Revisiting the Theory and Practice of the Three-Layer System of Culture: An Exploration of Chinese Backpackers’ Travel Experiences in Europe

by

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Declaration

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Abstract

This study initially aims to investigate Chinese outbound backpackers’ travel experiences through White (1949a)’s traditional system, which understands and classifies cultural theories into three layers (ideological, social and technological). However, this original system is too problematic to provide adequate explanations of the experiences of mobile individuals and their relations. Thus, beyond investigating Chinese backpackers’ experiences, this study adopts an abductive approach that systematically combines theoretical and empirical approaches to reconceptualise the three-layer system of culture, and proposes the ‘Fluid Networked System of Culture’ to provide a framework for understanding mobile individuals’ experiences. Theoretically, liquid modernity and the new mobilities paradigm create the theoretical constructs. Empirically, Chinese outbound backpackers’ experiences develop and complete the reconceptualisation process by providing ‘thick descriptions’ of their travel experiences in Europe. Online participant observation and three fieldwork trips through a mobile and virtual ethnographic approach were undertaken between June and November, 2014. Overall, three sets of comprehensive field notes, twenty semi-structured interviews, other supporting data (for example, reflexive notes, conversational interviews) were collected and analysed through thematic analysis.

The findings show a complex and fluid picture of Chinese backpackers’ travel experiences. Regarding mobile social relations, the findings suggest that the Chinese value of harmony plays a predominant role in backpacker group dynamics, which directly influence their travel experiences. While in terms of ideologies, multiple conflicting streams of values were identified in their perceptions and identities. In addition, multiple affording roles of materials and technologies were recognised in the Chinese backpackers’ practice. This thesis then abductively proposes the ‘Fluid Networked System of Culture’ as the outcome of this reconceptualisation through the theoretical framing and empirical comprehension. The Fluid Networked System of Culture provides a comprehensive framework to explore issues in and beyond tourism.
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# Table of Contents

**CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION** ................................................................. 1

