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An investigation of how specific social backgrounds shape the characteristics of young Chinese travel bloggers within the mobilities paradigm.

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Forward

First and foremost, I would like to give my sincere thanks to my supervisor Kjell Olsen for his support throughout this Master's thesis project. He is intellectual and was willing to share all the knowledge I need. This project would not have been finished without his guidance.

I owe much gratitude to the informant for participating in this project and sharing her valuable experiences and opinions. It was a great pleasure to work with the informant to look back and reflect upon blogs and opinions she posted online, to explore the context of these blogs and the motivations behind them.

The journey of writing this thesis is more than a study about my research questions; it is also a quest for my personal characteristics. It provided an excellent opportunity for me to review myself as a traveller and a young Chinese who grow-up in the same changing society as the blogger group I studied in this thesis. Thus, writing this thesis is also a journey of understanding myself. This journey motivated me to devote myself entirely to this project and gives me the strength to continue when I felt frustrated or anxious during my writing.

Lastly, I am grateful for the experience of living here in Alta. It inspired me to rethink everything with new perspectives. My time living here is a precious chance to take a break from my fast-paced life, to broaden my life and spark my curiosity.

Abstract

Using the mobilities paradigm, this thesis aims to try to explain the uniqueness of a certain group of young Chinese travel bloggers, who were also tourists. Hence, this thesis considered that the characteristics of young Chinese travel bloggers, both in their motivations and behaviours, do not appear in the realm of tourism only. A better understanding of this group means freeing them from the tourist role and exploring how Chinese social background shapes the feature of this group. In other words, instead of focusing on what are their characteristics as tourists, this thesis explores where their characteristics come from and how to interpret them in contemporary China.

The project asks: How does specific social backgrounds shape the characteristics of young Chinese travel bloggers? This question is examined by narrative analysis of on online materials posted by the informant and semi-structured interviews with the informant. In the analysis, I first summarised the generational characteristics of the young travel blogger group as they need to constantly face the contradiction between individualism in a more advanced society and Chinese traditions or communism of the Chinese government. Hence, their travel preferences, like dependence on the Internet or higher consumption, are generational characteristics manifested in a tourism scenario. Using the informant as a case, I illustrated how the informant confronted these contradictions. I described how the informant used online representation in travel blogs to construct her self-identification. And how continuous developments in both society and the online environment in China affect the process of self-identification of the informant.

In conclusion, I demonstrated an alternative way to explain the distinctiveness of the young Chinese travel blogger group. Since they are a touristic phenomenon in a non-Western society, interpretations of their characteristics need to be situated within their cultural and social traits instead of fixing them into the existing theories based on Western societies.

Keywords: mobilities paradigm, Chinese tourists, travel bloggers, generational approach

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Since the emergence of the Internet, research has been conducted to understand its impacts on tourism from different perspectives. Previous research has illustrated that tourism is one of the major industries that has been affected by the Internet since tourism is an intense information industry (Akehurst, 2009; Jang, 2005; Pan, MacLaurin, & Crotts, 2007). Significantly after Web 2.0, the Internet has changed from a "publishing-browsing platform" to a "participation interaction platform". Thus, the Internet has transformed travel with tools such as fare aggregators, meta-search engines, and new virtual communities (Newman, Chang, Walters, & Wills, 2016). Moreover, innovations cultivated by Web 2.0 in the travel and hospitality sector have been widely adopted by consumers (Z. Xiang, Wang, O'Leary, & Fesenmaier, 2015). In particular, Web 2.0 facilitates the rise of social media. As a result, it has profoundly affected tourists' preferences, behaviours, and social relations (Akehurst, 2009; Ali-Hasan & Adamic, 2007; Ayeh, Au, & Law, 2013). For some people, the influences of the Internet were deepened by social media, especially for experienced Internet users. The appearance of social media equips them with better Internet connectivity and new channels for expressing themselves and socialising with each other. The term "travellers 2.0" was proposed by Christou, E. (2012) as a description for the group of tourists who are experienced in both travelling and Internet using. Travellers 2.0 depend on information and social connections online since they include the utility of digital devices throughout their travelling. For example, Internet connectivity is a crucial factor for them in evaluating destinations. In addition, the activity of taking pictures and sharing on social media has become a travelling ritual. More importantly, the social networks of travellers 2.0 also have expanded. With the Internet, travellers 2.0 can include people they meet in travelling in their daily lives. The relationship between tourists does not end when travelling stops.

In this thesis, I focus on a group of Chinese travel bloggers since blogger have been listed as distinct representatives of the travellers 2.0 (Christou, E, 2012). Travel bloggers are "savvy consumers who make great use of information tools; they are knowledgeable and demanding drivers of tourism activities." (Akehurst, 2009, p. 53). Furthermore, travel blogs, as new media, affect this group of tourists a lot. Through blogs, they have new ways of making decisions and interacting with each other. However, the influence of blogs does not rely on

the information they provide only. Instead, what makes blogs influential for their users is their ability to form social networks.

Blogging activity is not just about publishing. Instead, it is a social activity and a cumulative process. Travel bloggers can establish their identities through self-representation on blogs (Y. Li, 2021; Rettberg, 2017). Instead of mass communication from a few producers to large, primarily passive audiences, blogs support a dense network of small audiences and many producers (Rettberg, 2014). Hence, the importance of studying blogs is not about understanding what blogs are. Instead, it is about what blogs can be. Hookway (2012) concluded four perspectives to answer the second question. He posited that blogs could 1) be a new genre of open-access, participatory journalism to encourage civic and political engagement, 2) create new communities and identities, 3) be a new medium for facilitating knowledge production within education, and 4) be a business sector. I will focus on blogs' ability to create identities and communities.

People consider identity when they are "not sure how to place oneself among the evident variety of behavioural styles and patterns, and how to make sure that people around would accept this placement as right and proper so that both sides would know how to go on in each other's presence." (Bauman, 1996, p. 19). Hence, identity and community issues directly affect how tourists behave or interact with each other. In other words, analysis of the identities of this certain group of tourists in the context of the Chinese blogosphere can provide tourism operators and researchers a valuable perspective for understanding the origin of their motivations and behaviours. Viewing tourism through the lens of identity can provide "insights into why individuals choose to visit certain venues and not others, what behaviours they enact while at the tourist venue and most importantly, enable a measure of qualitative prediction about the nature and extent of perceived benefits that result from the tourism experience." (Bond & Falk, 2013, p. 440).

Furthermore, parallel to the development of travel blogs, changes have happened in the sociology of tourism as well. Tourism is considered a central constituent of contemporary social life instead of a bounded-off or discrete activity (Franklin & Crang, 2001). This indicates the de-differentiation of tourism from everyday life, making tourism analysis approaches open to a broader sociological analysis (S. A. Cohen & Cohen, 2019). Tourism now is a central component of modern social identity formation and engagement (Franklin, 2003a). In addition, developments in the Internet and de-differentiation in tourism are not two

single, separated lanes. Instead, the Internet, especially social media, join the transformation process of tourism. Tourists have adopted social media to search, organise, share, and annotate their travel stories and experiences (Leung, Law, van Hoof, & Buhalis, 2013). Through social media, touristic roles and practices can transcend time and space more effectively. Thus, the omnipresence of social media plays an essential part in the de-differentiation of tourism by bridging tourism with daily life frequently and constantly. In the case of the travel blog, touristic conventions, together with other practices, join the identity and lifestyle construction of blog users through blogging activities.

Moreover, the nature of the tourism industry has changed as well, especially with the recent shift in the point of origin of tourists. Increasing tourists from the world's emerging regions, particularly Asia, has become a trend with important theoretical and comparative implications for the sociological study of the tourism (S. A. Cohen & Cohen, 2019). However, the rapid growth of tourism in the last two decades in the emerging regions has not been matched by adequate theorising in tourism studies (E. Cohen & Cohen, 2015). Hence, in this thesis, I try to fill some of this theoretical gap by locating my study on Chinese tourists in the ongoing changing sociology of tourism. However, the ambition here is not to target the whole population. Instead, I will focus on travel bloggers. The reason for doing so is that bloggers belong to the young generation, who are representatives of both Chinese tourism and the Internet.

The young generation in this thesis refers to the post-80 tourists who were born from 1980 to 1990 in urban areas. This is the group growing up in China's transformation period. They are the first generation who could afford to travel freely and consider travelling a birth right (Luo, Huang, & Brown, 2015; Sparks & Pan, 2009). As a result, they have emerged as the key drivers of Chinese outbound tourism, accounting for most independent and outbound travellers (Rosyidi, 2018; Y. Xiang, 2013). Therefore, a better understanding of the Chinese post-80 tourists is urgently required as many destinations have welcomed hundreds of thousands of these tourists.

In addition, the post-80 group accounts for most Chinese Internet users as well. According to ChinaInternetInformationNetworkCenter (2021), China has more than 900 million Internet users. The younger age group, age twenty to fifty, accounts for more than 50% of the total number of Internet users. Moreover, Internet usage in China is characterised by regional and age discrepancies. The size of urban users had reached 680 million or 68.7% of the total

population, while rural Internet users were 309 million or 31.3% of China's total Internet population. In other words, post-80 tourists are also experienced in Internet use in China.

Hence, post-80 tourists in China represent both experienced travellers and Internet users. A better understanding of them can help understand the current customers in the tourism industry. Moreover, a better understanding is valuable because their traits and preferences will affect other Chinese tourists, especially those with less travel experience and who are also majorities of the population.

However, previous studies on young Chinese tourists remain fragmented, albeit the request to understand them is urgent. In addition, the existing studies are primarily praxis-oriented. Namely, studies target understanding behaviours, motivations, and the decision process of young Chinese tourists only, which are aimed to solve practical issues in the industry (Song, Wang, & Sparks, 2018; Sparks & Pan, 2009; Tseng, Wu, Morrison, Zhang, & Chen, 2015). Some commonalities have been concluded to help destinations better prepare for post-80 Chinese tourists. For example, one obvious commonality is that they primarily rely on information online. They trust comments from peers with similar interests or experiences, they will collect much information before they travel to be well prepared, and they prefer independent travelling instead of group travelling (Morrison, Tucker, Wu, & Zhang, 2018; Wu & Pearce, 2016; Y. Xiang, 2013; Z. Xiang et al., 2015; Jingru Zhang, Tucker, Morrison, & Wu, 2017). However, one missing piece for gaining a better understanding of this group is the macro social and cultural background those young Chinese tourists live within. More importantly, as a transformation period, this background is still an ongoing process in China. It keeps affecting the young generation to this day. Therefore, the neglect of social context has led to most studies on young Chinese tourists "getting lost in the search for details and often a synopsis is lacking because of an overzealous focus on cases and examples easily" (Kristensen, 2013, p. 169). To fill some of this missing part in this thesis, I found that the de-differentiation in the sociology of tourism is inspiring for my study. It freed my study on post-80 tourists from the policy-led and industry-sponsored analysis (Franklin & Crang, 2001), including the heterogeneity of contemporary Chinese society in the analysis. In other words, in this thesis, I will focus research on Chinese travel bloggers, who also belong to post-80 tourists, using the mobilities paradigm to connect their characteristics with the complexity of contemporary society, instead of limiting their traits to the tourism scope separated from daily life.

1.2 My interest in this project

My interest in how the Internet affects people started from my enthusiasm for the Internet and reflections on my own experiences. From 2016 to 2019, I worked in a law technology company. The company aims to provide software for young Chinese lawyers to help them improve their professional skills and the efficiency and quality of their work. Additionally, I was a co-founder of the company in the meantime. The reason to establish this company with my colleagues was that, over the past two decades, as members of the young generation, we have experienced the process of the Internet gradually penetrating many aspects of our life in China in the past two decades. It is a process that has seen Internet access developed from a dial-up connection to broadband Internet, then to 5G recently. In this process, the Internet gradually became one of the most critical information sources for younger groups like us. Namely, most things start from "google it". The Internet's tendency to expand to all industries and include everyone is powerful and seems inevitable. This experience has developed into a source of our passion and continued to enthral us. Hence, we decided to join this process and work on integrating the Internet within a specific industry. As a participant, I got the chance to observe the transformations of people as users of new technology.

For example, young Chinese lawyers have used social media almost daily as a new channel to construct and express their professional image to their clients. The boundary between personal life and professional career was primarily blurred since they use giant social media platforms, such as WeChat, to include all activities and relations. For example, most young Chinese lawyers put families, friends and colleagues on WeChat. Additionally, they will deal with their personal issues and working activities on WeChat. The only difference is that they divided their families and colleagues into separate chat groups. Hence, multiple images of young lawyers were constructed through social media since they need to manage different groups in one account for various purposes. In addition, diverse social identities and relations collide within their social media. They are lawyers, colleagues, friends and children of their parents simultaneously. More importantly, connections through social media are real-time updated. Therefore, it requests its users change different identities more often. In other words, they need to change between different identities and behave accordingly within one minute. In my experience, most young Chinese lawyers I worked with were used to and good at this situation and considered it a natural consequence of development in society.

Even though my working experiences are not from the tourism industry, I realised that transformations brought by the Internet to the Chinese law industry might become new normality for young tourists also. Hence, in this thesis, I focus on how young Internet users represent themselves and interact with each other in the context of Chinese tourism.

1.3 Research question

My primary research question is: How does specific social background shape the characteristics of young Chinese travel bloggers? Moreover, I will ask two sub-questions to inform the primary question:

1. What are the generational characteristics of young Chinese bloggers?
2. How do young Chinese bloggers negotiate their identities between self-identification and a relatively fixed social structure?

Moreover, the data I use in this thesis was retrieved from one Chinese travel blog website named the Mafengwo, interviews with one Chinese young female travel blogger and her travel blogs. To be specific, I will introduce the mechanism of the website to explain the rules of posting travel blogs and the way the travel blogger community is organised. Furthermore, contents and comments from the informant's blogs are quoted to understand how the informant, as a representative of young travel bloggers, constructs her identity through blogging. In addition, I will reflect upon materials from the interviews with the informant to reveal more details about her process of constructing herself in the blogosphere.

1.4 Structure of the thesis

In this first chapter, I have provided a brief background of this thesis, described my interests in the Internet and its effects on tourism and introduced my research question. Having done that, the rest of the thesis is structured as follows:

Chapter two contains detailed descriptions of the Mafengwo travel blog website and the informant's background. Although this website is designed for Chinese travellers, it mainly reflects the preferences of Chinese users. For example, the language of this website includes Mandarin only. Travel blogs the informant posted also represent the behaviours of young Chinese tourists. I felt that a more thorough introduction was needed for readers from outside of China. In this chapter, I will introduce the structure of the Mafengwo website, including its major sections and the function of each section.

Moreover, this chapter also includes an overview of blogs the informant posted on the Mafengwo website. The main features of the blogs are summarised. In addition, screenshots of the website and blogs of the informant are included in this chapter to provide a visualised impression of the website and the informant for readers.

Chapter three presents the research design used for this thesis. It covers with the theoretical framework, a literature review on Chinese tourists and identifies the theoretical gap I target in this thesis.

Chapter four presents my methodological framework. I explain my qualitative research methods, including narrative analysis and semi-structured interviews. I also reflect on the strengths and limitations of my method.

Chapter five covers the findings of my study, providing a detailed analysis of data. It included four sections. These are: Modern identity of the Chinese youth establishes in a heterogeneous context, Popularity, Identities and relations in multiple contexts. The maturity of the blogosphere has brought changes to blogging.

Chapter six is the conclusion and focuses on my overarching results.

2 Case description

2.1 Description of the travel blog website

For my study case, the website I use is one of China's earliest travel blog websites. It has expanded rapidly since being established in 2010. In October of 2012, it had more than four million registered users. Another milestone was June 2014, when it achieved fifty million registered users. Although this website started as a User-Generated Content (UGC) Internet forum, it has grown into a giant platform that combines all aspects of travelling. I include a thorough introduction to the website in this chapter and details about a blogger because they are inseparable. A blogger starts as a user of the website. The mechanism of the website helps the bloggers construct an online self-representation and establish credibility among the community as well as shape social networks with other users through the website centred on this self-representation. Hence, the site itself is an important context for including in my research project. In this following, I overview main sections of the website.

