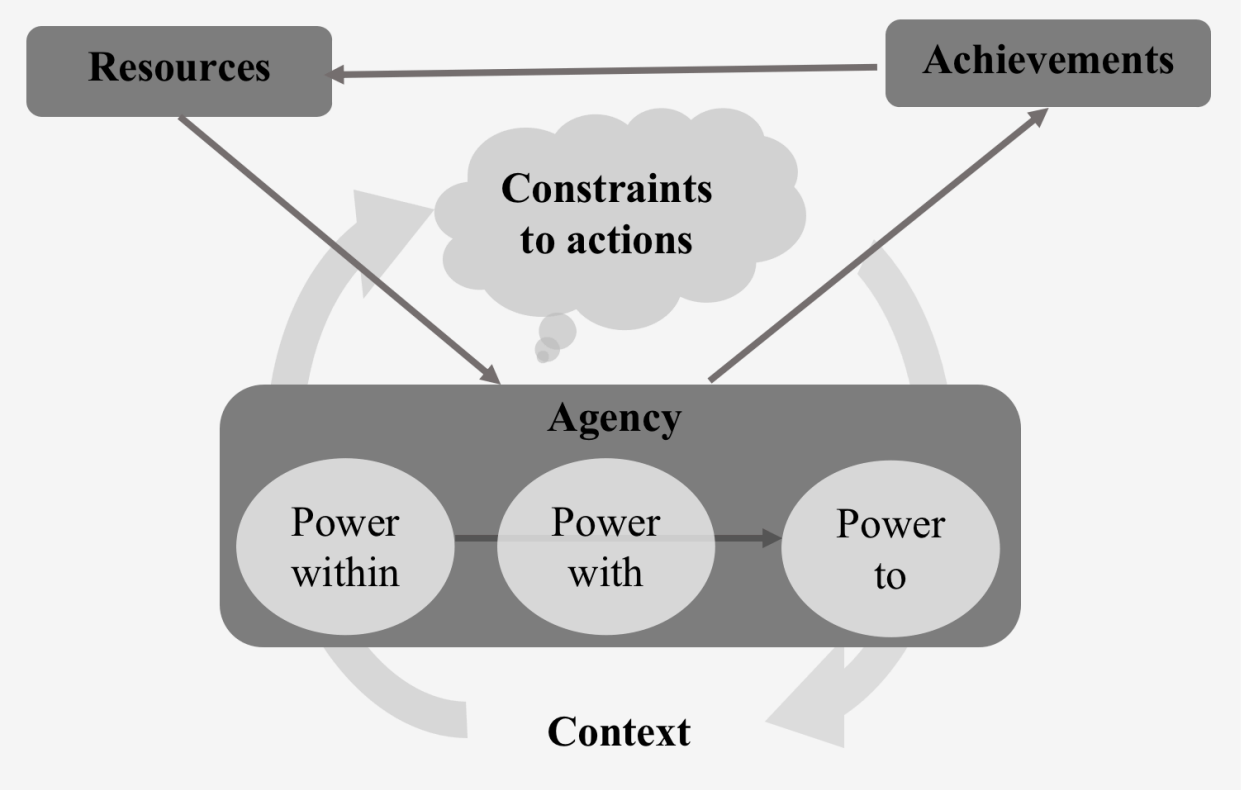

Figure 1. **Conceptual framework of women empowerment (adapted after Kabeer, 2005)**

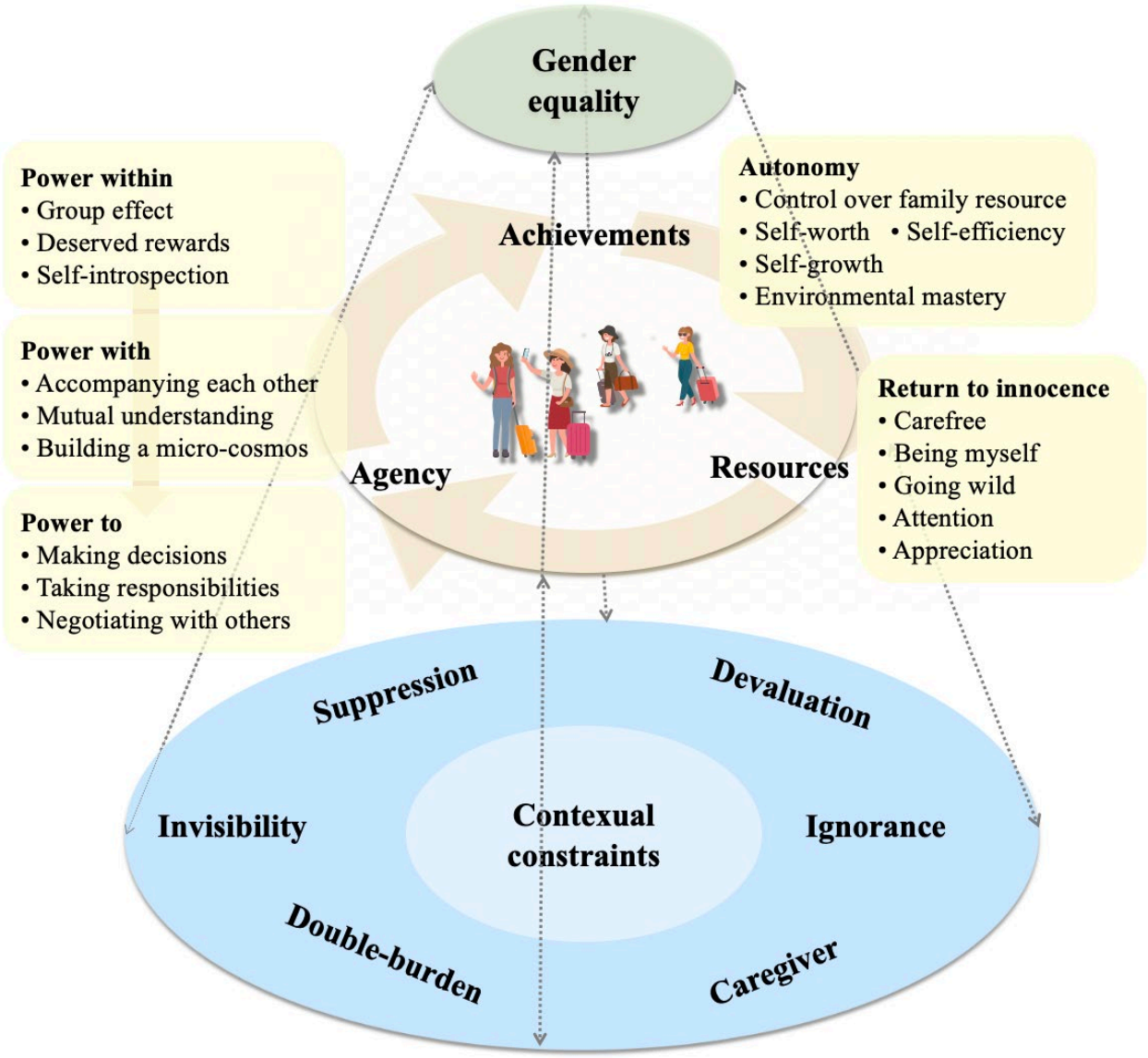

Figure 2. **Women empowerment mechanism through Guimi Tourism**