1.1 INTRODUCTION .................................................................................. 1

1.2 RATIONALE ....................................................................................... 1

1.3 DEVELOPMENT OF THEORY: AN ABDUCTIVE APPROACH ..................... 3

1.4 THE SETTING – CHINESE OUTBOUND BACKPACKERS IN THE WEST ..................... 5

1.4.1 CHARACTERISTICS OF CHINESE BACKPACKERS ........................................ 6

1.4.2 DEVELOPMENT OF WESTERN BACKPACKER TOURISM ................................. 8

1.4.3 DEVELOPMENT OF CHINESE BACKPACKER TOURISM .............................. 13

1.4.4 WHY CHINESE BACKPACKERS IN THIS STUDY? ........................................ 15

1.5 AIM AND OBJECTIVES ....................................................................... 16

1.6 UNDERLYING PARADIGM AND RESEARCH METHOD ................................. 16

1.7 STRUCTURE ....................................................................................... 17

**CHAPTER 2 THREE-LAYER SYSTEM OF CULTURE** ................................. 21

2.1 INTRODUCTION .................................................................................. 21

2.2 COMPLEXITY OF THE TOURIST EXPERIENCE ....................................... 21

2.3 DEFINITIONS OF CULTURE .................................................................. 22

2.3.1 SYSTEMS OF CULTURAL THEORIES ...................................................... 23

2.4 THE THREE-LAYER CAKE MODEL OF CULTURE .................................... 24

2.4.1 IDEOLOGICAL SUBSYSTEM ...................................................................... 26

2.4.2 SOCIAL SUBSYSTEM .............................................................................. 36

2.4.3 THE TECHNOLOGICAL SUBSYSTEM ....................................................... 44

2.5 CONCLUSION ..................................................................................... 52
### Chapter 3: Theoretical Constructs: Liquid Modernity, New Mobilities Paradigm, and Networks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Introduction</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Theoretical Constructs</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2.1 Liquid Modernity</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2.2 New Mobilities Paradigm</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 Information Communication Technologies (ICTs)</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.1 Virtual Communities</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.2 Surveillance</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.3 Technologies of Separation</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 Networks on the Move</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.1 Network Sociality and Social Networks</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.2 Network Capital</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.3 Moorings</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.4 Backpacker Enclaves</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.5 Regulation and Limitations of Mobilities</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5 Theoretical Framework</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6 Conclusion</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Chapter 4: The Setting - Chinese Outbound Backpackers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Introduction</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 Chinese Outbound Tourism</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3 Chinese Independent Outbound Travellers</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4 Traditional Chinese Travel Culture</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5 Chinese Backpacker Research</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5.1 Donkey Friends</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section</td>
<td>Title</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>CHINESE BACKPACKERS: ADVENTURE TRAVELLERS OR FLASHPACKERS?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>RESEARCH PHILOSOPHIES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.1</td>
<td>POSITIVISM/QUANTITATIVE VS. INTERPRETIVISM/QUALITATIVE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>RESEARCH STRATEGY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3.1</td>
<td>ETHNOGRAPHY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3.2</td>
<td>CHALLENGES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>RESEARCH TECHNIQUES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4.1</td>
<td>PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4.2</td>
<td>IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>REFLEXIVITY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5.1</td>
<td>REFLEXIVE TURN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5.2</td>
<td>REFLEXIVE METHODOLOGY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5.3</td>
<td>THE RESEARCHER AS A CHINESE BACKPACKER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>RESEARCH DESIGN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>IN THE FIELD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.7.1</td>
<td>PILOT STUDY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.7.2</td>
<td>ACCESS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.7.3</td>
<td>INFORMANTS CRITERIA AND FIELD CHOICE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.7.4</td>
<td>FIELDWORK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>DATA ANALYSIS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>ETHICAL ISSUES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.10</td>
<td>QUALITY ISSUES</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.10.1 TRUSTWORTHINESS ................................................................................................................125
5.10.2 RICH RIGOUR ...........................................................................................................................127
5.10.3 SINCERITY ...............................................................................................................................128
5.11 CONCLUSION ..............................................................................................................................128

CHAPTER 6 MOBILE SOCIALITY ........................................................................................................130
6.1 THE STRUCTURE OF FINDINGS CHAPTERS ................................................................................130
6.2 INTRODUCTION ............................................................................................................................131
6.3 GROUP ORIENTATION: A PARADOX OF RISK CONCERNS .........................................................132
6.4 MAINTAINING GROUP HARMONY ...............................................................................................139
6.4.1 FIRST IMPRESSIONS AND OVERCOMING AWKWARDNESS .................................................139
6.4.2 POWER RELATIONS AMONG DONKEY FRIENDS ................................................................141
6.4.3 GROUP DYNAMICS: HOW DEEP IS THE INTERACTION? .........................................................146
6.4.4 GROUP DYNAMICS: CONFLICTS, COMPLAINT AND COMPROMISE ....................................150
6.5 INTERACTIONS OUTSIDE THE GROUP ......................................................................................154
6.6 CONCLUSION ...............................................................................................................................158

CHAPTER 7 NEGOCIATING IDEOLOGIES ...........................................................................................160
7.1 INTRODUCTION ............................................................................................................................160
7.2 DONKEY FRIENDS’ INTERPRETATION AND PRACTICE OF THE WESTERN BACKPACKER CULTURE .............................................................................................................................................160
7.2.1 SELF-SEARCHING AND LEARNING .........................................................................................161
7.2.2 BUDGET ....................................................................................................................................165
7.2.3 OFF THE BEATEN TRACK ..........................................................................................................166
7.3 BACKPACKING: A RITE-OF-PASSAGE? .........................................................................................168
7.4 CHINESE OUTBOUND BACKPACKERS: A CONFLICT BETWEEN CHINESE AND WESTERN IDEOLOGIES .................................................................................................................................173
7.4.1 FLEXIBILITY AND RISK AVOIDANCE .......................................................................................174
7.4.2 EXPLORE THE UNKNOWN OR STICK WITH FAMILIARITY – CULINARY EXPERIENCE AS AN EXAMPLE