Figure 1 Screenshot of the homepage of the Mafengwo website

Travel blog

The travel blog section is the core section of the website. This website became popular among Chinese tourists and specifically, independent travellers because of this section. Now, the website not only provides an editor to write and publish blogs, but it also has a template for

blogging. The template is a suggested blog structure, including the title, text, and table of contents. It allows users to upload pictures, videos, or music to blogs. More importantly, the template suggests parameters for each element also. For example, it recommends uploading images larger than 1680 pixels (px) as a blog cover. The title is limited to forty-eight words. Selected pictures should all be bigger than 100*50 px and smaller than 30 megabytes. Videos should be limited to 1 gigabyte. Parameters display high-quality photographs and videos on multiple terminals, especially smartphones and tablets. Because more than 80% of users are active on mobile devices now, I will present a screenshot of the website's editor. Since the website's official language is Mandarin, I provide a translation to make it clearer for readers. All translations are written in red words.
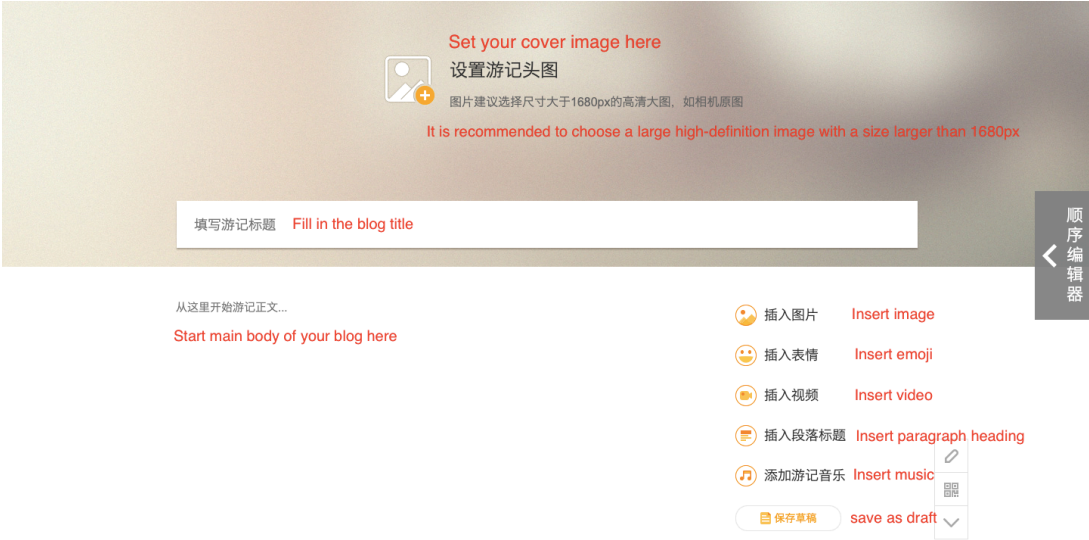
Figure 2 Screenshot of the blog editor on the Mafengwo website

Besides technical support, the website values well-edited blogs by suggesting them on the front page and banner. Even though the website includes many travelling services, the primary part of its front page, which every visitor sees first, is still travels blogs. This section has two popular and influential features: "Cover of the day" and "Treasure blogs". Becoming a selected cover blog, which is selected to be displayed on the banner of the front page, leads to a greater volume of reading. Treasure blogs are recommended under each destination marked with a special icon to emphasise that the website has selected the blog as a treasure blog. Both cover and treasure blogs are chosen and certified by the website.

Figure 3 Screenshot of one cover blog in April of 2022 shown on the front page of the Mafengwo website

Figure 4 Screenshot of one treasure blog of the informant. The yellow star in the red square is the unique icon for a treasure blog.

Moreover, the website has an article to explain how to become a cover or a treasure. It says that all users can apply to become treasure blogs. The website has an editorial team to review applications and make decisions. Conditions for being a cover blog are abstract. The statement from the website is that the only requirement of becoming a cover is to write a good blog. In addition, there are many posts in the Q&A section from former cover bloggers describing how to become the cover blog. Being selected as a cover is an honour among the user community. Cover blogs are an official certification of being an experienced traveller. In addition, being a cover blog also can attract more readers, which means higher popularity in the community. Furthermore, the website provides many benefits to cover bloggers, including sponsored trips and official promotions like personal interviews.

Writing a travel blog is time-consuming. Even though it seems user-friendly to provide a template, it also raises the threshold of composing a good blog. Because everything must be processed to fit parameters. However, most bloggers on this website do more than that. They provided blogs that were well crafted. A cover blog normally has more than 10,000 words, hundreds of edited pictures; some have hand-drawn illustrations and microfilms. These contents are more than stating 'where I go'. Bloggers construct their self-representations through their blogs. In other words, blogs are about 'who I am'. Bloggers include their hobbies, personal relationships and families, feelings and opinions. Hence, cover blogs and treasure blogs present personalities and identities best. For example, one cover blog named 'Watching seventeen sunsets with you' is not a chronologically documented travel blog. Instead, this blogger spliced seventeen sunsets from different places to which she had travelled before into this blog. As she said in the blog, writing this blog expresses her recent thinking about cherishing friends and families. In addition, blogging is a continuous activity. Each blogger has a personal page to collect all the blogs they write and all answers they give in the Q&A section. Hence, they need to maintain consistency to present a complete identity.
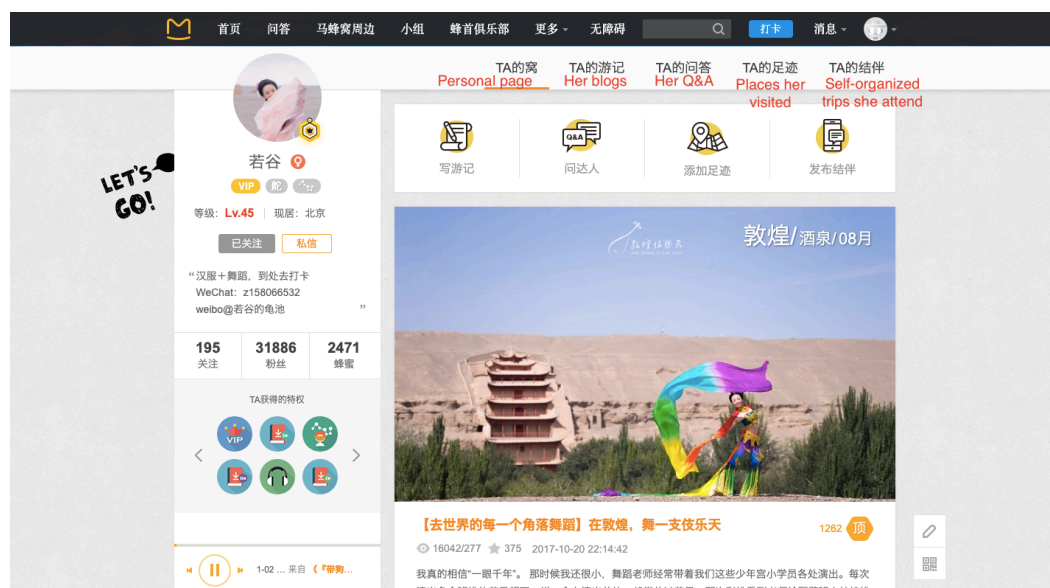
Figure 5 Screenshot of the personal page of the informant

Furthermore, relations with other users are established through the travel blog section. Each blog will usually receive dozens of comments and bloggers on the Mafengwo website actively reply to comments on their blogs. For cover and treasure blogs, they can receive hundreds of comments. Moreover, most bloggers will respond to their comments within a day. Sometimes they turn into a long conversation. There are three kinds of statements that appear most often. The first kind is those giving compliments to content. Even though sometimes they are just simple words like "This picture is gorgeous" or "I like this picture most", bloggers replied to

all of them as well. The second kind is asking practical questions about photos or clothes, like which camera was used, the location of a store the blogger visited or asking where to buy the same clothes bloggers are wearing. Other comments show more personal relations. For example, if the follower is from the same place the blogger visited, he\she will ask the blogger to meet next time if the blogger comes back. Or bloggers will invite some followers to visit the site they live in. Finally, some comments indicate that bloggers and followers have met at events organised by the website or at other self-organised activities by other users. Such comments will show their support of the blogger as a friend or give more compliments about the blogger's personality. Thus, blog comments reveal social networks centred on the bloggers, which involve online and offline activities.

Destination

The destination section contains information about domestic and international destinations. Destinations are classified into three categories, which are 'popular destinations', 'seasonal recommendations' and 'topic selections'. Popular destinations include famous cities on all continents. The time category operates on a twelve-monthly calendar. Each destination has five or six recommended places. The theme category has four subsets, *Collections for each season*, *Travel mode*, *Hobbies* and *Holidays*. In addition, each destination has another page that includes practical information, like route suggestions, hotel and restaurant recommendations, selected treasure blogs and Q&A. It also provides a digital guidebook for downloading. Although this page seems like an official collection or an online lonely planet page. However, the contents in it are all from registered users. Even guidebooks are quotations from users' blogs or comments. Hence, this serves as an approval of the value of users' content.
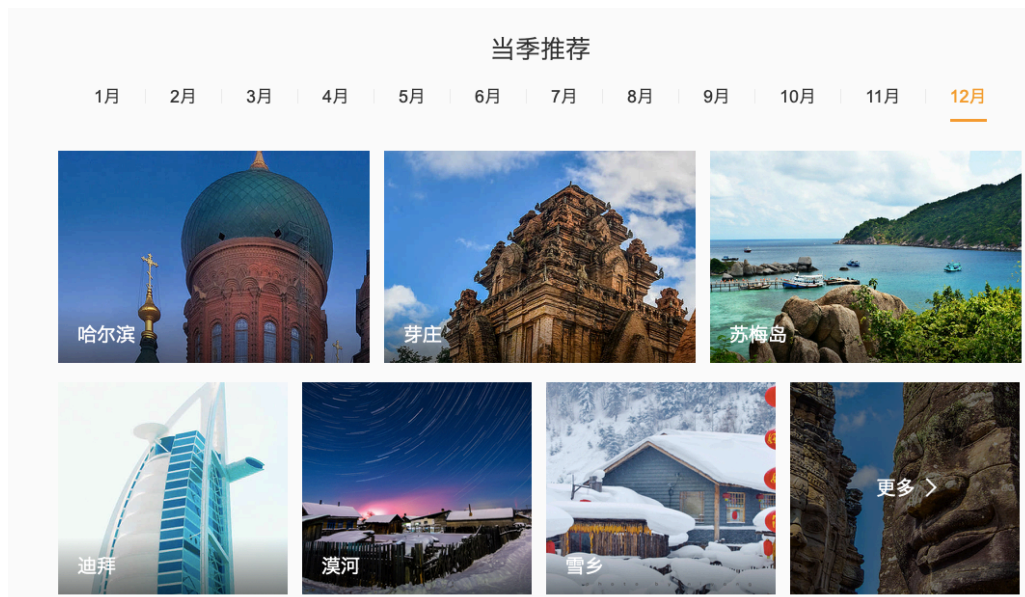
Figure 6 Screenshot of the Collections for the season

Community

Another section of the website is the community. In this section, users can interact online by using a Q&A board. However, user relationships have extended beyond the online environment. Two popular activities arising from the website are highlightened in this section. One is an activity called "Unknown Dinners", which refers to gatherings for users in the same city. It was initiated by the website in 2019. The website will sponsor some dinners. After each gathering, a website editor will post an article on the community board to recap the gathering.

Moreover, those offline activities are deeply related to online self-representations. Users join these activities with their online identities. For example, they will use their online names instead of their real names. In recap articles, the description of each person also echoes their characteristics online, such as their interests, hobbies and personalities shown in their travel blogs. Another popular event is the "Club for cover writers". Different to the Unknown Dinners, every registered user can apply to join. This event is limited to those who have become cover bloggers only. Members of this club have the chance to join sponsored trips. Like Unknown Dinners, the editorial team will post a recap article about each trip. However, a recap of club events is a well-edited travel blog from the official account of the website. Same as in the other activity, cover bloggers present their online identities in those sponsored trips. However, recap blogs about Club trips contain more details about the trip and bloggers.

For example, each trip has a professional photographer to take pictures and videos. Personal pages of bloggers on the website are also included as external links to direct viewers to know more about bloggers.

In conclusion, the criteria of the website indicate what kind of users are preferred. Most registered users are young independent travellers, namely young Chinese tourists who can afford and are capable of self-organised travelling. The functions of the website help them present their image as experienced travellers. Identities on the website share similarities with Bauman's conclusion that identity in 'disembedded' or 'unencumbered' forms that are not fixed and are always open to more options (Bauman, 1996). Bloggers do not reveal every aspect of their personalities, nor do they intend to present a self precisely the same as their offline lives. Instead, they intentionally choose which parts of themselves can be seen by other online users and build their online self-representations based on these choices. However, one thing that does not entirely coordinate with Bauman's conclusion about the commitment-avoidance in the post-modern identity is that bloggers on the website do not wholly avoid fixation. Instead, they try to keep consistency in blogs or Q&A to fix the representation of some identities.

Moreover, the website also guides them with respect to maintaining their online identities by presenting quantitative self-data on their personal page and facilitating more close relations between bloggers and followers. Hence, it is necessary to investigate how young Chinese bloggers choose, establish, and keep their identities in the Chinese context. Heavily referenced in social media scholarship is Erving Goffman's conceptualisation of self-representation, which suggests that people have the desire to control the impressions that other people form about them (Rettberg, 2017). However, bloggers' identities on the Mafengwo website are constructed within multiple contexts. With the involvement of technology, online and offline, travel and everyday life are not divided. In these circumstances, ambivalences about frontstage and backstage, masking and unmasking, request a closer investigation.

2.2 Description of the blogger

The blogger who participated in my research is a young Chinese female. Like many travel bloggers, she started blogging for personal interest. She joined the website as a user to search for travel information, especially details about those off the beaten tracks travel. She has twenty-one blogs on her page now, and seven of them have become cover blogs. Each cover

blog has around 100,000 page views. Like other blogs, all her blogs contain a vast amount of information. Besides travel information, she also revealed her personal life, such as her married life and friendships. In addition, each blog has more than 20,000 words and hundreds of pictures. Some of them also include videos and music. After reading every blog of hers, I sorted out some characteristics. Firstly, all images in her blogs are well-edited high-quality photos. This is a shared similarity among other blogs on the website. Moreover, she introduces detailed parameters of her photos. Such as what kind of camera and lens she uses, how to shoot selfies with the tripod, or what software is used to edit photos and videos. Hence, visual contents are crucial for her blogs. They are also the most popular topic among comments from visitors. Secondly, all her blogs have clear themes. From the first cover blog, dancing is an important theme. Dancing is also her personal hobby. All of her blogs have photos of posing dance gestures. It is also a popular topic in her comments. Thirdly, the traditional dress of the Han Chinese people, called Hanfu, is another popular theme of her blogs. Especially after 2017, all her blogs are about this theme. The structure of her blogs changed accordingly. She stopped writing chronologically as she had done in previous blogs. Instead, currently, all texts, pictures and videos centred on her outfits. She also chose destinations differently. All places in her blogs are traditional Chinese buildings or historical sites consistent with Hanfu. Modernised scenes seldom appear in her blogs. Her followers react positively to this kind of content and recognise her as a professional in Hanfu. In one blog post in 2019, she introduced herself as a "freelance Hanfu photographer". It indicated a career change in her offline life. In the Q&A section, she answered a question about resigning from a stable job to become a freelancer. In this answer, she talked about how she quit her previous work, became a professional photographer specialising in Hanfu, and a freelance dancer.
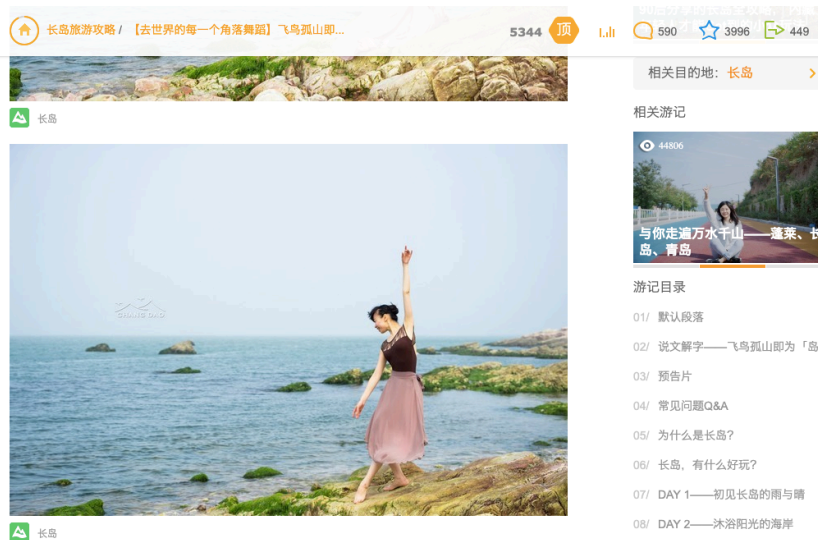
Figure 7 Screenshot of one cover blog of the informant with a picture of a dancing pose

This blogger managed to construct an online identity and gain credibility in the blogger community based on identity and communication in cyberspace. In addition, becoming a travel blogger parallels changes in offline, personal life. Therefore, her experience can be an exemplifies answers to the research questions of exploring how the social background shapes the characteristics of Chinese young travel bloggers.

3 Theoretical framework

3.1 Introduction

From the beginning, I realised it was critical to find an appropriate theoretical framework for my research of post-80 travel bloggers since this phenomenon occurs in a different social and cultural background than Western tourism. After 1978, tourism was introduced in China as an economic boost for modernisation (Yungxiang Yan, 2012). Chinese tourism has kept growing quickly in the past decades, both domestic and outbound travel. As of 2015, Chinese tourists took 4 billion domestic tourism journeys and 117 million outbound trips. In 2019, before COVID-19, Chinese outbound tourists hit the number of 83 million mark, not including mainland Chinese visiting Hong Kong and Macao (C. Liu & Cheng, 2021). Thus, Chinese tourists have become a significant market share for some destinations and are crucial to the Chinese economy. Therefore, the development of the tourism industry is an essential part of modernisation policy in China, and it has led to the transformation in many cities.