7.4.3 MEETING OTHERS OR STICKING TO THE GROUP

7.4.4 PARADOXICAL IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION OF CHINESE BACKPACKERS

7.5 CONCLUSION

CHAPTER 8 AFFORDING MATERIALITY

8.1 INTRODUCTION

8.2 MATERIAL AFFORDANCE OF MOBILITIES

8.2.1 ACCOMMODATION

8.2.2 TRANSPORT

8.2.3 BACKPACK

8.2.4 TRAVEL SUPPORTING TECHNOLOGIES

8.2.5 MATERIAL AND INTERCULTURAL PERCEPTION

8.3 COLLECTIVE INTELLIGENCE – TRAVEL GUIDEBOOKS AND ONLINE COMMUNITY

8.3.1 TRAVEL GUIDEBOOKS

8.3.2 ONLINE COMMUNITY SOCIALITY

8.3.3 INFORMATIVE CHINESE BACKPACKERS

8.4 CONNECTEDNESS

8.4.1 SHARING TRAVEL EXPERIENCES AND UPDATING SAFETY

8.4.2 NETWORKED SOCIALITY DISTRIBUTION

8.5 DEPENDENCE AND RESTRICTIONS OF MATERIALITY

8.6 CONCLUSION

CHAPTER 9 FROM A THREE-LAYER SYSTEM OF CULTURE TO A FLUID NETWORK

9.1 INTRODUCTION

9.2 RECAP THE THREE-LAYER SYSTEM OF CULTURE
9.3 General critique of the three-layer system of culture

9.3.1 Critiques from liquid modernity

9.3.2 Critiques from the New Mobilities paradigm

9.3.3 Revisiting the theoretical framework

9.4 Layer-by-layer: specific critique and reconceptualisation of three layers – an empirical approach

9.4.1 Reconceptualisation of the technological layer

9.4.2 Reconceptualisation of the social layer

9.4.3 Reconceptualisation of the ideological layer

9.5 Conceptualising the fluid networked system of culture

9.5.1 The configuration

9.5.2 The dynamic

9.5.3 The fluid networked system of culture and the three-layer system of culture

9.6 Conclusion

Chapter 10 Conclusion

10.1 Introduction

10.2 Meeting the research aim and objectives

10.3 Contribution to knowledge

10.4 Implications for practice

10.5 Limitations

10.6 Reflection on the process

10.7 Future research directions

10.8 Final remark

List of references
APPENDIX 1................................................................................................................................. 284

APPENDIX 2................................................................................................................................. 286

APPENDIX 3................................................................................................................................. 289

APPENDIX 4................................................................................................................................. 290

APPENDIX 5................................................................................................................................. 291

APPENDIX 6................................................................................................................................. 293

APPENDIX 7................................................................................................................................. 294
# Table of Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1-1</td>
<td>Structure of the thesis</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2-1</td>
<td>Three-layer System of Culture (White, 1949a)</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3-1</td>
<td>Transformation Process of the Theoretical Framework</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5-1</td>
<td>Research Design</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5-2</td>
<td>Participants and Fields selection process</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5-3</td>
<td>Fieldwork 1: Spain and Portugal</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5-4</td>
<td>Fieldwork 2: UK</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5-5</td>
<td>Fieldwork 3: Poland</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6-1</td>
<td>Structure of Chapter Six</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6-2</td>
<td>A Note of Travel Expenses Calculation, Seville</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6-3</td>
<td>Itinerary planning, Valencia</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6-4</td>
<td>Drawing to Communicate with the Restaurant Owner</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 8-1</td>
<td>Picture taken in front of a Hostel, Bath, UK</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 9-1</td>
<td>An Abductive Approach of Reconceptualising Three-layer System of Culture</td>
<td>218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 9-2</td>
<td>The Sociality of the Fluid Networked System of Culture – Aspect from One Social Actor</td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 9-3</td>
<td>Ideological Surroundings in the Fluid Networked System of Culture</td>
<td>237</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# List of Tables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5-1</th>
<th>Research Overview</th>
<th>94</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 5-2</td>
<td>Relevant Research Questions</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5-3</td>
<td>Field Trip Information</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5-4</td>
<td>Informants Information Trip 1</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5-5</td>
<td>Informants Information Trip 2</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5-6</td>
<td>Informants Information Trip 3</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to reconceptualise the three-layer system of culture (ideological, social, and technological layers) in light of mobilities by exploring Chinese backpackers travel experience in Europe. As such, the thesis is focused on the reconceptualisation process of the traditional three-layer system developed by White (1949a) through an abductive approach. Theoretically, this thesis introduces the new mobilities paradigm and liquid modernity as theoretical constructs to propose a framework that critique the three-layer system and proposes a conceptual network instead in the setting of mobilities; empirically, Chinese outbound backpackers in Europe were chosen as the case to develop the reconceptualised system. A mobile ethnography was undertaken between June and November 2014 in the UK, Spain, Portugal and Poland to provide a thick description for this study. This thesis is intended to contribute to academic knowledge by investigating Chinese outbound backpackers’ experiences and reconceptualising the three-layer system.

In this chapter, I am going to provide an overview of this research project. To begin with, I will establish the rationale of this thesis by discussing why it is essential to reconceptualise the traditional three-layer system of culture, and why I choose to study Chinese outbound backpackers. Then I am going to introduce the research aim and objectives of this study. Next, I will introduce Chinese outbound backpackers in Europe as the setting of my study. I will also discuss the main concepts and outline the methods. Finally, I will briefly explain the structure of this thesis.