For example, take the city I lived from 2008 to 2019. Infrastructure has been improved or renewed to attract more tourists. Some old streets were renovated into tourist attractions, and new restaurants and hotels were built. Local citizens also welcome such renovations and like to go there as daily activities. Hence, the integration of the touristic world and everyday life in China has been an intentional choice by the policy from the beginning.

Moreover, the development of Chinese tourism is also an ongoing process of transplanting the Western tourism industry into a politically, culturally different society. Through tourism, values and norms originating from Western culture were introduced to Chinese tourists. Consequently, tourism not only brought economic stimulation. It also was an influential participant in the social and cultural transformations in Chinese. Hence, the theoretical frame of my thesis must consider tourism as a cultural and social phenomenon instead of just an economic stimulation.

Inspired by Franklin and Crang (2001), my research focused on alternative perspectives to study post-80 travel bloggers beyond Eurocentric approaches to include the social and cultural contexts of China within my analysis. There are several reasons to free these travel bloggers from a Eurocentric perspective. Firstly, tourism was perceived as a modern, Western phenomenon, while 'non-Westerners' entered that analytic framework by default as 'tourees'. Thus, research on tourists from non-Western areas is mainly planning and management led,

"serving the interests of governments and the tourism industry, rather than by theoretical issues." (E. Cohen & Cohen, 2015, p. 12). Namely, new participants' cultural and social contexts, which contains multiple layers and components, have been largely neglected to fix them into the Western-centred theoretical frame as the Other. Secondly, tourism theories have often privileged the exotic and strange, reflecting anthropological legacies of dramatic contrasts between visitors and locals (Franklin & Crang, 2001). However, the boundaries between tourists/locals and away/home have become blurred due to the de-differentiation of tourism and everyday life (E. Cohen & Cohen, 2012).

Thus, tourism is no longer just an exotic and bounded activity. Instead, it "becomes a significant modality through which modern transnational life is organised" (Franklin & Crang, 2001, p. 7). In the context of China, the development of tourism parallels the establishment of modernity. Besides contributing to the economy, tourism also facilitates changes in social and cultural aspects in contemporary China. Post-80 tourists belong to the first generation who benefits from the economic growth and modernisation in social life. Namely, they have gotten economic support from their families to explore their own experiences in contemporary China and the world outside (Cameron, Erkal, Gangadharan, & Meng, 2013; Feng, Poston, & Wang, 2014; F. Liu, 2011).

Furthermore, they are the first generation who must face the influences brought by the Internet. Particularly with the development of Web 2.0, values and lifestyles from Western societies were introduced through online information and communications, such as individualism (L. Wang & Juslin, 2011). As a result, post-80 youth cannot rely on their parents' past experiences to deal with modern issues, like establishing a modern lifestyle and constructing a modern identity, since the background has changed profoundly in recent decades (Wu & Pearce, 2016). Hence, the theoretical approach of my project here should consider tourism as a complex set of social and cultural phenomena. A theoretical pluralism is needed here in the analysis of post-80 travel bloggers, which can make sense of various connections and engagements between tourism and the constantly changing social and cultural milieux of modernity in contemporary China (Franklin & Crang, 2001). Following this path, I found the mobilities paradigm helped me to locate tourism in a transformative period of China.

3.2 Mobilities paradigm as theoretical frame for Chinese travel bloggers

E. Cohen and Cohen (2015) demonstrated that the post-modern tendency in the sociology of tourism reflects the complexity and heterogeneity of contemporary society. The tendency is to reject structuralist dichotomies or binary oppositions to understand the social world. Thus, four perspectives, mobilities paradigm, Actor-Network Theory (ANT), performativity and practice theory, have been summarised as new directions in the sociology of tourism (S. A. Cohen & Cohen, 2019). Among them, the mobilities paradigm focuses on the systematic movement of people, objects, capital, information, etc. It challenges dichotomous differentiation between home/away and travel/daily life. It is a dynamic frame to research touristic phenomena. The mobilities paradigm brings tourism to the centre of the social science since tourism mobilities are viewed as being bound up with other kinds of mobilities in society (E. Cohen & Cohen, 2015; Hannam, Butler, & Paris, 2014; Hannam & Knox, 2010; Sheller & Urry, 2006). Applying the mobilities paradigm to post-80 travel bloggers is to understand them as components of modernity in China. This is contrary to considering them as specific phenomena that happen within a limited scope or distant destinations.

There are several reasons to choose the mobilities paradigm as the theoretical frame for my research. First, the mobilities paradigm adapts to the nature of Web 2.0. The term Web 2.0 was defined by Tim O'Reilly in 2005, it emphasises peers' social interaction and collective intelligence (Newman et al., 2016). It is a people-centric and participative web (Murugesan, 2007). Therefore, Web 2.0 is not simply a new technology for people searching and sharing information. It also enables new channels for communication, capital, or relations to transfer with unprecedented speed and scope. In other words, media established through Web 2.0 are ubiquitous and able to transcend time and space. Web 2.0 shapes continuous networks that include most aspects of social life (Newman et al., 2016). Hence, Web 2.0 is characterised by mobility. Secondly, advancements in Web 2.0 have also triggered significant changes in touristic activities. Digital devices with Internet access have become essential partners for travellers. Christou, E. (2012) proposed the term 'travellers 2.0' to describe travellers who rely on technology on for information searching, posting, and communicating through digital devices. Travellers 2.0 engage in social relations with people through online networks. Moreover, they drive enjoyment from interactions online, trust feedback and comments from other users who are initially strangers (Christou, E., 2012). With the help of Internet

connectivity in Web 2.0, travellers 2.0 can link to their social relations at home or from online communities simultaneously while they are travelling. In addition, they can expand their network by including friends from travelling in their daily lives. Thus, the everyday lives of travellers 2.0 do not stop because travelling starts, connections among them and people they meet in travelling are not lost by the separation from destinations.

Furthermore, bloggers have been listed as distinct representatives of the travellers 2.0 (Christou, E., 2012). For bloggers, the role of being tourists is not fixed, nor it is singly defined by physical travelling activities away from home. Instead, it is a continuous identity that overlaps with other social roles. Therefore, the mobilities paradigm that can transcend boundaries between different identities through a dynamic approach is more adapted to the analysis of bloggers. Thirdly, the mobilities paradigm is an appropriate theoretical approach to touristic phenomena of a non-Western region. The mobilities paradigm enables examining tourism mobilities within a specific socio-cultural-political context (D. Wang, Kirillova, & Lehto, 2020) by considering tourism as a mode within the broader conceptual framework of mobilities. It demonstrates that tourism mobility is interwoven with other mobility types, it is produced, driven, and constrained by interdependent societal forces (D. Wang et al., 2020). Hence, tourism as mobility cannot be detached from the macro-environment that produces travel activities and travellers' origins. In other words, within the mobility paradigm, the macro-environment of contemporary China can be included in my study on post-80 Chinese travel bloggers.

3.3 The need to expand theoretical understanding of Chinese tourists

3.3.1 Previous studies on young Chinese tourists

Mainstream English-language studies on young Chinese tourists are policy led, focusing on marketing implementation. Motivations and behaviour preferences are the main topics of current discourses. Moreover, since young tourists account for the majority of Chinese outbound and independent travellers (Rosyidi, 2018; Y. Xiang, 2013), it is possible to apply the results of studies of Chinese travellers to young Chinese tourists. Thus, in this chapter, I will review some studies on Chinese outbound and independent travellers as applicable conclusions for post-80 Chinese tourists.

A common approach to the motivations of young Chinese tourists is to apply existing theoretical frameworks or models to the case of Chinese tourists. For example, the push and pull theory is used a lot to reveal the travel motivations of Chinese tourists. Studies conducted by Y. Zhang and Peng (2014) and Y. Xiang (2013) had similar conclusions that sightseeing, resting and relaxing are the most important motivations for outbound Chinese tourists. Exotic experience is a crucial motivation for Chinese tourists in the research conducted by Pearce and Wu (2014). In addition, intellectual/increasing knowledge is also an essential motivation for Chinese tourists to travel overseas (S. Jiang, Scott, & Ding, 2015). Meanwhile, the quantitative approach is also popular. For example, the validity of the four subscales (Stimulus-avoidance, Competence-Mastery, Intelligence, Social) of the leisure motivation scale have been tested in Chinese adventure tourism by Weber, Jin, Xiang, and Liu (2019). They proved that this scale is able to be verified in a Chinese scenario. However, those studies also mentioned that Chinese tourists' social and cultural backgrounds are fundamentally different. Even though the motivations of Chinese tourists seem coherent with their Western counterparts, they may have different meanings in the context of China. For example, for both Chinese and Western tourists, escape from daily life is an essential motivation for travelling. However, in the context of Western culture, escaping roots in an alienation background end up pursuing authenticity (MacCannell, 1999). While in the Chinese context, escaping is more related to experiencing modernity and expanding personal knowledge (Pearce & Wu, 2014; Y. Xiang, 2013). Thus, taxonomy is not enough to uncover the motivation of Chinese tourists. Because motivation is deeply related to and constructed by the social, cultural, economic, political, and technological contexts. Classification can be an efficient starting point for identifying the motivations of Chinese travellers, but it is not enough to interpret the meanings and origins of their motivations.

The same situation occurs in behavioural studies of Chinese tourists. They focus on the decision-making process heavily, especially pre-travel and on-site behaviours. For example, Dichter, Chen, Saxon, Yu, and Suo (2018) suggested that the interests of friends, families and the travellers themselves are now vital determinants of choosing a destination for Chinese tourists. Moreover, in a study of young Chinese tourists made by Y. Xiang (2013), the pre-travel phase is named "doing homework". Namely, the young tourists will put lots of effort and time into searching for information to determine their itinerary, as well as arrange transportation and accommodation to maximise their overall experience. They heavily depend on online information, including blogs, virtual communities, microblogs and reviews, since

they contain richer data and reveal multiple aspects of tourists' experience at a specific destination (Wu & Pearce, 2016). In addition, young Chinese tourists depend on online information because, compared to information from travel agencies, they consider input online as unbiased and trustworthy (Johnson & Kaye, 2004; Pan et al., 2007). Hence, previous research has been also aimed at evaluating how online platforms and social media can serve as marketing tools to influence the decision-making process of young Chinese tourists. And research has been conducted with the regard to how the industry can use the Internet and social media as marketing channels to improve service satisfaction. However, previous research found that the complexities of Chinese tourists are challenging for implementing the results. Since the group is too diversified and their needs change so quickly (Schmallegger & Carson, 2008; Tse & Zhang, 2013; Tseng et al., 2015; Uzunoğlu & Misci Kip, 2014).

Due to the fast growth of the Chinese market and its financial ability, studies have focused on the on-site behaviours of Chinese tourists' focus on shopping preferences (Agrusa, Kim, & Wang, 2011; Lo & Qu, 2015; Parasakul, 2020). Indeed, since the beginning of overseas travelling, shopping occupies a crucial need for Chinese visitors, especially outbound travelling (Chow & Murphy, 2008). However, with changes to the private visa policy, and the rise of independent travelling, Chinese tourists' on-site activities have also diversified. Some Chinese tourists now desire places that offer natural scenery, high value for money, and family-friendly localities. Moreover, they prioritise local experiences, like food, culture, and history. Shopping does not rank in the top three demands, especially for young tourists who reside predominantly in bigger cities like Shanghai and Beijing (Dichter et al., 2018). Classifying tourists in this way can effectively divide this emerging market into different market segments. For example, eight archetypes with drastically different preferences and behaviours were concluded by Dichter et al. (2018). This classification can enlighten industries, like travel agencies and hotels, to develop more products for different groups of targeted customers. However, tourists are not confined to their segment of life. On the contrary, especially in the recent years, tourists have transitioned from their current classification into another one quickly (Dichter et al., 2018). It has led to not only more classification criteria, like semi self-guided groups. But also more sub-categories, for example, the individual travelling group is divided into Individualist and Sophisticated Traveller (Dichter et al., 2018).

Another perspective of studying Chinese tourists is to focus on a single market segment, for example, individual outbound travellers (Chow & Murphy, 2008; Y. Xiang, 2013), or tourists

to a specific destination, like Chinese travellers to Australia (Pearce & Wu, 2014; Ye, 2019).
Defining Chinese tourists into different tourist roles or experiences is a promising way of
having an overview of their behaviours and preferences. However, the challenge lies in the
nuance between each division and classification accuracy. Since the behaviours of Chinese
tourists is an ongoing fast-changing process, it seems an ever-ending effort to complete the
list that combines all categories.

Furthermore, the praxis-oriented tendency of studies of Chinese tourists can lead to an
obsession with taxonomies and craziness for classification (Franklin & Crang, 2001). As a
result, this fast-growing group's social, cultural, and political implications have been largely
excluded. For example, developments in China in the past few decades are oversimplified as
its booming economy supporting Chinese tourists' financial abilities. Economic reform,
named the Reform and Opening policy, is a crucial policy. Yet, other policies, such as the
One-child policy, also supported the transformation in China and shaped the distinctiveness of
young Chinese tourists. But these aspects have received less attention.

Another problem is that studies of Chinese tourists intend to restrict them to a series of
discrete, localised events and concluded them as another grim incarnation of the Rational
Economic Man (Franklin & Crang, 2001) to explain their consumption decisions. However,
recent literature on Chinese tourists has diverged from the traditional approach of viewing
them simply as a whole to investigations into specific groups, highlighting their diverse needs
(C. Liu & Cheng, 2021). Among them, senior, Post-80s and female tourists were
demonstrated by C. Liu and Cheng (2021) to be among three popular topics in recent
research. It is worth noticing that this research reveals a generational approach to young
tourists. The uniqueness of this group was related to the rapidly changing time in which they
lived within. For example, research conducted by Cheng and Foley (2018) used the
generational cohort theory to uncover the preferences and values of Post-80 tourists. A similar
approach was applied by McKercher, Lai, Yang, and Wang (2020), who researched four
generations living in central China. This latter study focused on exploring various issues
related to generational differences in travel patterns. Furthermore, F. Li, He, and Qiao (2021)
used romantic tourism as an example to explain why the younger generation prefers to
consume new types of tourism activities, like romantic tourism. They addressed the age group
between 18 and 35 as generation Y. Travel preferences of this group are connected with their
generational characteristics which were concluded as "optimism for the future, newfound

excitement for consumerism, entrepreneurship, and acceptance of its historical role in transforming modern China into an economic superpower." (F. Li et al., 2021, p. 2131).

Furthermore, generational distinctiveness demonstrates the main differences between the young and previous generations. Also, it is helpful to explain the touristic phenomenon in non-Western societies. For example, Lee, Chen, and Chan (2021) compared Chinese Generation Y with their Western counterparts to examine the young Chinese Generation's perceptions of patronising street food in Hong Kong.

In addition to a generational approach, identity construction theory has appeared in recent research on young Chinese tourists. Several studies conducted by Morrison et al. (2018); (2017) focused on young Chinese backpackers. In those studies, the writers addressed backpackers as a socially constructed identity intertwined with Chinese backpackers' social status construction and self-actualisation. Jinfu Zhang and Xiao (2021) explored the identity construction process of Han sojourners in Tibet. In that study, the authors tried to examine this phenomenon using the liquid identity theory proposed by Bauman (2000). They concluded that the identities of Han sojourners in Tibet developed a fluid multidimensional structural system in their sojourn. The researchers considered their study a manifestation and demonstration and a micro-level complement to Bauman's liquid modernity (Jinfu Zhang & Xiao, 2021). Moreover, previous studies that used the generational approach and identity construction theory emphasised the social context in China as a crucial element in shaping the young generation of Chinese tourists. Thus, these recent discussions reveal a tendency to overstepping the restriction on Chinese tourists as an economic thing, confronting the complexities of contemporary society in China. This thesis will follow this tendency by applying a generational approach to the characteristics of Chinese travel bloggers. In addition, I will use the identity construction theory to explain how the generational characteristics join the shaping of Chinese travel bloggers.

3.3.2 Liquid identity in a non-Western context

Bauman concluded that the tourist syndrome is representative of the liquid modernity in the tourism context. He demonstrated three characteristics of tourist syndrome, looseness, grazing behaviour and frailty (Franklin, 2003b). Among them, looseness is the essential characteristic, which means "the looseness of physical, geographic, and social ties with the place: no firm commitment, no fixed date of staying" (Franklin, 2003b, p. 207). Namely, after experiencing and consuming the site, tourists will move on. They do not commit to a long relationship with

the place they visit or the people they meet. This loosened relationship creates a "peg community" (Franklin, 2003b, p. 214). The latter refers to a kind of relationship in which people only temporarily bond together, do not have ethical responsibilities or commit to long-term relationships, instead they have carnival bonds (Heimtun, 2007). However, critiques have been raised. Heimtun (2007) applied critiques from a feminist perspective to Bauman's notion. She criticised that liquid modernity only captures the male experience who "always travel alone, never with family or friends, and never meeting or travelling with other tourists that have babies or disabilities." (Heimtun, 2007, p. 275). She claimed that Bauman's notion contradicts the social turn in tourism study. This feminist perspective indicates that with the development in the sociology of tourism, social roles and the relationships of various participants in tourism should be further studied.