1.2 Rationale
The formation of this PhD research topic went through a shift of focus, from investigating Chinese outbound backpackers to reconceptualising the three-layer system of culture. Contextually, Chinese outbound backpacker studies have been relatively overlooked compared with the phenomenon of the growing Chinese outbound market. With the trend of globalisation and economic development in China, backpacking in European countries – as a new way of travel to experience independence, freedom and life-achievement – has been widely adopted by the younger Chinese generation. However, academic studies on Chinese backpackers seem not to have kept pace with this expanding phenomenon. Although Western backpackers travelling to Asia, especially to South-east Asian countries, have been widely reported in the literature, research focusing on Asian backpackers themselves travelling to Western developed countries is extremely limited. Most current studies about the Eastern flow still focus on mass tourism. However, with the growing confidence to travel individually and the Western backpacker cultural influence, an increasing number of Chinese backpackers are travelling to the West. In the context of Chinese backpacker tourism specifically, studies can be categorised into two dimensions: research on a backpacker’s characteristics, motivations and consumption behaviour; and backpacker destination development in China. In examining Chinese backpackers, scholars mainly confine their studies in the domestic context (Zhu 2005, 2007, 2009; Zhang, 2008; Lim 2009; Luo, Huang and Brown, 2015). However, an exception has been made by Ong and du Cros (2011) about Chinese backpackers travelling in Macau from a political-geographic aspect, which creates a new horizon for Chinese backpacker overseas research (Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan do not count as domestic destinations); nevertheless, besides Macau, research on Chinese backpackers in overseas destinations, especially Western countries, remains largely a clean slate. Regarding outbound tourism research, a few studies look at independent Chinese travellers in Australia (Pearce, Wu and Osmond, 2013; Wu and Pearce, 2014), but these do not focus on backpackers specifically. In Europe, the closest attempt is undertaken by Prayag, Cohen and Yan (2015), who focus on independent Chinese tourists in Western Europe. In this quantitative study they discuss the overlap between independent
tourists and backpackers. More Chinese outbound backpacker studies are needed, not only to formulate a complete theoretical framework for understanding backpacker tourism in general, but also to take a more specific look at backpackers from non-Western contexts.

While searching for a theoretical framework to guide investigations of Chinese outbound backpackers’ experiences, the classic three-layer system of culture (White, 1949a), which has been used by Paris (2009) in tourism and also applied in various studies and fields, was chosen to provide a comprehensive categorisation to review related theories that construct backpacker experiences. However, as an integrated system, I realised the three-layer cake format, which indicates the hierarchy and solidity of this system, does not apply adequately in light of increasing mobilities, as is the case of Chinese backpackers in the West. Thus, I shifted the research focus of my Ph.D. to reconceptualise the three-layer system of culture, as I believe conceptual research can make a wider contribution to academic knowledge, and can be applied to understand other relevant issues or solve related problems. This reconceptualisation responds to the shift from solid to liquid modernity, as well as the call for mobilities studies in a global context, to theorise and develop a system for explaining individuals’ experiences in mobile and intercultural settings. The initial research focus of Chinese outbound backpackers not only became the context for this study, but also acts as the empirical approach that supports the reconceptualisation process. Thus, by reconceptualising the three-layer system in light of mobilities, this Ph.D. can also unpack issues of Chinese backpackers’ experiences, which also meets the initial motives for this study.

1.3 Development of Theory: An Abductive Approach

As a reconceptualisation study, this Ph.D. focuses on theory development rather than generation; therefore an abductive approach, using ‘systematic combining’ of the deductive approach and the inductive approach (Dubois and Gadde, 2002), is chosen. Differing from deductive approaches to test existing theories in different contexts, and inductive approaches used to generate theories
(grounded theory), the abductive approach is an inferential creative process that creates or develops new theories based on empirical evidence (Timmermans and Tavory, 2012). Some studies simply link the deductive approach with quantitative studies, and the inductive approach with qualitative studies. However, I argue that, except for grounded theory, other qualitative studies are not purely inductive studies. Peirce (1935) values abduction as an integral process of the scientific method: ‘abduction is the process of forming an explanatory hypothesis. It is the only logical operation which introduces any new ideas; for induction does nothing but determine a value, and deduction merely involves the necessary consequences of a pure hypothesis’ (p.171). In addition, Peirce (1958) suggests that abduction provides less certainty than induction, and less security than deduction. Abduction, however, provides the potential for innovations and explanations by developing theory rather than generating or testing it. In this case, the study reconceptualises an existing system by providing critiques through a theoretical lens, and details of empirical materials in this abductive reasoning process. Although the abductive approach cannot simply be understood as a mixture of deductive and inductive approaches, the ‘systematic combining’ (Dubois and Gadde, 2002) in this thesis can be divided into two parts of abductive reasoning: the development of a theoretical framework, and empirical support from the field. By reconceptualising the three-layer system of culture, a new system will be proposed in Chapter Night to understand mobile experiences in an intercultural setting.

From the theoretical approach, the reconceptualisation process is based on adapting an established theory of the cultural system: the three-layer culture system in light of the theoretical lens of liquid modernity and the new mobilities paradigm. The traditional three-layer culture system is based on Marx’s general evolutionary models, and is regarded as an integrated system formed by three subsystems: technological, social, and ideological (White, 1949a; Keesing, 1974). White (1949a), and more recently Paris (2009) in the field of tourism, visualise this three-layer culture system as a three-layer ‘cake’ and emphasise the fundamental role of the technological subsystem that enables
and affords individuals’ performance and the formation of social relations. However, although the three-layer culture system has been introduced to look at backpacker studies (Paris, 2009), no attention has been paid to evaluating its suitability to understanding the mobilities of tourism, and even the hypermobilities of backpackers.

The proposed theoretical framework, in contrast to a layered understanding of cultural systems, proposes a dynamic and fluid network involving various elements that play a significant role to understand the travel experience of Chinese outbound backpackers. The theoretical lenses of liquid modernity (Bauman, 2000) and the new mobilities paradigm (Sheller and Urry, 2006) transform this system from a hierarchical and solid system to a dynamic and moving network, in order to express and explain individuals’ mobile behaviours and experiences in different settings. This contemporary networked understanding is set in recognition of the new mobilities paradigm, liquid modernity, as well as related theories of network sociality (Wittel, 2001), material affordances (Gibson, 1979), and network capital (Putnam, 2000). Thus, the boundaries between layers blur; elements from these three layers reconstruct in this dynamic network setting, and aspects of materiality are highlighted. In this case, a dynamic ‘network’ has replaced the steady three-layer system, and three layers of culture transfer respectively into various formats according to the mobile and intercultural setting. Liquid modernity and the new mobilities paradigm as theoretical constructs, on one hand, provide a theoretical lens through which to critique the structure of the traditional three-layer system of culture. On the other, they offer a networked and dynamic format from the fluidity of the liquid modernity and the network sociality from the new mobilities paradigm to construct the theoretical framework of this thesis before examining and comprehending through the empirical approach.

1.4 The Setting – Chinese Outbound Backpackers in the West
Chinese outbound backpackers in this study act as empirical subjects to aid the development of the reconceptualisation process. Besides being overlooked in the literature, as addressed earlier, Chinese outbound backpackers in the West also provide the ideal case to source empirical material for comprehension and development of a new system, as Chinese backpackers in the West can be seen as mobile carriers of different streams of values. The development of Chinese backpackers follows different patterns to those of Western backpackers. In this section, I am going to introduce Chinese backpackers by briefly discussing their characteristics, and comparing them with Western backpackers in order to contribute to the outlook of the abductive framework.

1.4.1 Characteristics of Chinese backpackers

As one of the few examples of primary research on Chinese backpackers, Zhu (2009) compares domestic Chinese backpackers with Western backpackers travelling in China and there are four contrasting characteristics reported. First, Chinese backpackers are generally older than those coming from Western countries; this demographic difference reflects the relatively weak ability for independent travel among the Chinese younger generation. The second difference Zhu suggests is consumption capability. Chinese backpackers have an abundant travel budget compared with Western backpackers, and the money is spent on accommodation and various types of facilities for outdoor activities. The third difference Zhu focuses on is the maturity and tolerance of backpackers. Generally, Chinese backpackers are less experienced than Western backpackers in terms of the lengths and frequencies of their trips. For transport and accommodation, Chinese backpackers tend to prioritise more heavily on the quality of facilities than Western backpackers do. Finally, regarding risk perceptions, Chinese backpackers show greater risk sensitivity.

Lim (2009) also concludes three ‘Chinese characteristics’ of ‘donkey friends’ (the Chinese term for fellow Chinese backpackers). Firstly, Lim stresses the role of the Internet in constituting the whole Chinese backpacker experience and suggests that, besides physical backpacking enclaves, online
enclaves warrant further research. In keeping with this line of thought, Ong and du Cros (2011) employed virtual ethnography to observe the motivations and interactions of Chinese backpackers through a tourism forum in order to offer insights into Chinese backpacker outbound travel in Macau. The second ‘Chinese characteristic’ reported by Lim (2009) is that Chinese backpackers create a ‘distinct cultural entity’ by introducing a particular linguistic and behavioural code, such as ‘donkey friends’, ‘donkey travel’, ‘masochism’ etc. This phenomenon, with active involvement of Chinese vocabulary and slang, is independent from the standard Western backpacker culture and is a unique communicational code among Chinese backpackers. The last characteristic Lim mentions is Chinese backpackers’ tendency to stress the importance of communities while backpacking, in contrast to the ‘carefree’ attitude reportedly adopted by Western backpackers (Lim, 2009). It is worth noting that the group orientation of Chinese backpackers plays a critical part in this study. This emphasis on strong social bonds among Chinese backpackers leads to an interesting finding regarding social harmony in travel group dynamics, which will be discussed in Chapter Six.