Discussion and critiques of the tourist syndrome can be synchronised with Bauman's other crucial theory, liquid identity. Bauman described liquid modern societies as having no flexible, hierarchical social order governing people's lives (Franklin, 2003b). Thus, liquid identity construction is an individual task, "it is up to the individual to find an escape from uncertainty" (Bauman, 1996, p. 19). Based on four types of identities, Bauman concluded that a person does not need any fixed social relationships. They are wandering alone, longing for individualisation, avoiding commitment and fixation. A female perspective is not only perspective that is ignored in the liquid modernity notion. Specifically, Bauman's discourse is also being used as a metaphor for contemporary life in Western society (Franklin, 2003b). Namely, non-Western backgrounds are excluded from this theory. For example, interpersonal relationships, prominence of family, and respect for authority are dominant characteristics of Confucianism, these have been the philosophical beliefs and moral values in China for a long history and in some other East-Asian countries (Fu, Cai, & Lehto, 2017). Thus, social relationships are a crucial part of Chinese culture. More importantly, Chinese society is not as flexible as Bauman described, albeit modernisation in China has achieved massive success in past decades. Social order is still governed by hierarchy and bureaucracy (F. Liu, 2011), because China's encounter with modernity is different from establishing modernity in the Western context.

Modernity was introduced into China through destructive Western power plays, for example, the Opium War and the sacking of the Summer Palace. Moreover, in the late nineteenth century, the nation was in a period of weakness and political disorder at the end of a dynastic cycle (Buzan & Lawson, 2020). Because of this origin, modernity, considered the

representative of Western power, was considered responsible for China's humiliation during the 19th century and was resisted by Chinese culture and society. Thus, acceptance of modernity in China is permanently shadowed by traumatic encounters with imperialism and colonialism (E. L. Han, 2016). Thereby, the balance between Chinese culture and traditions and Western ideas and practices has "remained the essential question of China's encounter with modernity ever since" (Buzan & Lawson, 2020, p. 199).

Furthermore, the establishment of modernity was accompanied by turmoil, including civil war and the Japanese invasion. This period started from 1911 until 1949 and ended with the founding the People's Republic of China. After 1949, the development of modernity, rooted in Western capitalism, was governed by a socialist government. The Communist Party of China embraced modernity because of the wealth and national power that come with it (Fung, 2010). However, Chinese development has sought to maintain its collectivist social structure and hierarchical authoritarian–bureaucratic model of government at the same time (Buzan & Lawson, 2020). An ideological contradiction is another crucial trait of modernity in China. In socialism, the Chinese government named it as 'modernity with Chinese characteristics' (Buzan & Lawson, 2020; E. L. Han, 2016). Namely, modernity represents different meanings in the Chinese context. The government has modified it to adapt to Chinese traditions and ideological setups. Especially after the Open and Reform policy proposed by former chairman Deng Xiaoping in 1978, Chinese leaders accepted nationalism, industrialisation, and technological progress come with modernity and are open to capitalism up to a point (Buzan & Lawson, 2020). This is probably the main difference in social backgrounds between Chinese tourists and Western counterparties. In one sense, modernity with Chinese characteristics and economic success in past decades posed a challenge to Eurocentric assumptions about modernity (Fung, 2010). Hence, it cannot be assumed at the outset that the modernity described by Bauman is a singular all-embracing modernity. It remains a question as to whether Bauman's discourse about modern identity can explain the situation in China. This reflection on Bauman's identity theory also brings to the research question of this thesis, that is, how does specific social backgrounds shape the characteristics of young Chinese bloggers? Hence, it is necessary to include characteristics of contemporary Chinese society in this research on young travel bloggers.

3.4 Characteristics of contemporary Chinese society are the foundation of understanding travel bloggers.

Dedifferentiation and de-exoticization in tourism theory position tourism at the centre of social life and identity-making. From this perspective, tourism is about social life conducted at a distance (Heimtun, 2007). Therefore, understanding the relationship between tourists is expanded from a short-lived peg community to a more substantial relationship. Namely, it can be in favour of establishing and enhancing deeper relationships, like facilitating friendship, as Heimtun (2007) has argued. This path of combining social relations of people within the discussion of tourism sheds light on the possibility of including the generational uniqueness of a specific group of tourists given by their social background in the tourism analysis. In other words, the society in which tourists live informs their social norms, habits, or practices. These rituals will be performed in tourism also. Hence, in my project about young Chinese bloggers, it is essential to examine how the social environment travel bloggers grew up with intertwined with the shape of their characteristics. Further, in this thesis, I try to reveal their generational distinctiveness cultivated by contemporary Chinese society as the foundation for a better understanding of the post-80 blogger group.

3.4.1 The generational distinctiveness of young Chinese is largely policy-led

Chinese travel bloggers are mainly composed of the young generation born in urban cities after 1980. They are called 'the Balinghou (the post-80 generation)' in Mandarin. In China, this name refers to the time they were born, but it is also a concept that refers to distinctive formative experiences this specific group of young people has had. After the 2000s, the Balinghou has appeared as a famous catchphrase in media and among the general public in China (Lian, 2014). It was first introduced to describe a group of writers born after 1980 whose work reflects the values of this generation, including their discontent with the conventions of life, love and education (Cheng & Foley, 2018). In addition, these young writers have achieved massive success in their early 20s.

For example, a writer named Han Han was born in Shanghai in 1982. He published his first novel when he was eighteen. That book has over twenty million copies printed. And at the age of 28, CNN described him as the rebel voice of his generation in 2010 (Wikipedia, 2022). The young generation's achievements have "fundamentally changed the traditional path to success in China" (Cheng & Foley, 2018, p. 1315). Hence, this group attracted the attention

of the Chinese public through the diffusion of the media and commerce. The concept of the Balinghou has gradually been extended from the group of young writers to the whole cohort born in big cities in the 1980s and has become the symbol of the transformation taking place in China (Cheng & Foley, 2018; Lian, 2014).

Three public policies were addressed by Cheng and Foley (2018) as significant elements that have shaped the distinctiveness of the Balinghou group. They are the Reform and Open Policy, the One Child Policy, and the Education Reform. The Reform and Open Policy are mentioned most in previous studies about Chinese young tourists. This is because it improves the economic situation of Balinghou directly and makes young tourists, who are from urban middle-class families, a critical market segment for destinations. In contrast, the other two policies were seldom mentioned. However, the other two policies also profoundly influenced the thoughts and preferences of this group. Significantly the One-child policy has changed the traditional structure of Chinese families and transformed the basic social fabric of society (Cameron et al., 2013; Cheng & Foley, 2018). As a result, family relations and social networks of this group have been restructured, which leads to changes in their behaviours, such as being active and dependent on social media.

The One-child policy was introduced at same time as the economic reform. It limits the number of children that urban couples can have to control the population growth in China (Abrahamson, 2016). As a result of the One-child policy, the structure of urban Chinese families has been restructured from a model where 4 – 6 siblings were typical to the three-member family pattern (i.e. two parents and one child) (Feng et al., 2014) or the "4-2-1" structure (i.e. four grandparents, two parents and one child) (Cameron et al., 2013). As a result, the only child in these families is the centre of their parents and their four grandparents. The whole family tends to concentrate all resources on the only child. For example, 50 – 70% of the total household income of urban families is spent on the only child for their needs and demands (F. Liu, 2011). It made the urban Chinese youth become beneficiaries of the economic reform. Namely, they gained support from the whole family and did not have to 'share' with other siblings. So that they can make decisions more freely. As a result, new consumerism that has been cultivated during modernisation is widespread among this group. The consumption of Western brands, like Nike and Adidas, and Western ways of living, such as travelling, especially independent and outbound travelling, has become a symbol of material modernity and new cultural expressions for the Balinghou youth in China

(Yungxiang Yan, 2012). Thus, post-80 Chinese tourists are willing to invest money and time in travelling to maximise their experiences and demonstrate their maturity in modern society.

In addition, with the change in family structures, the social relations of the Balinghou group have changed as well. On the one hand, they have to extend their social connections to society at large to establish their social network due to the absence of siblings and prominent families (Lian, 2014). As a result, their establishment of social networks is more affected by social influences, such as school education or trends in media. On another, because this group grew up during a revolutionary period, their lifestyle and values are mainly different from their previous generations. Thus, a large generation gap has been demonstrated between the only child generation and their parents, making them fail to feel close to their parents. Sometimes, they do not trust their parents' experiences (Abrahamson, 2016; Sun & Wang, 2010). For example, the Balinghou group is heavily influenced by individualism. Therefore, they tend to be more self-centred. The individualistic value contradicts the traditional collectivist Confucian values their parents have grown up (L. Wang & Juslin, 2011). Hence, for the Balinghou youth, they intend to put themselves ahead of other people, self-pleasure is essential. While previous generations disapprove of this attitude, they sometimes describe the Balinghou group as 'little emperors' and 'little princesses' to demonstrate that they have been spoiled (Chow & Murphy, 2008; Yiu Fai, 2019). Thus, due to the lack of peer relations and the missing of mutual understanding with parents in their own families, the Balinghou youth value social networks outside of their families, through which they can find peers with shared values and interests (Feng et al., 2014). Because they have also grown up with the rapid development of the Internet and social media in China, the Balinghou urban youth are also media-savvy (F. Liu, 2011). Therefore, they depend on media and social platforms to reach out to their peers. For example, they are generally active online in finding their travelling companies, and they like to share travel experiences during their trips to keep in touch with their friends back home.

3.4.2 The Internet development in China has its characteristics

Together with rapid economic development, the Internet has been booming in the past decades and profoundly affects the behaviours of its users. More than 300 million people use social media in China, including blogs, social-networking sites, microblogs, and online communities (Chiu, Ip, & Silverman, 2012). Besides having the most significant number of Internet and social media users globally, China also is one of the most active environments

for social media. For example, by the end of March 2019, Weibo (Sina Weibo), launched in 2009, has reached 465 million MAUs (monthly active users) and 203 million DAUs (daily active users) (S. I. Zhang, 2020). However, the Internet in China has unique characteristics.

First, even though the Internet and social media in China have witnessed probably the most explosive growth, it is disconnected from other parts of the world. Famous social media platforms worldwide, like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, are blocked in mainland China. Instead, China has established its microcosm of social media. For example, WeChat and Weibo are two of the most popular social media platforms in China. Launched in 2010, WeChat was designed as a messaging and calling app, like Messenger on Facebook. Until 2019, it had MAUs of 1040 million (S. I. Zhang, 2020). Moreover, WeChat has grown into a 'super App'. Wechat facilitates the sending of both voice and text messages, as well as making of voice or video calls. Additionally, users of WeChat can post photos, make payments, play mobile phone games, and connect with nearby strangers (Tu, 2016). At the same time, Weibo is an open and public social network platform. It has similar functions as Twitter and Instagram. It enables users to post 140-character messages, comment on other people's posts, upload short videos and online streams, address others with '@' symbols, and use hashtags to mark Weibos topically. In addition, the social media landscape in China is diverse and dynamic, featured with a wide range of social media forms (S. I. Zhang, 2020). New platforms are emerging and growing fast, like Xiaohongshu (the Red), a social lifestyle & e-commerce app. Zhihu, a Q&A app similar to Quora, and Douyin (TikTok), a short video streaming app. In addition, each of them has more than 200 million MAUs (Chiu et al., 2012; S. I. Zhang, 2020). Hence, even though Chinese social media is an enclave for the rest of the world, it is characterised by being dynamic and active. Therefore, the impact it brings to users is still profound.

Secondly, social media have penetrated daily life. On the one hand, platforms have included most functions users need in everyday life to guide them to immerse themselves in their apps. Tu (2016) described a typical new lifestyle of an experienced WeChat user:

> The user checks their friends' updates on WeChat right after she wakes up. At 8:30 a.m., the user buys breakfast through WeChat payment. At 9 a.m., she starts working and deals with information in work-related WeChat groups. At 10 a.m., she takes a rest from work, checks friends' updated moments, or replies to WeChat short messages. At noon, she rushes for a "hong bao" [red envelope, a gift of money] and

uses that to pay for lunch … By 10 p.m., she chats with friends in WeChat groups, "likes" friends' posts, reads articles from public accounts and says good night to family members through WeChat before going to bed.

Hence, social media are not only information channels for Chinese users, but also, they have transformed the way users establish and maintain their social relations with families, friends, and colleagues. Moreover, because many Chinese are somewhat sceptical of formal institutions and authority and the increasing dependency on social media, users disproportionately value the advice of opinion leaders in online social networks. For example, friends and families or online celebrities are named Wanghong in China. Approximately 66 per cent of Chinese consumers relied on recommendations from friends and family (Chiu et al., 2012). At the same time, the influence of Wanghong covers whole Chinese Internet users. Internet celebrities in China have gone through a rapid process of professionalisation and institutionalisation. The business ecosystem built around Wanghong is estimated to be worth over two trillion *Yuan* (Chinese currency) in 2018. It has been considered the next economic growth pole for the Chinese internet (X. Han, 2021). Therefore, social media penetration keeps going deeper, including more people, the relationships users establish will be firmer and more diversified.

Lastly, the development of social media is deeply related to government policies and the development of modernity in China. One outstanding unique feature of Chinese social media is state censorship. Besides blocking social media giants worldwide, the Chinese government has adopted and developed new mechanisms of participation, monitoring, regulating, censoring, and sanctioning in cyberspace (S. I. Zhang, 2020). The level of censorship depends on different platforms and different types of content. For example, the openness and accessibility of Weibo make it easier to trace information. Thus, it has tighter censorship and a more constrained information environment.

On the other hand, while a platform like WeChat is more private, users have more chances to bypass government censorship. Moreover, the strictest censorship is on sensitive political content. For example, Twitter was blocked permanently after the riots in Xinjiang involving Han Chinese and ethnic Uighur in Urumqi, which led to the emergence of the Weibo (S. I. Zhang, 2020). However, instead of suppressing any criticism of the state or the Communist Party, censorship aims to reduce the probability of collective action by clipping social ties whenever any collective movements are in evidence or expected (King, Pan, & Roberts,

2013). Therefore, critique of the government is allowed and can be seen frequently. Moreover, social media has played an essential part in the anti-corruption events in recent years, and is considered an important tool to increase the openness and transparency of the Chinese government (Bertot, Jaeger, & Grimes, 2010). Hence, censorship does not offset the transformative force of the Internet and social media in China. Although authorities are strict on sensitive topics, they allow information flow for business and technology, encourage and support national-wide informatisation construction and innovation (Tu, 2016). Informatisation is listed in the country's 14th Five-Year Plan for economic and social development as a critical indicator of modernity (Zhongming, Linong, Wangqiang, & Wei, 2021). Hence, government policies facilitate the development of the Internet and set the limitation of freedom in social media at the same time.

The 'giant cage' is used to describe the role of social media in China (Nip & Fu, 2016). It indicates the limited boundary of Chinese social media set by government policies. But the word 'giant' here reveals its power as well. The rise of social media results from the economy booming, the commercialisation of media, and the partial liberalisation of China's political climate (DeLisle, Goldstein, & Yang, 2016). In the meantime, it is also a crucial reason that stimulates and pushes economic, social, and political transformations. Hence, simple dichotomies of "freedom versus control" or "promoting democracy versus strengthening authoritarianism" are not enough to understand social media in contemporary China. Nor can people be pessimistic to say that the Internet does not change China eventually as it should have (DeLisle et al., 2016). Moreover, instead of jumping to the conclusion about the consequences of the integration of social media and Chinese society; a closer look at how social media intertwine with the lives of Chinese people at present is needed. Since, again, transformation is an ongoing process in China. The social media environment can change overnight, making any concluded discourses unstable.

To sum up, in this chapter, I first describe the theoretical origin of this thesis. It is a theoretical framework built on the de-differentiation between everyday life and tourism. Specifically, this thesis aims to locate the research on young Chinese travel bloggers in the mobilities paradigm. From the mobilities paradigm perspective, tourism is a social mobility that involves the systematic movement of people, information, capital, etc. Moreover, the mobilities paradigm can free research on Chinese travel bloggers from praxis-oriented tendencies and paves the way to connect characteristics of contemporary Chinese society with the research on young travel bloggers.

Furthermore, together with other social mobilities, tourism can organise modern life and construct modern identity. Hence, the mobilities paradigm enables this research to focus on the generational characteristics and identity construction of Balinghou travel bloggers. Secondly, by reflecting on the theory about tourist syndrome and modern identity, I ask if Bauman's discourse about modernity applies to contemporary Chinese society. In one sense, questioning Bauman's theory brings the necessity of digging deeper into the characteristics of Chinese culture. But more importantly, it inspires the main research question of this thesis, namely, how do specific social backgrounds shape the characteristics of young Chinese bloggers.