In addition to the studies by Zhu (2009) and Lim (2009), Ong and du Cros (2011) offer three characteristics of Chinese backpackers: they are more communal in nature; are highly active socialisers in travel forums; and lean towards shorter stays. Interestingly, the findings by Ong and du Cros (2011) also suggest that Chinese traditions stemming from Confucian ideology significantly influence Chinese backpackers regarding gender bias. According to this traditional culture, Chinese backpackers fulfil their gender roles during backpacking. Males are supposedly more assertive, adventurous and rugged, while females tend to be more submissive, domestic and gentle. Further research on this aspect is suggested by the authors, in order to make a contribution to the nature of social interaction and gender in the travel ethnographies in young generations of Chinese backpackers. In terms of what leads to the uniqueness of Chinese backpackers’ characteristics, a detailed discussion will be undertaken in Chapter Four.
1.4.2 Development of Western Backpacker Tourism

Originally from the concept of ‘drifter’, presented by Cohen (1972; 1973; 1974), it has been four decades since backpacker studies began. In the early stage of backpacker (or drifter) study, Cohen developed a typology, dividing travellers into institutionalised and non-institutionalised travellers in order to understand different purposes of travellers and their characteristics. As the model of the backpacker (Cohen, 2003), ‘drifter’, together with ‘explorers’, are identified as the non-institutionalised role. According to Cohen, a drifter is labelled with novelty, spontaneity, risk, limited-budget, independence and a flexible itinerary. Historically, travel for the same kind of purpose can be dated back to the Grand Tour among European aristocrats in the 17th Century (Richards and Wilson, 2004). Whilst in China, there has a legacy of travellers who left behind descriptions of precision and detail, such as Shen Kuo in the 11th Century and Xu Xiake in the 17th, but they never undertook international travel such as Marco Polo (Strassberg, 1994). Similar to the Grand Tour, travelling was regarded as a way to gain knowledge, broaden vision and horizons in ancient China. Relatively, in the west, adapting the concept of Grand Tour, young independent travellers in the modern world go out of Europe seeking the exotic experiences of the East (Hottola, 2004), particularly in the peripheral developing regions of Southeast Asia (Spreitzhofer, 1998).

What backpackers expect during the trip is to encounter ‘otherness’ while travelling ‘off the beaten track’ (Richards and Wilson, 2004).

While looking at backpacker research, in addition to the early stage of the ‘drifter’ by Cohen, Vogt (1976) looked at this phenomenon from an anthropological perspective, and identified the term ‘wanderer’, but drew similar conclusions regarding characteristics. The term ‘backpacker’ was officially identified by Pearce (1990). Pearce concludes previous studies of this travel phenomenon and mainly focus on the motivation and identity of backpackers, recognising it as a way to extend their education, whilst the middle classes use backpacking to escape their realities, and ‘occasional work’ to extend their time of travelling. After the introduction of ‘backpacker’, research in this area
kept developing. The term ‘backpacker’ is now well accepted by both the general public and academia.

With ICT increasingly involved in the travel decision-making stage as well as travel experiences, the notion of ‘flashpacker’, as a new term of backpacker, has been highlighted in the backpacker literature (Paris, 2009; Hampton, 2010). Sharing the same social nature and interests of backpacker culture, flashpackers travel with a more expensive backpack or suitcase, have more flexible choices of accommodation, have higher incomes and more affluent travel budgets, and carry at least one ‘flash drive' and a mobile phone, but still stick to visiting ‘off the beaten track' places. This group of people normally takes holidays during a career break, and the average time of the trip is shorter than general backpackers. The ‘virtually and mentally hypermobile' characteristics of flashpackers have been stressed by Paris (2012), which names the term ‘flashpacker' by a combination of backpacker culture and the ‘digital nomad' (Makimoto and Manners, 1997). In this case, two distinguishing factors of flashpackers from backpackers are the frequent use of new technologies as well as higher expenditures, which at some points suit perfectly with the socio-demographical characteristics of Chinese independent travellers. This match between Chinese backpackers and flashpackers has been identified in the literature (Zhu, 2005; Prayag, 2015). However, it seems another story to compare Chinese independent travellers with traditional backpacker characteristics.

1.4.2.1 Backpacker Characteristics

The most recent global backpacker survey was conducted in 2004 – the Global Nomad Survey, which concluded several valuable motivational characteristics of backpackers. This survey categorised three main traveller groups: backpacker, traveller and tourist, from which to compare their motivations, activities and preferences. Four characteristics were concluded in this survey. Firstly, the length of the trip was relatively long for backpackers. Secondly, budget accommodations were preferred for them while travellers and tourists have a wider range of choices. Thirdly,
backpackers had flexible itineraries and did not plan too much, and they preferred cultural experience than sightseeing with intensive schedules. And fourthly, backpackers were information-intensive, they were proficient at using travel guidebooks and the Internet, and they gathered information from a range of channels. A decade later, the fourth characteristic is influenced significantly by innovative technologies in our daily lives, whilst the third characteristic does not sit very well with the Chinese tradition of doing plenty of ‘homework’ before a trip. In this case, taking into accounts of Chinese travel culture and today’s informative environment, this backpacker characteristic faces challenges and is required to be updated when looking at it from a Chinese perspective.

1.4.2.2 Backpacker culture

Other than looking at backpacker characteristics from a quantitative approach, backpacker culture is suggested in an anthropological aspect from a qualitative approach (Anderskov, 2002; Sørensen, 2003; Binder, Richards and Wilson, 2004; Anderson, 2006). Anderskov (2002) suggests backpacker culture has characteristics of ‘high mobility, abrupt social relationships, valuating of the visual, and identification with signifiers, as opposed to being signified’, which leads it in a liquid modern direction. In addition, Sørensen (2003) conducts an ethnographic study of the backpacker culture, allocating backpacker research in the socially construed category. Four elements are highlighted for backpacker culture: road status, ‘us travellers’ community, development and use of technology, and short-term backpacking. He also stresses the dynamic nature of backpacker culture.

Following Larsen, Ogaard and Brun (2011)’s arguments of backpackers’ self-perception and identity, in cultural studies, backpackers are usually defined as a community for their self-representation in order to differentiate themselves from other groups. However, Cohen (2003) argue that backpackers as a group do not suit the concept of ‘community’, since every backpacker is relatively independent, individual, and does not immerse with their fellow backpackers.
Spreitzhofer (1998) adds that, for backpackers, the individual experience is far more important than an acknowledged and standardised culture. Binder, Richards, and Wilson (2004) suggest backpackers can be understood as an ‘imagined community’, which was developed by Anderson (2006) to explain nationalism. This ‘imagined community’, which responding to the ‘us travellers’ community by Sørensen (2003), is more appropriate to describe backpackers. Anderson (2006, p.5) indicates: ‘It is imagined because the member of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them or even hear them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion’. The members of this imagined community share the same image of their communion; even they do not know most of their fellow members. Interestingly, this imagined community starts re-establishing itself in backpacker enclaves, where interactions and stories happened. Specific ideology and narratives of travel experiences construct and contribute to backpacking culture. The characteristic of a ‘secure and friendly family’ is used as a metaphor for backpackers to describe the identity of the imagined community. There is no commitment among the backpacker network; however, backpackers feel secure sharing a room with strangers, and leaving personal property in hostels. Binder, Richards and Wilson (2004) explain this phenomenon as mutually dependent of the ‘cursory’ and ‘intensive’ nature of backpacker culture. The cursory contact allows trust building among fellow backpackers. This community has its own rules, structures and implications, which are more dynamic and unpredictable than others. To sum up, backpacker culture can be seen as a core value that gathers and leads travellers who share the same interests to travel through similar paths, to use the same facilities, and to interact in certain enclaves. They seek ‘otherness’, community experience, self-development, renunciation, and distinction (Binder, 2004).