4 Method

The methodological question cannot be reduced to a question of method. Instead, it is constrained by answers to ontology and epistemology (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 108). Hence, the method must be fitted to a predetermined methodology. I choose constructivism to support my project. I chose it because this thesis focuses on personal experiences and interpersonal relations and considers that identity-building of travel bloggers is subjective and socially constructed. Guba and Lincoln (1994) demonstrated that the constructivism posits that realities are apprehendable in the form of multiple, intangible mental constructions, socially and experientially based, local and specific in nature (although elements are often shared among many individuals and even across cultures), and dependent for their form and content on the individual persons or groups holding the constructions.

In terms of the above, as an inquirer, I was focused on generating an understanding of the identity construction as experienced by my informant as a blogger. Identity construction happens in a specific social context, and I was also interested in what blogging means to the informant as a participant. "Alignment between the belief system underpinning the research approach, together with the research question, are prerequisites for rigorous qualitative research." (Teherani, Martimianakis, Stenfors-Hayes, Wadhwa, & Varpio, 2015, p. 5). Due to the constructivist belief from which I started, a qualitative approach was more appropriate for my project. A qualitative method seeks to identity a certain quality typical of a phenomenon, or what makes the phenomenon different from others (Caroline, 2001). Namely, in my thesis, I sought the representative qualities of young Chinese travel bloggers, which make them different from blogging activities in other backgrounds. Therefore, I acknowledge that the bigger question underlying this research was associated with understanding the qualities that define young Chinese travel bloggers and stimulate their behaviours or motivations. This question guided me toward identity theories and the use of qualitative methods.

Moreover, it directs me to the informant I chose for this thesis. On the one hand, she fits the profile of the Balinghou group, which is an urban youth from a middle-class family. We have known each other from a young age and have kept in touch for years. Besides knowing her as a travel blogger, I also understand her qualities and personality in other social roles, such as being a wife to her husband or a child to her parents. I believe these different roles play crucial parts in shaping her distinctiveness in the blogosphere. More importantly, we share similar backgrounds in growing up. The same as her, I grew up in a middle-class family in an

urban city. We have similar family backgrounds, which means both of us benefited from the support from our parents. These shared backgrounds made it easier for me to gain her cooperation during my research. In addition, our shared backgrounds provide contexts for me to interpret her expressions or behaviours better.

Furthermore, I used narrative analysis to understand materials from online blogs and interviews with the informant. In particular, narrative analysis can "gain insights into tourist-constructed identities, meaning-making associated with their experiences, and temporal and spatial characteristics of travel experiences." (Banyai & Glover, 2012, p. 270). People share stories because it allows them to convey and negotiate their identities with others (Bosangit, McCabe, & Hibbert, 2009). The narrative analysis process involves deconstructing the blogs of my informant into episodes and quotations. Furthermore, with the consent of the informant, pictures from her blogs are quoted since visual content is a crucial part of a blogger's self-representation and identification. By going through all the blogs my informant has uploaded, I tried to find out how she identifies herself through blogging. Contents from the comments on each blog and the Q&A section of the website indicate that the interaction between my informants with other users was also included. I believe these materials are essential. They can demonstrate the self-representation of the informant and how relations with other users have been established through blogging. This thesis aims to reveal how social backgrounds shapes the characteristics of a group of Balinghou travel bloggers. However, the informant only wrote about her own experiences and opinions. Thus, as an inquirer, I needed to go back and forth between literature and online materials to sort out how macro-social backgrounds relates to bloggers' expressions. More importantly, the informant seldomly reflected on how her social background involves her online representation within her written blogs. Thus, besides the narrative analysis, I believed that semi-structured interviews are also necessary for this thesis. In the interview with the informant, we were able to reflect on her values, attitudes, and opinions when she wrote her blogs, especially how she explains and contextualises these issues.

4.1 Interview guide

The interviews were carried out simultaneously with the process of narrative analysis. Although I only chose one informant for my thesis, I still found abundant materials I could use. All the online materials I was able include in this thesis, I had time to plan more detailed interviews with my one informant. In total, I conducted three interviews with the informant,

which took around three hours. In those interviews, some of the questions inspired me to progress this project from the beginning, such as why she chose to become a travel blogger and how the online activities affect the self-identification as a blogger. I also wanted to touch on the relationships between bloggers and other users in the blogger community. In particular, I wanted to understand about blogger-website interactions, such as how a blogger feels about the restrictions of composing a blog article on the website, and how a blogger reacts to the sponsored tours provided by the website. Hence, the interviews consisted of four parts, and they were focused on loosely connected topics. After each interview, I reflected on my transcriptions and went back to literature and narrative analysis to gather more information to support my analysis.

The first of interviews enabled the blogger to warm up by starting to share her background, the forms of travelling previously experienced, as well as her opinion about independent travelling. The second part focused on her journey of becoming a travel blogger. This second part aimed at inquiring about the motivation of sharing travel experiences online and how the blog article's structure provided by the website affects her expression. The third part related to the relationships established through blogging included open-ended questions about relationships with other users. The last part focused on the identity built online and how it affects a blogger's offline life. It inquired as to whether the blogger realised that she had established an online identity or how the online performances affected her offline choices.

4.2 Strength and limitation of the method

The combination of narrative analysis and semi-structured interviews was aimed to gain insights into the blogger's identity and social relations. Narrative analysis structures our understanding of events, ourselves, and other social actions. Memory and identity are implicated in narrative forms and content (Atkinson & Delamont, 2006). Thus, narrative analysis was helpful for my project to avoid a praxis-oriented tendency by focusing on the bloggers themselves instead of only on how the industry can be improved. Moreover, narratives are not confined simply to the narrations themselves. Namely, narratives are "embedded in interactional and organisational contexts" (Atkinson & Delamont, 2006, p. 165). The premise of narrative analysis is that when narratives are collected, the social and cultural context in which such narratives are told should be considered.

Thus, through narrative analysis, contexts of contemporary China can be included, which was helpful to channel my research to confront and understand the complexities embedded within

Chinese society. The utilisation of semi-structured interviews also served to get insight into the blogging phenomenon and acquire the blogger's perspective about the expression she presented online. Atkinson and Delamont (2006) have argued that methods do not act as clear routes into an authentic interior self. Respectively, narrative analysis and interviews can help me, as an inquirer, obtain implicit meanings behind online narratives of bloggers or, together with the informant, reflect upon her personal experiences or contextualise her experiences in broader society. In addition, since me and the informant share similar background, I speak same language with the informant. It helps me to understand the blogosphere she is in better, and during the interview we can reach better understanding with each other. However, the narrative analysis inquiry road "does not lead to 'a truth' about the phenomenon, nor can it provide privileged means of access to informants" (Atkinson & Delamont, 2006, p. 167). A critical perspective on the methodology in this thesis indicates its limitations: the reliability and generalisability of the analysis. The limitations can be related to the concerns about qualitative research, which include: are the research questions reproducible, and/or is the conclusion is generalisable for a population (Caroline, 2001). Hence, as an inquirer, I must remind myself that this project only targets a limited group. Observations or analysis from this thesis does not represent the whole population. I limited my thesis to the group of a Balinghou travel bloggers.

However, this group has similar generational backgrounds that include parallel developments in society and changes in their families. Thus, the informant, as a representative of this group. Her experiences in constructing identities and social relations through blogging have the potential to reveal similarities shared in this group.

5 Analysis

This chapter is based on materials from the informant's online blogs and my interviews with her. I concluded from these materials four key observations, which are discussed in the following sections of this chapter.

In the first section, I discuss how the Balinghou group negotiated and reclaimed their collective identity. The purpose of doing so is to situate my analysis in a more explicit context for the readers. Albeit that I have already mentioned that the Balinghous grew up within a period when modernity was quickly being established. This process of modernisation contains ideological and cultural contradictions. However, by discussing changes in the collective identity of the Balinghou youth, I reveal how modernity with Chinese characteristics is manifested in this group. Furthermore, I have already questioned the suitability of the modern liquid identity defined by Bauman being used to explain the situation of Balinghou Chinese youth. From here on, I use the collective identity of Balinghou youth to clarify this question. More importantly, the female young travel blogger I chose as the informant for this thesis is included in this process of reclaiming collective identity. In other words, reclaiming collective identity is a context for the informant to construct her own identity. Seeking clarity with respect to this context helped my analysis of her identity construction, which is discussed in section two.

In the second section of this chapter, I present the self-identification of the informant via her blogs on the Mafengwo website. Observations and some direct quotes from the online materials and interviews are used to demonstrate that online self-identification online is about the self-actualisation of bloggers. However, it is also a process of intentionally breaking from their original identities and social relations to explore their characteristics, which echoes the context of reclaiming collective identity, which are discussed in the first section. In addition, in section two, I touch upon the social relations the informant built through her blog to illustrate the difference between them and the 'peg community' identified in Bauman's discourse.

The third section focuses on the popularity the informant has gained from her blogs. I review the process of popularity development from the initial achievement of recognition among the blogger community to the receipt of economic benefits by bloggers. Accordingly, it changed participation in the popularity process changed the contents the informant presented in her

blogs. Instead of focusing on self-actualisation, the informant prioritised pleasing her readers to keep accumulating popularity. In addition, popularity added complexities to relations between bloggers and the website as well. Since popularity has become a critical target to both the informant and the website, their relationship has more layers than reciprocity. In the meantime, more constraints appeared in their relationship as well. Discussions about the informant's popularity are a clear example of how the ongoing changing Chinese society continues to affect the preferences and behaviours of the informant and the blogger community.

The rest of this chapter is built on the blogosphere's development of the Mafengwo website. Materials from the interviews and online content indicate the growth in the landscape of Chinese social media as well. On the one hand, the role of travel bloggers has extended beyond the realm of self-identification of the bloggers themselves. Their roles as travel bloggers start acquiring social recognition from outside the blogosphere and can become a career choice for the blogger group. More importantly, growth of the social media draws attention from national censorship. As a result, the development of the blogosphere directly connects with some social policies. In other words, the traits of the travel bloggers group are further marked by the social background in which they are living with.

5.1 The modern identity of the Chinese youth establishes in a heterogeneous context.

Due to the changes in contemporary China, the identity building process of the Balinghous group is complex.

Firstly, the name 'the Balinghou' is a collective identity. A shared conception in Chinese society that expresses generational characteristics (Cheng & Foley, 2018; Lian, 2014). However, the complexity of this term is that the term is used by media and previous generations instead of the expression being defined by the group itself (F. Liu, 2011). The term Balinghou has also been applied as a negative label. Examples of such negative labelling include the me-generation, the strawberry generation (good-looking but weak-willed and cannot tolerate any pressure or difficulties), or the most self-centred generation (Lian, 2014; F. Liu, 2011; Yiu Fai, 2019).

Negative stereotypes of this group are also judgments about a junior group made by seniors. The Balinghous were juniors when those labels appeared. It is hard for them to negotiate this

collective identity in a society characterised by a patriarchal power hierarchy (F. Liu, 2011). However, this unbalanced situation has changed since they stepped into adulthood. Thus, the Balinghou group started reflecting on this collective identity and tried to raise their voice regarding such imbalance. Furthermore, the Internet is an essential tool used by this group to reclaim their collective identity. They valued the Internet as a rare public sphere within a socio-cultural context where "the combined effect of a host of factors leaves inadequate room for individual self-expression and social-political participation" (F. Liu, 2011, p. 145). Thus, the Internet is a crucial space for self-expressing and reconstructing the collective identities of the Balinghou group.

Secondly, besides the collective identity, the Balinghou group is also simultaneously in the process of constructing self-identity. Because the Balinghous have entered their twenties or thirties in recent years, they have to choose careers or establish their families. As a result, they obtained new social roles from their jobs and families. With the ageing of their parents and the birth of their children, their family roles have changed. The "4-2-1" family structure caused by the One-child policy is stressful for the Balinghou group. Since filial piety is still an important tradition in China and the welfare system in China is insufficient, since they are the only child, they are expected to bear the responsibility of taking care of both parents and grandparents (Abrahamson, 2016; F. Liu, 2011). Additionally, they need to raise their children at the same time. Due to the end of the One-child policy in 2015, now all couples are allowed to have two or more children (Abrahamson, 2016). The pressure and cost of raising children rise accordingly if young couples decide to have more children. Thus, although the Balinghous benefit from the unprecedented economic increase in China, they also face unprecedented challenges in their adulthood. Namely, they need to take the responsibility as children of their parents and as parents of their children. Thus, the Balinghou group are still facing a relatively fixed social structure. They have designated social ties and responsibilities, albeit deeply influenced by individualism and focus more on themselves.

Because of the ongoing process of negotiating collective identity and acquiring new roles, the identity of the Balinghou group in China is uncompleted and in a 'disembedded' or 'unencumbered' form, similar to the description made by Bauman (1996) about liquid identity in the Western contexts. However, the social context of their identities is different from Bauman's statement. First, the identity construction processes of this group are still accompanied by ongoing dramatic transformations. Fluidity and fragmentation of their identity are more related to China's social conditions and political policies instead of a

completely individual choice. Namely, the fragmented identity of the Balinghou group is the result of its unstable state. They keep trying to stabilise their identity. Subsequently, this instability is more similar to Bauman's description of the modern identity problem instead of the postmodern problem of identity, which is primarily about avoiding fixation and keeping options open (Bauman, 1996).

Moreover, in Bauman's discourse, tourist identity can be traced back to the origin of the pilgrim. However, Bauman placed the pilgrim into the modern context and posited that "modernity gave it a new prominence and a seminally novel twist" (Bauman, 1996, p. 19). However, the image of the pilgrim is a shared concept in Western culture. It raises similar imaginations that, as Bauman (1996) described, lonely men, wandering in the desert-like, featureless world and trying to bring meaning to it. The process of bringing in meaning was called 'identity-building'. Even though this discourse has raised critiques that, as Heimtun (2007) argued, it has excluded female perspective. However, the identity of a tourist in Bauman's description has a relatively singular and pure origin. Discussions about tourists are shadowed with characteristics of this origin, even though identity in the postmodern era is about going the opposite way instead of committing to the path of the pilgrim. On the contrary, the tourist role in China has a more complex beginning as it is the result of the establishment of modernity. The establishment of modernity in China, which started in 1978, was aimed at economic prosperity (Lu et al., 2019). Tourism was introduced to China as an important industry capable of contributing to modernisation. In addition, the tourist role is a crucial path for Chinese people to join the modernised societies. Hence, tourism is more related to emphasising economic strength for Chinese tourists. More importantly, due to the historical and socialist background in China, the cultural meaning of the tourist as a pilgrim is hard to implant. Since the position of Christianity in Chinese history is not as important as in Western culture. Furthermore, the current Chinese government is still determined to maintain political stability under the Communist Party, even though the Chinese market has been opened to the world and the market economy has been introduced and promoted during modernisation. Thus, besides being a substantial economic boost, the government chose the tourism industry as the appropriate mix of traditional Chinese culture, socialist culture, and modernity (Sofield & Li, 1998). Namely, tourism can ease the tensions raised by contradictions in Chinese modernisation. Hence, instead of being an 'individual task' as Bauman (1996) described, the process of identity-building of the Balinghou Chinese tourists is deeply affected by the political and cultural background of China. In other words, being a

tourist in China can be a convenient and less sensitive way to embrace and enjoy the development of modernity since it is less involved with ideological or political choices. Furthermore, for the Balinghou group, travelling overseas and independently can even be seen as an indication of economic strength and a demonstration of making self-choice (Bui, Wilkins, & Lee, 2013). Thus, they account for most outbound tourists in China and are willing to invest money and time into travelling to extract better experiences.

For Balinghou youth, the identity building process is deeply related to social media as well. Cyberspaces on the Internet are the 'third place' (F. Liu, 2011), where they can make their self-expressions freely. Thus, besides being used as a platform to negotiate collective identity, it is a place to build their own identities. Moreover, the combination of social media and tourist roles is related to the social status of this group of Chinese youth as well. For the Balinghou group, being preceived as experienced travellers is a vital way of distinguishing oneself and displaying the uniqueness of oneself within the Chinese social media sphere for the Balinghou group (Kristensen, 2013). Due to the nature of the Chinese online environment, the aforementioned online giant cage enables the Balinghou to engage in self-identification as tourists online and to accumulate popularity more efficiently and avoid censorship. Hence, their dependence on the Internet during travelling is not only because of its convenience but also because it is related to self-recognition and identity reinforcement.

Thus, identity construction of the Balinghou group is an ongoing process happening in heterogeneous contexts. Those contexts include intersections where the new generation establishes and reclaims their collective identity and social positions in a patriarchal power-driven hierarchical society. They also intersect diverse places where modernity originated from Western culture encounters and socialism with Chinese characteristics. It is "an emergent and ongoing narrative project which is meanwhile characterised by a struggle for coherence." F. Liu (2011, p. 160). Nuances among different contexts are the places where the heterogeneity of the Chinese society is manifested in the context of identity-building of the Balinghou travel bloggers.

5.2 Self-identification through blogging

Online self-representations are social and communicative; through blogging, bloggers present themselves in blogs and communicate with others with their established selves (Rettberg, 2017). Thus, travel bloggers, including the informant, on the Mafengwo website construct their identities through self-representation in their blogs, including visual, written, materials.

More importantly, representations are constructive, "words, images, and other representations can be interpreted differently in different contexts or cultures." (Rettberg, 2017, p. 4). Hence, the meaning of representations of the informant on the Mafengwo website needs to be considered within some specific contexts. Hence, both the content of her blogs and the context where these blogs are posted need to be considered. Specifically, the mechanism of the website and the social background of the blogger growing up. I commence with the analysis of the Mafengwo website.

The first step of self-identification on the website is creating a new user account to post blogs. However, instead of using real names, the informant chose to create anonymous names. She explained that it is because her real name in mandarin is relatively rare. The informant tried to search her name online, it is easy to find her personal information through that name, such as news of her winning a writing prize in her middle school. So, she chose to have an anonymous online name to protect her privacy. For other people she knows, some of them keep their English names from studying abroad experiences. Some bloggers kept their English names from previous work experience in big Internet companies, like Tencent and Alibaba, or in some foreign companies. In addition, online names can also express the attitudes or values of bloggers. For example, the online name of the informant is a word quoted from a Chinese idiom, describing a person with an open mind and humble attitude.

Thus, the self-representations of the informant started by breaking her original identity and social relations intentionally. Rettberg (2014) describes online self-representation as an object, a sign that is seen as constructed in some way and that stands instead of an object to which it refers. In other words, the purpose of online representation is not to mirror who the informant is in her offline life. Instead, the informant intends to break herself from her origin and presents whom she wants to be in the blogosphere on the Mafengwo website. It indicates that the informant places great emphasis on individualism, she comes to this website to express and explore whom she thinks she is.

The informant also mentioned that bloggers, including herself, intend to keep their online usernames in all activities organised by the website. The informant commented that bloggers on this website are more comfortable with their online names. She said,

> For most people I know, online names are enough for us. We recognise each other by
> our usernames, both in online and offline activities. More importantly, it does not feel

necessary for me to know other bloggers' real names or other parts of their personal life. I still do not know their real names of most friends I met through the website up to now. It does not hinder us from becoming friends. I've known them for years and feel close with them.

Furthermore, users cannot have the same name as others when creating a new account. In other words, the username of the informant is unique on the website. The informant has accounts on other social media platforms, like Weibo and WeChat. She uses the same username and describe herself with the same labels on different platforms, such as travel bloggers, travel lovers, photographers, make-up artists, etc. Thus, she can maintain the consistency of her online identity among different platforms. The efforts of keeping the same names and characteristics on multiple platforms are how the informant reinforces her identity.

Moreover, for the informant, tourism is more than leisure activities she does during her vacations. Instead, the tourist role oversteps the scope of travelling through blogging and becomes a crucial part of her self-identification. It is a unique quality that helps the informant distinguish herself in the blogosphere and gain social recognition from online communities on the website. Hence, the informant's self-identification as a tourist addresses that tourism has become a significant dimension of modern social life where she can establish new aspects of her self-making (Franklin, 2003a). In addition, it indicates the de-differentiation between the touristic world and the everyday life of the informant. This process is not merely about establishing representations online. It affects the social relations of the blogger group as well. Through her description, users on the website are aware that their relationships are built upon anonymous names. However, this does not affect the credibility and reliability of each other. The foundation of their relationship is mutual interests and long-term interactions within the community. More importantly, their relationships are the result of self-actualisation and self-selection. The informant explained why she chose a public way of expressing herself, like a blog, instead of keeping her experiences in her diary.

> I believe the impulse to express is in my nature. Even if there is no blog, I would find other ways to express myself to the public. As you know, I won a prize in a writing competition when I was young. I think back then, I have already realised that I am a person who wants to communicate with other people by writing. In addition, I am passionate about travelling. I always love to read others' travel notes and journals, even though I do not have time or money to travel sometimes. Before posting my first

blog, I spent much time reading other people's blogs. For me, I know the world through travel notes and blogs. It is much more fun to see a destination through the expressions of others instead of reading guidebooks. I always think guidebooks are too dull.

Hence, the motivation for blogging is more related to actualising herself. For the informant, blogging is an appropriate medium to externalise her characteristics. In addition, she thinks that lots of bloggers she knew from the website are similar to her,

> From the beginning, I think it was just me like this. But after talking with other bloggers, I found out that most of them are the same as me. Before the website appeared, we would post long paragraphs of our travelling experiences on other platforms, albeit some platform, like Weibo, suits better for 140-words-length posts. For us, expressing and interacting with others is how we enjoy travelling. My husband used to ask me why I needed to take so many photos for every trip and post every detail about the trip. I answered that the only purpose of travelling is to show my clothes and the beauty of your wife to the online community (she laughs). But to be honest, I want people to know this part of me. It relates to the real me.

The Mafengwo website began by targeting people who had the motivation to write long, well-edited travel stories. Because of this characteristic, it attracted a specific group of users with shared similarities. It provides the informant and other bloggers like her with a proper context to express. The community accepts their expressions and self-representations on this website. The acceptance from the community also cultivated a feeling of belonging among bloggers. Thus, collective identity has been established in the community. The informant addressed this group as a group of writers.

> We were very clear about this writer's identity, even though none of us is a professional author in daily life. But most of us value writing as an essential way of self-expressing. Some bloggers I know are very quiet and shy if you meet them in person. But once they started writing, they became active, energetic, and funny. Again, this is who we are. We chose blogs to express our interests, experiences, and thoughts, not just about travelling. This group is a crucial reason I still stick with the website also. I picked this website because it was almost the only place back in 2013 where I could interact with real people. Other websites, such as Trip.com or

Qunar.com (famous travel websites in China), only had automatic replies from the algorithm to give comments to blogs. One can immediately tell some words are from a robot, not a person. So, I lost interest in such websites fast. Only on the Mafengwo website do I have the chance to interact with real people. Namely, I could have good readers for my writing on this website. It is vital for me to keep blogging.

For the informant and other bloggers like her, the blogging activity is a way of strengthening their self-cognition. More importantly, the self-representation of bloggers can be constructed as the way they want them to be in this context. The informant mentions several times that it is hard to show this side of her to her family or colleagues. She explained,

People are different. They will interpret my expression from their perspectives. For example, my parents don't understand why I travel to a distant place to take pictures of dancing or dressing in traditional Hanfu. I do not want my boss to know that I travel this much. It looks like I am not a hard-working staff member. However, it is easier to find people like me through this website. Friends here seldom ask why I like to travel, nor will they judge me being strange or weird because of the activities I do in travelling. We only care about how you get to that place, why you choose that hotel, or how to present our travel stories better.

Thus, the description of the informant reveals her altered family structure caused by the Only child policy and the generational gap between her and her parents. This situation also deepens her relationship with other bloggers in the online community. Friends from the website became a crucial part of her social network and the reason she stayed active online. "In the beginning, relationships with online friends are purer than other relations in my daily life", said the informant, "It is a reciprocal relationship that does not involve specific benefits or money.". As a result, she felt more comfortable and confident in showing her personality within the blogger community.

Further, the dependency on the Internet and social media that the informant demonstrates is also a commonality among Chinese Balinghou tourists. The informant indicated that young Chinese tourists do not just rely on online information. They depend on social networks formed through online platforms as well. The credibility of online information by bloggers does not depend on them being authorities or the accuracy of their information. Instead, credibility is built on shared interests and long-term relationships among online communities.

Moreover, publishing travel stories and experiences is not merely a post-journey activity. For the informant, it is a way to actualise her personality. In other words, the tourist role does not end with her trips. Instead, touristic aspects are essential components of her life. Her touristic roles and relationships are prolonged by blogging. They extend to everyday practices and participate to further identity construction of the informant. Thus, "the grazing behaviour of a flock of sheep" (Franklin, 2003b, p. 208) described by Bauman as a trait of the tourist syndrome does not fit the long-term relationship between the informant and other bloggers on the website.

5.3 Popularity

5.3.1 Evolution of popularity of blogs

Popularity is a crucial indicator for bloggers. Increasing the reading volume motivates bloggers to put more effort into writing and editing. Moreover, the popularity of the informant affects her weight on the website since the website depends on the contents of blogs to attract more new users and increase its commercial value accordingly. Therefore, famous bloggers will receive more opportunities on the website, such as official promotions, sponsored trips, or even the chance to develop their own business. Specifically, the blog's popularity is directly related to how much money the informant can make.

The informant divided the development of popularity into two phases. The first phase was from 2013 to 2016, while the second phase started in 2016 until now. She described the first phase as a period with more freedom. In 2013 she started posting blogs on the Mafegnwo website. The informant explained this stage, "Back then, there were so few writers, all bloggers wrote for our pleasure and for showing our uniqueness, I was always surprised by how many interesting people I could find on the website.". In the meantime, the starting point of the website was shifting into the fast-development lane. From 2010 to 2015, the number of registered website users increased from 15,000 to 100 million. The website determined its target was independent young travellers in China. Since independent travelling was a new type of travel, information, such as traffic and accommodations, was needed back then. Thus, in the beginning, the website encouraged bloggers to write long blogs with step-by-step details. The first cover blog of the informant is about her honeymoon trip to the Maldives. It has around 25,000 words and more than 200 photos. She chronologically included almost every trip detail, including how she and her husband chose a destination island, hotels, and activities. She even wrote about how they transited in Dubai and took an overnight trip there

because the waiting time was long. In addition, she added photos of every meal they had, and all clothes they had prepared for their honeymoon.

Furthermore, she wrote about their wedding in Beijing as an introduction to this trip, such as how her husband promised to travel around the world with her and her opinion about marriage. Readers of this blog were active in the comment section. This blog has more than 900 comments. Readers read the blog thoroughly and had many interactions with the informant, albeit the blog was long and full of information. One reader even mentioned their camera remote for selfies. The reader asked what the tiny thing held in her husband's hand in all their couple photos was. The informant replied to almost every comment. Because of this cover blog, her popularity on the website increased. Accordingly, her friend list on the website became longer as well. Moreover, besides being friends on the website, she also added those friends to her Weibo and WeChat. She explained the difference in her WeChat after the joining of her blog friends,

> Before, my WeChat friends were only my family or friends from work and school. Most of them post their daily moments, such as cooking and pictures of their kids. After adding my blog friends, I felt surrounded by people with wild thoughts and different ways of living. People are travelling or posting something about their trips every day. It makes me feel more natural to express my thoughts and experiences about travelling on all my social media. Colleagues and families of mine started consulting me about trip plans and recommendations. They considered me as an experienced traveller. But I did not travel so often, to be honest. I guess I just talked so much about travelling.

Thus, the success of this cover blog brought the attention of other users. She started expanding her social network through it. After the first cover blog, the informant felt she belonged more to the website and the blogger community. She kept posting more blogs, even though not every blog was as successful as the cover blog. At the beginning of her second blog, she mentioned that she decided to "settle down" on the Mafengwo website. She wrote, "I like this article, even though it was written after a trip two years ago. Since I have decided to take the Mafengwo as the home of my travel blogs, I want to share this article with you.". She was not shy about the fact that back then, the only camera she had was not good, and all the photos in this blog were not edited. After the first cover blog, the other three blogs she posted did not become the cover blog. However, in those three blogs, the informant wrote

directly about her desire to get more 'like' for her blogs. All those three blogs started with a sentence that "it is not easy for me to write so much. Please leave a like for me". Moreover, this request only appears in those three blogs. The informant explained this period as a cultivating time, which meant she needed more reading volume. She said,

It took time for my account on the website to grow. The website uses both algorithms and editors to select cover blogs. As a writer, I need to first keep my account active by posting blogs or interacting with other users in other sections more often. Activeness helps my account increase its weight in the algorithm. Thus, my blogs can have a better chance of being recommended to the editors. The editor team decides which blog can become cover of the day, so I also need to work on the quality of my blog to show them that I am a dedicated writer.

One year on from her first cover blog, the informant received her second cover blog at the end of 2015. According to the informant, it was also the beginning of the second phase of popularity development. In the second phase, the website started organising offline activities and providing welfare for influential bloggers. Accordingly, one noticeable change that appeared in the blog of the informant is that merchandising products with the logo or the mascot of the website were demonstrated. Such as luggage tags with the name of the website or a mascot key ring. Those products were gifts from the website to help highlight her popularity on the website.

Moreover, the website has a complete bonus system to materialise the popularity of its bloggers. It started with achievements shown on the personal page of all bloggers. For each personal page, the website will show the level of the account, the more time one user spends on the website, the higher the level is. In addition, the website authorises privileges for users with higher levels, like becoming VIP. A VIP has access to downloading all electronic guidebooks, the chance to add music to blogs, etc. In contrast, other users need to pay for those privileges. Merchandising products is another way of certifying the popularity of bloggers. In addition, the bonus system of the website has evolved from simple gifts to sponsored trips after 2015. Alongside these bonuses, the website started setting more requirements for blogging in the second phase. Due to the fast-growing usage of smartphones, the contents of blogs needed to be compatible with small screens. "It takes much more time processing my pictures because of this", explained the informant, "editors from the website

encourage us writers to use more videos, and the quality of the pictures is stricter. To write a cover blog has become more difficult.".

Moreover, binding bloggers to the website has become deeper and more complicated. Significantly, the website started paying bloggers to write for a destination. The website will promote this kind of blog for sure. But they will be examined by website editors and the destination representatives, who usually are managers from marketing or public relations departments. The informant has two blogs sponsored by destinations. Writing becomes complicated in this situation. The blogger does not want it to become an advertisement for the destination. She thinks she will lose most of her followers if she loses her neutral position. However, the destination wants it to show as many advantages as possible in this blog that they paid. The negotiating process was exhausting. The informant mentioned an incident during the interview. In one of her sponsored blogs, a marketing manager from the destination wanted to add a paragraph to demonstrate all the goodness. But it is different from the informant's writing. She described that "the paragraph the manager wants to add was worse than my writing in high school. I refused the request after several times of having discussions. I value the quality of my writing and do not want my readers to think that I suddenly had become stupid.". Such negotiation happens for other bloggers she knows as well. In this second phase, popularity has extended beyond the readership or the friendships within the blogger community.

In the meantime, competition from other platforms had become fierce during this period. The rise of Douyin (the TikTok) and the Xiaohongshu (the Red) drew users from the Mafengwo website. Those new platforms are video centred since concise videos can easily attract attention from users. But diverse content forms bring more work to the bloggers. "Blogging for me now is more about editing content, instead of writing, sadly", the informant said, "because every platform has its requests for videos and pictures". For example, the Xiaohongshu only accept square pictures with an aspect ratio of 3:4. At the same time, the Mafengwo website has different aspect ratios for PC and app. Therefore, if the informant wants to share her blog on multiple platforms, she needs to prepare at least two kinds of formats for all pictures and videos. "Preparing content for multiple apps is a time-consuming procedure, and there's no fun.".

Moreover, popularity in the second phase means the bloggers can make money and this is a business they can build on it. The informant mentioned two types of bloggers. One is the

semi-professional bloggers, like her, who have their jobs. To keep their blogs' popularity means that they can have a chance to travel for free. Or the popularity of their blogs and other social media will bring customers for their own jobs or business. For example, the informant is a freelancer now. She is a makeup artist specialising in traditional Chinese makeup and a photographer specialising in Hanfu (traditional Chinese costume) photo shooting. At the same time, she has a dancing studio in Beijing. Lots of her customers know her from her blogs or other social media accounts of hers. Thus, exposure on the travel blog website means publicity for her own business. "To be honest, I write only for money now.", she said in one of the interviews. Even though the informant emphasised that this is just a joke to explain why she keeps blogging, it reflects a significant change in the Chinese blogosphere as well. Another kind is professional bloggers. They work full-time and are dedicated to content creation on all social media. Most of them focus on attracting sponsorship and destinations.

Thus, the popularity that started with mutual recognition among bloggers has gradually acquired commercial value with the growth of the website and the maturing of social media. The evolution of popularity deepens the de-differentiation between tourism and everyday life. More aspects of bloggers' personal life are involved with blogging. Nowadays, blogging is the way bloggers pursue commercial benefits.

In particular, travelling is more than a leisure activity or personal interest for bloggers, especially for professional ones. For them, the boundary between work and leisure became weaker. Their travelling practices are intertwined with working habits. Thus, the preferences in travelling of these full-time bloggers may be more related to their work than travelling, for example, the enthusiasm for photo shooting. Since the platform has its requirements for photos and videos, bloggers need to put more time and effort into them. The informant mentioned that it is a normal situation for bloggers to spend most of their travelling time taking and editing pictures. "Even my mom can tell which ones are bloggers when she is travelling now. I remember she told me she recognised a blogger sitting next to her on the plane one time. Because during the whole flight, that person focused on her computer, and kept editing photos and videos."

Furthermore, social relationships of travel bloggers established through blogging have been reinforced by the development of popularity. On the one hand, bloggers are more dependent on their readers. They even ask for attention from their readers directly, as the informant did in some of her blogs. On another, bloggers do not write only to please all readers. Instead,

bloggers prefer to keep those who are attracted to their writing. The informant mentioned that she values the quality of her writing and neutral position as a writer instead of opinions from representatives of some destinations.

Moreover, on the website, all registered accounts have access to a text editor to post a blog. Hence, readers consider themselves as bloggers as well, even though they are not as influential as cover bloggers. In addition, the website emphasises that users' feeling of belonging to the blogger community is based on reciprocity. For example, not like some other social media, the Mafengwo website does not name subscribers of each blog as followers. Instead, it is called a friends list.

5.3.2 The ambiguous relationship between bloggers and the platform

Both bloggers and the platform depend on popularity. For the bloggers, being popular satisfies their desires of self-expressing and bringing in income simultaneously. For the platform, the Mafengwo website, improving the popularity of blogs is the way of keeping its business value. But unfortunately, the bloggers and the platform do not always cooperate, albeit their goals are the same.

In the beginning, the Mafengwo website was attractive for the informant because she could interact with real people. During the interview, the blogger repeated many times that there were so few writers back then. The writers were those who had a strong need to express themselves. Most of them are used to expressing themselves by writing. In addition, they have other skills, like photo shooting. A travel blog is an appropriate method of expression that combines a blogger's skills and interests. The informant described bloggers she knew from that period as "I always amazed by their talents.". She mentioned a blogger who is an astrophotographer, while his daily job is as an engineer in the state power grid. Because of this work, he can go to places other people do not have a chance to visit to take photos of stars or night skies. "Without the website, I would never meet someone like him. Not even mentioning becoming a friend with him.". The ability to recruit writers is also crucial for the website in the beginning.

> In the beginning, the website was invested in by venture capitalists. The only goal for the website was to attract more users and keep them active. Hence, we have connivances to write, interact and learn from each other.

Thus, content created by registered users accumulated on the website fast. "With more users, the website started thinking about making money from it.". The informant considered the appearance of sponsored writing as the turning point. After realising writing can become a way of making money, more people came to the website to become professional writers. As a result, the relationship between the bloggers and the website has become less balanced. With the growth in bloggers and the competition from other platforms; the website has more candidates to choose from and in the meantime has become stricter. The informant mentioned compromises she and other bloggers needed to make. For example, she listed current standards for a sponsored blog now. To complete a high-quality blog, the writer needs to have well-edited photos, videos, and aerial photography. In addition, the blogger needs to provide at least two versions of all materials that can be compatible with both PCs and smartphones. Namely, blogging requires skills now. Enthusiasm and interests in writing are not enough. Hence, the informant mentioned that she is not so active on the website now.

Moreover, there has been no chance to travel in the recent two years because of the COVID-19 pandemic. She knows many bloggers are more focused on sharing daily lives or providing sponsored content. For example, one travel blogger she knows got many sponsored projects from mobile phone companies. This blogger became famous in the blogosphere because of her photo shooting during travelling. As a result, the blogger was invited on some trips organised by some telephone companies to use their phones to take pictures and videos. All pictures and materials were to be used as promotional materials for the phone on trending platforms. Accordingly, the full-time bloggers will produce content sponsors ask for instead of what they want. "The freedom and enjoyment of blogging will decrease for sure. In addition, the risk of losing followers is high. But it is the risk we need to take to make money. That's why I said my posts are only for money.", said the informant. Even though the informant seldom writes travel blogs now, she is still active on the Mafengwo mobile application. This application has a unique section which is named The Note. Unlike the blog section, the Note is a section that is pictures and videos centred. It allows users to upload more pictures and short videos. In this section, long articles are not needed. The informant explained that the most popular contents in The Note are practical tips, like tickets, open and close times, or food and accommodation recommendations. This section looks like Instagram. The contents in it are fragmentations. Moreover, it includes moments from both travel and daily life.
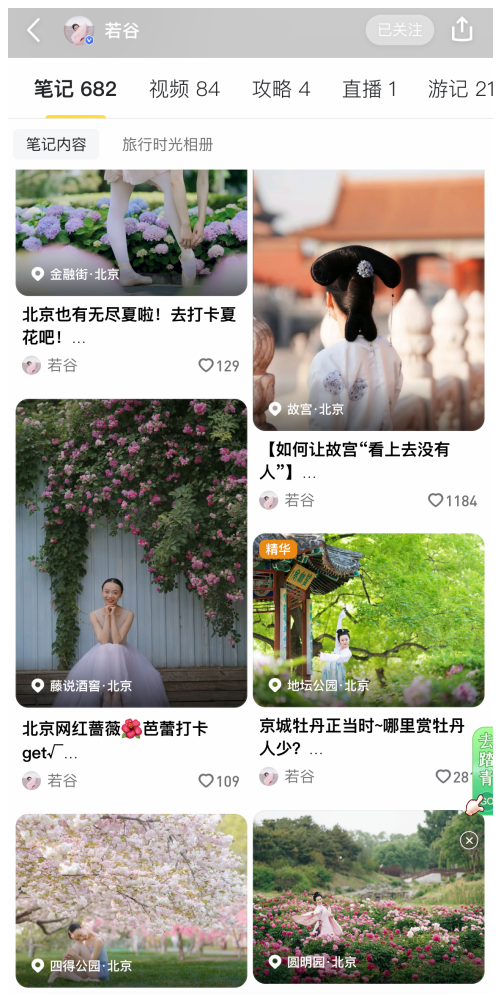
Figure 8 Screenshot of the Note page of the informant

The informant adds her freelance photo shooting within it as well. It is a heterogeneous combination of tourism experiences, everyday lives, and business publicity. The informant explained that the appearance of this section is the result of the increasing popularity of TikTok and Xiaohongshu,

> People are used to watching short videos and scrolling for pictures on other social media. They do not want long, detailed articles about a trip. In addition, most posts on the Mafengwo smartphone application provide similar content. You can understand them as everyone presents tips on Lonely Planet or TripAdvisor. Although contents are highly homogenised, with good pictures and videos, they are still popular.

The main reason for the informant being active in The Note section is that she wants to keep the relationships with other bloggers. She values friends on the website, "most bloggers I know keep writing and posting, even though there are compromises and negotiations. I still feel excited and inspired by their blogs.". In addition, The Note section provides an easier

way of keeping the activeness of her account on Mafengwo. Since both pictures and videos are compatible with Xiaohongshu or TikTok, it takes less effort to use the same content. For the informant, being active on the Mafengwo application is an easier way of maintaining the weight of her account. If her account is not active for a long time, the algorithm will account for it as a zombie user. The weight of the account will decrease accordingly. However, the accumulated popularities from previous cover blogs cannot support new blogs to catch the attention of the algorithm or the editor team. The informant will lose privileges and bonuses as well.

For the website, active users are vital assets. Thus, the informant mentioned that editors encourage her sometimes to write or post more things. More importantly, her new blog now is easier to become a cover blog.

> It feels like the website is playing with my mind. My latest blog was in June of 2021, and it became the cover blog quickly. However, my last cover blog was two years ago. It's been a while for me to have the feeling of being a cover. I have to admit that it motivates me to continue. I considered it a reward from the editor team for being active on the mobile application, and they want me to write more often.

The same situation happens to other bloggers she knows who have higher level accounts she knows. Thus, for the website, providing the opportunity to increase the popularity of bloggers is still a good way of bonding with them.

The importance of popularity changes with the expansion of the group and the development of the website and social media in China. In the beginning, popularity is the result of reciprocity between bloggers and the website. It represents mutual recognition among the community and the self-acknowledgement of bloggers. In addition, blogging is an interest-driving activity. The website did not involve itself too much in content from blogs. However, with the expansion of the blogger group and the development of social media in China, popularity has added more value. The direct connection with money has altered the purpose of blogging. It has changed the relationship between bloggers and the website as well. The association is looser nowadays due to the growth of social media in China. Both bloggers and the website have more options. Namely, bloggers have the chance to choose a better platform to improve their popularity, while the website can choose bloggers who are more adaptable and cooperated with its mechanism. However, they are still interdependent since the cost of

separating is high because of the accumulation of popularity from the past and relationships among bloggers. In the meantime, blogging has become more restrained on the website. Because of the competition from other platforms, the website chooses to sacrifice the convenience of bloggers to ingratiate its visitors. Therefore, it has more requirements for blogging. The bar for becoming a cover or a treasure blog is higher and more complex now.

5.4 Identities and relations in multiple contexts

Bloggers can construct self-identity and establish interpersonal relations through blogging. Furthermore, identities and relationships built on the Mafengwo travel blog website gradually expanded to other social media platforms and offline lives. In this situation of a "collision context" (Rettberg, 2017), how they keep and develop their identities and relations in different contexts is another vital issue in my project.

5.4.1 Consistency of identities in different contexts

Online identities are built on self-representations that the informant wants people to know. Even though they are anonymous and only reveal limited aspects of the informant's lives. her online identity has acquired recognition in the blogger community. Moreover, it can transcend the boundary between online and offline. Online self-representations of the informant are continuous characteristics that have been accepted in offline contexts. The informant mentioned that at the beginning of the development of the website, only those who had the impulse for expression and writing were willing to dedicate themselves to blogging and to make time for meetings offline. She described her first meeting with other bloggers as "nothing surprising". She explained that most bloggers are the same as they are online, "before the meeting, I had clear assumptions about other bloggers. For example, I assumed some of them are introverts in offline lives, albeit bloggers are active on the website. During the meeting, most of them fitted my assumptions well.". In addition, the informant demonstrated that she did not feel distinctive differences between the online community and offline meetings, "our topics were the same as in online discussions. Offline meetings only made impressions about each other more vivid since we talked face to face.".

Moreover, the similar growing-up contexts also made it easier for bloggers on the website to understand each other. The informant illustrated this by saying the bloggers she knows from the website have similar ages to her and are from big cities, grew up in middle-class families. Almost all of them got chances to travel alone during their college time, both domestically and internationally. The informant considered the similarities in their backgrounds as a crucial

basis for their reciprocal relationships. She said, "Since we grew up in similar backgrounds, we were not so interested in the basic information of each other, like hometown cities, families, or education.". Furthermore, the Internet development in China is another implicitly shared background for bloggers. As experienced Internet users, bloggers acknowledge several online norms in their interactions.

> Anonymity is no problem for us, nor is well-edited content. Instead, because our blogs are for public readers, we feel responsible for presenting high-quality content for our readers. For some bloggers, writing is the essential part. They will spend hours, even days, composing their blogs. While for me, I focus on pictures. I practice a lot for photo shooting and editing. Skills of editing are critical criteria for becoming a successful blogger.

Hence, the online identities of the bloggers are foundations for their relationships. Acceptance among the blogger community enabled those relationships to transcend online and offline boundaries.

Moreover, like the informant, most bloggers have multiple social media accounts other than the Mafengwo website. Travel-related content is shared on other social media as well. The travel blogger role is crucial for identifying and distinguishing themselves from other bloggers on those platforms. Due to the mechanism of the Mafengwo website and other platforms, bloggers need to be active to keep their popularity in the community. Thus, blogging is not just about posting an article after every trip. It becomes a daily activity of discussing, thinking, or planning travelling. The informant described being a travel blogger as an obsessive-compulsive feeling sometimes, "although I am not as active as in the beginning on the Mafengwo website. An idea in my mind will force me to at least post something simple in the Note section or join some discussion in Q&A. I cannot afford to waste the efforts I put into this account before.". Thus, tourism has infused into the everyday life of the informant and affects how her life is ordered. Franklin (2003a) illustrated tourism as a significant modality through which modern transnational life is organised. He explained that most places are now on some tourist trail or another; most of the things we like to do in our usual leisure time double up as touristic activities and are shared spaces. Also, the manner of the tourist has become a metaphor for the way we lead our everyday lives in a consumer society. For travel bloggers, like the informant, they went one step further by placing tourism at the centre place of their working lives as well. In Franklin's argument, tourism is still separate from workdays. However, travel bloggers choose to modify their lives to place the tourist role in the centre of their social lives, including their work time. With the development

of the Mafengwo website and social media in China, blogging gradually became a full-time job opportunity and a way of earning extra money for non-full-time bloggers. For those professional bloggers, the integration of tourism into daily life is a necessity. Tourists' roles can help them create an edge within the social media world, increasing their income and heightening their social status. Thus, the tourist role transcends the boundary between the private life and the work life of bloggers, affecting every aspect of their lives.

5.4.2 Social relationships among bloggers have extended beyond the relationships among tourists.

One crucial change in the blogosphere is that being a blogger is a career choice for daily life. Dating from 2017, the appearance of sponsored trips indicated that blogging had started to become a job that could increase income and develop business. Destinations, hotels, or restaurants started approaching bloggers to invite them to experience their places, then write a blog afterwards. Specifically, travel blogs gradually became marketing channels. Instead of identifying themselves as writers, bloggers now consider themselves KOLs (Key Opinion Leaders). Blogging has become a freelance job based on the popularity of bloggers. In the Q&A section on the Mafengwo website, the informant provided a long answer to a question about resigning from a stable job in a big company and becoming a freelancer in 2017. She described how she decided to quit and work as a freelancer in her response. She stated,

> Since graduating from university, I have worked in different companies. Some of them I liked, some companies made me sick. But in my mind, I always believe that stable office work is not how I want to live my life.

During the second interview, the informant disclosed more details about her career choice. She related it to the experience of being a blogger deeply. Blogging helped her with the skills and confidence she needed in freelancing. Firstly, she has improved her photo shooting and picture editing skills after being a blogger. Her photo shooting has become her distinctive tag on the website. She gained courage from positive feedback and then invested more time and money. Secondly, through blogging, she has found her uniqueness as a photographer. In recent years, she has focused on photo shooting of the traditional costumes in China named Hanfu. It has been her hobby for a long time. But her family and friends are not interested in Hanfu. "They even feel a bit weird about this hobby of mine. They cannot understand where it grows from", the informant said. However, blogging gave her a chance to show this side of

her to the community. Readers and other bloggers with similar interests react positively to her Hanfu photos. It has become a unique tag to distinguish her from other photographers.

Figure 9 Hanfu photo shooting. Photograph by the husband of the informant

Figure 10 Hanfu photo shooting. Photograph by the husband of the informant

Because of her influence as a blogger, she has received more sponsored trips from the website and destinations. The two photographs in Figures 9 and 10 were taken during one such sponsored trip. The destination is a historical-cultural theme park in the north of China. This theme park is a replica of the capital of the Song dynasty. It was built to restore life in the capital of the Song Dynasty. This theme park refers to the famous painting "Along the River During the Qingming Festival" painted by the Song dynasty painter Zhang Zeduan in the 11th century. The informant was chosen because of her speciality in Hanfu. In her blog, she explained that she prepared three sets of costumes for this trip, all of them were duplicates of clothes from the Song dynasty.

Moreover, her make-up and hair were specially made for the destination also. All these preparations showed her professional qualities as a blogger to the destination, "I need to make

my sponsor feel that my blog is worth the money they paid.". In addition, her blog is also her portfolio to other customers. Thus, freelance is an opportunity for popularity to cash out. Lastly, freelancing can strengthen her recognition of the identity she has established online. Through online self-representation, the informant has built an identity centred on her enthusiasm for her interests and specialities. Freelance photography, as a job, has developed from this identity. Through blogging, the informant can work for things she enjoys, "the most exciting thing in freelancing is that I feel free and passionate about my work now, although I work long hours every day and the risk is high.".

Thus, the travel blog has evolved into a heterogeneous node where new forms of the social life of blogger are orchestrated (Hannam & Knox, 2010). Tourism mobilities blend into and perform with other social relationships and activities through the travel blogs of the informant. For the informant, the tourist role or touristic living has become the centre of her daily social life.

Furthermore, relationships between the informant and other users on the website have extended beyond readership since readers of her blogs are sometimes customers of her business. Relationships with other bloggers or platforms have also become more complicated than reciprocal interaction. The informant needs to establish more stable and long-term relationships with others in blogosphere. One fact that she had observed within the blogosphere was that all bloggers were the ones who most often pressed the 'like' button on social media platforms. The explanation she gave was that,

> Exposure means opportunity for us. Nowadays, being a blogger is a competitive job. For example, I always add my customers as my WeChat friend to keep in contact with them. However, people normally have more than one thousand friends on their WeChat nowadays. It is easy for them to forget they have a freelance photographer like me on their friend list, so I need to be initiative. 'Comments' and 'likes' are now part of my customer relationship management system. While among bloggers, pressing the 'like' button means mental support. It is to show our understanding and sympathy for each other. Our way of saying, 'I understand you, my friend, blogging has become harder and harder. Hang in there.'.

Relationships built through travel blogs start with connections between tourists since all participants know each other from travelling. However, the 'cloakroom communities' concept does not adequately describe their relationships. Cloakroom communities are relationships between tourists in which tourists meet in a place for a short time, then move on quickly to

different directions and never meet again (Franklin, 2003b). However, the encounters of the informant, as a blogger with other users, are rooted in cyberspace. As tourists, they may visit the same places and share similar experiences. However, their visits do not happen at the same time. Their encounters happened after or even before a visit. The establishment of their relations is not because they happen to be in the same space. Participants initiate these relations. For example, the informant inspires readers to visit certain places. Because their relationships are built through the Internet, they do not end when a travelling experience ends. As the informant said, if she has friends in her other social media accounts from readers of her blogs, their connections can be activated by a 'like' or a comment. The informant demonstrated that, for now, people around her prefer online connections instead of meeting in person to maintain their relations.

> Everyone is so busy nowadays. Offline meetings cost so much time. Take me as an example. I live in Beijing now, and some of my friends I know from the website also live here. I like to meet and talk to them face to face, but it is so hard for us to find a time that suits all of us. In addition, we live in different districts. Beijing is so big. It can take more than two hours by subway to meet a friend. We like to keep in touch online. We can talk, or meet by video chatting if we want, anytime and anywhere we want.

In conclusion, relations between the informant and other users are built online and centred on her tourist role. They meet each other as tourists. Travel plans and experiences are continuous topics maintaining their connection. However, since blogging has become a job, relationships developed from blogs have been complicated for multiple purposes. Relationships combine reciprocity, marketing, customer management, friendship, and self-actualisation. Moreover, the social relationships of bloggers originated from their online identities and have expanded into offline spaces. They have brought the tourist role to daily life and reshaped their social life. Hence, the development of travel bloggers illustrates the argument made by Franklin (2003a) that tourism is a central component of modern social identity formation and engagement, rather than something shallow and insignificant that takes place in the social margins.

5.5 The maturity of the blogosphere has brought changes to blogging.

The maturity of the blogosphere is the result of the development of the Internet in China. With a sizeable total number of Internet users and high Internet usage, the online environment in China has kept in a fast-development lane until now. Online competition among platforms has become fiercer also. During the interviews, the informant mentioned many times how the mechanisms of platforms tended to put the user experience first and sacrifice the convenience of bloggers. For example, the difficulty of preparing different formats for pictures and videos to fit in multiple terminals or a preference for short videos. In addition, competition among bloggers has also become fierce. Since being a blogger has become a professional job, more people consider blogging a good career choice. Travel bloggers now need to compete for one business opportunity. In addition, blogging has been corporatised. Some bloggers have their own studio or company. In the following subsections, I discuss two main changes to explain the Chinese blogosphere in recent years.

5.5.1 Blogging has been professionalised.

From the beginning, a norm among bloggers has been that online contents needs to be edited to be of good quality. The informant explained editing as a responsibility taken by bloggers for their readers. Thus, how to improve their editing skills is a central topic among bloggers. However, after blogging became a profession; contents in some travel blogs have become carefully manufactured products now. The informant described an ongoing situation in the Chinese blogosphere nowadays.

> Some professional bloggers have their own companies or studios. They produce different content for separated groups of readers. It is usual for one blogger to have multiple accounts on one social media platform. For example, one blogger has two or three accounts on Weibo. One account is for sharing scenery photography, the second is for portrait photography, and the third is for personal daily life sharing.

In other words, the quality of blogs is less controlled by the blogger. Instead, it is more connected with the preferences of readers and the requirements of the platform. One consequence is that blogs have disengaged with the personality of bloggers.

In the beginning, I enjoyed knowing people through their blogs since showing ourselves is an important reason we started blogging. But it's all about content now. If the content can make people laugh and show them how beautiful a place or the blogger is, readers do not care about who provides that information.

In addition, professional bloggers are cooperating with the platforms now. For example, on the Mafengwo website, sponsored blogs get more chances to become cover blogs. The popularity of the blogger increases accordingly. And thus, they will have more sponsored opportunities in return. Relationships between bloggers and the website have changed. Bloggers need to compromise more in the negotiations with the website. Self-identification has given way to requests from the website. In addition, the website asks for a complete set of visual contents, including drone photography, pictures to present the destination from all perspectives, and well-edited short films. Moreover, the website prefers short and direct articles and sentences as well. As a result, bloggers must follow instructions from the website more often. Otherwise, there is no chance for them to keep and increase their popularity. However, the website needs bloggers to strengthen their uniqueness to avoid homogenisation because diversity in its contents is a competitive advantage. Hence, the online identities of bloggers are heterogeneous collections now. They result from negotiations between bloggers and platforms, personal characteristics and popular trends.

The development of professionalised travel blogs has deepened the fusion of cyberspace and daily life since online activities can affect both the personal life and career of bloggers. In addition, the tourist role is not only the core of travel bloggers' identities to distinguish them from others, but it also joins the construction of the social status of bloggers. A famous travel blogger is not just a celebrity in the traveller community. They can gain social recognition from a broader range of society since more people accept being blogger as a profession.

5.5.2 The maturity of the blogosphere draws more attention to censorship

During the interviews, the informant concluded that the growth of the Internet and social media was the foundation for the development of travel blogs. In addition, she also demonstrated a unique situation in Chinese society that has brought more influences on blogging in recent years, the stricter censorship of blogs and other social media.

National censorship is not a new story for the Chinese Internet. In an article written in 2013, Kristensen (2013) described the Chinese government's attitude toward social media as an area that has to be restricted for some time to come. However, national supervision of social media began in 2011. The Beijing Municipal Provisions for Microblog Development and Management was promulgated on 16 December 2011. It demonstrated the principle of front stage voluntary, backstage real name (M. Jiang, 2016). Namely, users of blogs and microblogs are expected to register their real identities backstage with microblog service providers (MSPs). All users need to provide their national ID cards, mobile phone numbers, or other identifications to MSPs, albeit they can keep their anonymous usernames displayed on web pages or applications. Hence, individuals can be held accountable for online activities through online censorship. Stricter censorship has been implemented on content in blogs or microblogs as well. The informant mentioned that blogs' words and sentences are easier to be censored. The improvement in technology provides better algorithms that make it easier to check sensitive contents automatically.

> As far as I know, the censorship criteria change all the time. Sensitive political issues are the strictest. An account will be deleted without notifying the user because of one word or one phrase about some sensitive political events. Censorship is not just about forbidding word descriptions. They cover a more comprehensive range. For example, each sensitive word contains the word itself, synonyms, and homophones. Thus, it is a set of sensitive contents.

Moreover, the scope of sensitive content is expanding.

> Political issues are those I would never touch upon on the Chinese Internet. Other than that, censorship of pornography and violence has become much stricter. Some photographers I know specialise in body arts. Their works contain nudity sometimes. As far as I know, they have no chance to display those photos on the Internet now.

The informant has experienced different levels of censorship on multiple platforms. According to her, the strictest media are Weibo and WeChat. On these two applications, some content or the entire blog will be deleted without explanation about the reason,

> The only official explanation shown in the deleted blog is that this blog involves contents prohibited by national rules. But they will never say which parts are not

allowed and what rules have been violated. So sometimes, I feel that censorship is a myth.

However, on the Mafengwo website, censorship is completed by both the editor team and the algorithm. "At least the editor will tell me why my blog is blocked. It feels better.", the informant said. Censorship on the Chinese Internet is also a key reason for the informant to focus on pictures or traditional Hanfu as the topic of her blogs, "topics like travelling, Hanfu, or dancing are safe and can pass censorship easier.".

Censorship varies according to specific events as well. For example, before the National Day of China every year, censorship will become stricter. "During that time, I feel like only politically correct or praise for the country can be displayed on Chinese social media." as described by the informant, "other kinds of comments, especially critiques, will easily be blocked or deleted.".

To sum up, firstly, blogging is not just an activity shared by a small group with similar interests in writing and travelling now. It has developed into a more complex system. On the one hand, success in the bloggers' community means popularity in a broader social range and can directly bring commercial benefits. Thus, being a blogger has developed from an interest-based personal choice into a new way of improving social status and achieving social recognition for the blogger group. On the other hand, like those post-80 young writers who achieved success at a very young age, blogging has developed into a new path to success in China. The growth of the total number of users does not necessarily bring popularity to all bloggers. Instead, it leads to an unbalanced relationship among bloggers. From the beginning, bloggers joined the community are based on their interests. Specifically, they can choose to join groups they like, such as portrait photography or astrophotography. However, since blogging has been professionalised, bloggers have been divided into two distinctively different groups according to the purpose. As the informant described in the interview, one refers to professional bloggers who blog to make money. The other one includes those who are still blogging for their interests or do not aim at commercial profits only.

Moreover, the chance of being influential is uneven between these two groups. Professional bloggers have better abilities to produce a good blog. Because they are good at photography or video shooting and editing, some were even professional photographers before. In addition, they will spend more time understanding mechanisms on multiple platforms and the

preferences of different reader groups. However, for unprofessional or semi-professional bloggers, it is hard for them to do the same. As a result, the maturity of the blogosphere dissolves the collective identity of bloggers as writers and brings new joint recognitions among different groups.

Secondly, national censorship has become tighter because of the maturity of the blogosphere. It connects online representations with the origins of bloggers again. The blogosphere started as an enclave for bloggers disconnecting from their original identities and social relationships. Bloggers construct representations by themselves, which means they can choose how to present themselves to other people and who can join their online social networks in the blogosphere. However, new rules about connecting their online accounts with national IDs and phone numbers, on the one hand, bring direct effects on the contents of blogs. For example, limiting topics blogs can discuss or set sensitive words and terms that require bloggers to avoid. On another, the self-representations of bloggers are restricted and regulated accordingly. Although the Internet is a crucial tool for the individualism of the Balinghou youth, they use the Internet to establish their own identities and negotiate their collective identities. But stricter national censorship, in a sense, sets clear limitations for the scope of individualism.

6 Conclusion

This thesis focuses on the relationship between the characteristics of Balinghou travel bloggers and their specific social backgrounds in China. Using a young female Chinese travel blogger as the case in this thesis, I address the question, "How does specific social backgrounds shape the characteristics of young Chinese travel bloggers?". I explore this question by conducting a narrative analysis of the contents of the informant's blogs and semi-structured interviews with the informant. I concluded contemporary social backgrounds in China as a transformational society. It has shaped the generational distinctiveness of the post-80 urban youth. Accordingly, I answered the primary research question by arguing that characteristics of young Chinese travel bloggers are the places where their generational characteristics manifested in tourism scenario.

Two sub-questions were addressed to inform the primary research question. Firstly, I explored concluded generational characteristics of the young travel blogger group as policy led. Two crucial policies were demonstrated in this thesis. One is the Reform and Opening policy that stimulates economic boosting in China after 1978. The Balinghou youth in China, including young travel bloggers, benefit from the economic results of this policy. Thus, they are the first generation who can afford to travel freely. Another important policy is the Only child policy which reshaped the family structure of urban young Chinese who born after 1980. It reinforces the centre position of young travel bloggers as beneficiaries of the economic reform. In addition, because of the only child policy, they lack peer relations and mutual understanding with parents in their own families. Hence, travel bloggers value social networks outside of their families, through which they can find peers with shared values and interests.

Second sub-question focused on the efforts young travel bloggers make to balance their self-identification and actualisation with the relatively fixed mechanism of the changing society in which they are living with. On the one hand, travel bloggers belong to the Balinghou group, who are influenced by the individualism introduced through the establishment of modernity after 1978. On the other hand, the establishment of modernity was characterised by the communist government and the cultural traditions of Chinese society. Hence, the individualism of the Balinghou bloggers is affected, sometimes even limited, by this social background.

In the analysis, the informant, as a representative of the Balinghou travel blogger group, is listed as an example to explain my research question further. Materials from the blogs of the informant and interviews with her were used to firstly illustrate that her identity construction was built on self-representation within the blogosphere. The process of her identity construction started with intentionally breaking free from her origin. The informant defined herself by her interests and personality chosen by herself. It is also a commonality among other bloggers on this website. Their identity constructions were influenced by individualism and supported by the economic success of their parent's generation. The blogging activity is considered a part of the self-recognition and actualisation for the informant. Moreover, identity as a travel blogger extended beyond the online environment to the offline life of the informant. It reorganises the informant's social life by including relationships established online in her social network or redirecting her career choice.

Furthermore, the self-exploring of the informant intertwined quickly with other parts of Chinese society. However, due to the maturity of the blogosphere, identity construction is complicated by more social relations. As a result, the blogging activity is professionalised, and regulation of both the website and the national censorship have tightened. Hence, the identity construction of the blogger is included in the social structure of contemporary China and is regulated by its political or cultural conventions instead of as a simple individual task as Bauman (1996) proposed. Hence, in this thesis, I tried to provide an alternative way of interpreting the distinctiveness of the young Chinese travel blogger group based on the differences in their identity. Accordingly, if further studies focus on travel blogger group, or other Chinese tourists, they need to be situated in their cultural and social traits instead of fixing them in existing theories based on Western societies.

I acknowledge that there are many limitations in this research, this research touched upon relationships between young travel bloggers' characteristics and contemporary Chinese society using only one informant. Yet, it could be interesting to study more cases and bring more perspectives to explore this kind of relationship. After all, the young travel bloggers community is diverse. The story of another specific blogger may have distinctive differences from the informant in this research. Anyhow, the structuring forces in contemporary Chinese society that I have described, will have an impact.

Moreover, the pandemic caused by COVID-19 has profoundly affected the blogosphere. In this thesis, I mainly focus on the blogosphere before the pandemic. Albeit some changes

during the past two years were mentioned, I did not go too far into this topic. However, I believe it is vital to have more research on the travel blogger group during the pandemic in the future.

Moreover, in this thesis, I followed the path of new directions in the sociology of tourism inspired by Franklin (2003a) and S. A. Cohen and Cohen (2019). I contributed to detailing Chinese tourism within the mobilities paradigm. However, the uniqueness of Chinese tourism is still an under studied topic, especially from cultural and social perspectives. One difficulty in studying a phenomenon from outside English-speaking countries is the translation. Because both the website and the informant use Mandarin, I found it was challenging to translate the meaning of some words or sentences into English with accuracy. Especially in the online environment, new words and slang are created every year. Some of them have shared meanings within a specific group. Some of them are hard to understand, even for Chinese people who do not belong to this group. Hence, I believe the topic of Chinese tourism will attract more audiences if better translations are provided. In addition, if more approaches can be integrated in future research, such as economic, social and cultural anthropology, these would help interpret and broaden the understanding of this phenomenon. Thus, more investigations can be included to develop further in-depth insights into Chinese travel bloggers.

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Appendices Information letter given to the participant

Are you interested in taking part in the research project

"An investigation of how specific social backgrounds shape the characteristics of young Chinese travel bloggers within the mobilities paradigm"?

This is an inquiry about participation in a research project where the main purpose is to conduct a master thesis that concentrate on a certain group of young Chinese travel bloggers. In this letter we will give you information about the purpose of the project and what your participation will involve.

Purpose of the project

This project is a master thesis. The purpose is to investigate how Chinese social backgrounds shape the feature of the Balinghou travel blogger group in China. To be specific, I will focus on travel bloggers who are acitve on a website named as Mafengwo.

Who is responsible for the research project?

UiT Norges arktiske universitet is the institution responsible for the project.

Why are you being asked to participate?

I ask you to participate is because you are a Chinese blogger for years, and we keep contact for years.

What does participation involve for you?

I will ask your consent of using contents from your blogs, I will focus on texts and images. As to the text I will only quote some sentence. Comments of your blogs will not be screenshot, also only be used as quotes. Images will be used directly in the article. Other than this I will also ask your consent of using contents from your other social media, Wechat and Weibo, which are two major social media in China. Same rules that aforementioned about how to use texts, images and comments apply here. I will avoid those images or texts what will reveal

your personal information, or any risk that will lead readers to identify you from reading publication of this project.

I will also conduct interviews with you. Your answers will be recorded electronically. The interviews will focus on your story of becoming a blogger, and how this experience changes your personal life and career choice. Another topic will be your opinion on the relationship with other bloggers and your readers.

Participation is voluntary

Participation in the project is voluntary. If you chose to participate, you can withdraw your consent at any time without giving a reason. All information about you will then be made anonymous. There will be no negative consequences for you if you chose not to participate or later decide to withdraw.

Your personal privacy – how we will store and use your personal data

I will only use your personal data for the purpose specified in this information letter. I will process your personal data confidentially and in accordance with data protection legislation (the General Data Protection Regulation and Personal Data Act).

- Your personal will only be used by the writer of this project. This writer is a master student of UiT Norges arktiske universitet. This student will be the person who has access to your personal data and recordings and notes of the interview.
- Your personal data, recordings and notes of the interview will be stored in the storage server provided by UiT. Personal data will be processed anonymously by the computer belonging to the data controller.

As the participant of this project, you will not be recognized in publications.

What will happen to your personal data at the end of the research project?

The project is scheduled to the end of Augest 2021. All personal data, including recordings will be deleted after the project.

Your rights

So long as you can be identified in the collected data, you have the right to:

- - access the personal data that is being processed about you.
- - request that your personal data is deleted.
- - request that incorrect personal data about you is corrected/rectified.
- - receive a copy of your personal data (data portability).
- - send a complaint to the Data Protection Officer or The Norwegian Data Protection Authority regarding the processing of your personal data.

What gives us the right to process your personal data?

I will process your personal data based on your consent.

Based on an agreement with UiT Norges arktiske universitet, NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS has assessed that the processing of personal data in this project is in accordance with data protection legislation.

Where can I find out more?

If you have questions about the project, or want to exercise your rights, contact:

- UiT Norges arktiske universitet via Kjell Ole Kjærland Olsen, by mail kjell.o.olsen@uit.no.
- UiT Norges arktiske universitet via Qing Yan, by mail yqi000@uit.no
- NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS, by email: (personverntjenester@nsd.no) or by telephone: +47 55 58 21 17.

Yours sincerely,

Project Leader: Kjell Ole Kjærland Olsen

Student: Qing Yan