1.4.2.3 Backpacking as a subculture
‘Off the beaten track’, or searching for authenticity and emphasising intercultural communication, are always aims declared by backpackers in order to distinguish themselves from mainstream tourists. Welk, Richards and Wilson (2004) claim that the anti-tourist attitude is an essential ingredient in constructing backpacker identity. The most important and most strongly defended differentiation is often the one against the community that lives closest to one's own, as in the case of backpackers, the closest community is mainstream tourists. Although from the liquid modern view, divisions are relatively permeable. Consequently, the ideology of backpackers stands in opposition to mainstream tourism (Welk, Richards and Wilson, 2004). It is interesting to find out that the ‘backpacker corner’ and ‘tourist corner’ are neatly separated at the same tourist attraction. There are specialised backpacker bus companies, hostels, ‘alternative' souvenir shops, tour operators and internet cafes often right next to the ones catering to mainstream tourists. However, Welk, Richards and Wilson (2004) argue that it is identifiable that the rejection of these parallel universes is only a one-way attitude, reserved by backpackers. Mainstream tourists do not try to make a distinction between groups and it is noticeable that, even though backpackers determine to draw a line, the mainstreaming of backpackers is still obvious and unstoppable.

1.4.2.4 Mainstreaming of backpackers

Criticisms of defining various traveller groups lead to discussion, especially in between backpackers and mainstreamers. In this respect, Cohen (2003) pose the question: are backpackers the ‘rear-guard' of modern tourism, guarding the backpacker ideology and standing in opposition to the postmodern setting? Or, the other way around, are they the trendsetters of postmodern tourism, creating a mode of travelling to be followed? To answer these questions, issues such as the existence of the gap between backpacker ideology and practice should be addressed. Backpackers are not only restricted in practising those ideologies set by researchers, but also visiting ‘beaten track’ sites and dining in decent restaurants from time to time. As from the perspective of liquid modernity,
human beings should not be limited to a certain category. It is remarkable that a number of ideas from modern tourism such as experiencing life 'off the beaten track' and seeking authentic sites construct the key backpacker ideologies; however, the practice of backpackers are marked by many traits of liquid modern tourism. Therefore, the boundary between mainstream culture and subculture has become blurry. At the same time, understanding tourism has become more complex and diverse.

The unique backpacker infrastructure and equipment, such as backpacker hostels and backpacker forums, create opportunities and platforms for meetings, sharing, network building and constructing backpacker enclaves. On one hand, these infrastructures create the distinct backpacker culture; on the other hand, the convenience of these infrastructures also attracts the attention of mainstream tourists. In addition, the emerging middle class, increasing household income, also the social supports by Overland Experience (Bell, 2002) and the Gap Year (O'Reilly, 2006) all contribute massively to the mainstreaming of backpacker culture. Based on these, Larsen, Ogaard and Brun (2011) argue that for some psychological variables, there are not huge differences between backpackers and mainstreamers in terms of motivations, risks and worries. However, backpackers' subjective perceptions play a significant role in convincing themselves that they are distinctive to ordinary tourists, in order to keep up a feeling of uniqueness.

1.4.3 Development of Chinese Backpacker Tourism

Chinese backpacker tourism develops on another path, which is different from the traditional development pattern of backpackers in the West, from ‘drifter’ and ‘wanderer’ to some emerging terms that have been used to explain diversity among Western backpackers, such as ‘flashpacker’ (Paris, 2011) and ‘lifestyle traveller’ (Cohen, 2011). Zhu (2005; 2007; 2009) argues that the origin
of Chinese backpackers follows a distinct pattern that differs from the traditional Western model: among four tourist typologies defined by Cohen (1974), Western backpackers derive from the ‘drifter’ and Chinese backpackers instead from the ‘explorer’ (Zhu, 2009). Not participating in the ‘evolution’ of backpackers seen in the Western world, Chinese backpackers instead stem from adventure travellers, albeit still influenced by the Western backpacker culture over the past two decades. Thus studies on the behaviour and perception of Chinese backpackers will be a different and culturally nuanced ‘story’ from general backpacker tourism research. More attention should be paid in order to suit the distinctive situation in China, and this includes exploring the consumption behaviour of Chinese backpackers. For example, similar to Israeli backpackers, Chinese backpackers still face the massive issue of visa restrictions when travelling around the world. But different from Israelis, who are still backpacking a lot, visa issues lead directly to negative influences on backpacking experiences, and result in a tremendous challenge to the demand for freedom and the mobile nature of backpackers.

Contemporary Chinese backpacker studies mainly focus on domestic and inbound backpackers, and most of them are market-orientated. However, studies beyond a business orientation in relation to Chinese backpackers require deeper insight. With the emergence of the critical and postmodern turn in tourism, as well as the development of technology and the phenomenon of globalisation, backpacker research has entered into a new stage. The mainstreaming of backpacking travel has been discussed (O’Reilly, 2006; Larsen, Ogaard and Brun, 2011) and various methods and perceptions of backpacking have been developed. Backpacker research moves from Australia and Southeast Asia to a variety of destinations. At this period, emerging issues such as feminism (Hottola, 1999; Myers, 2008), performance (Chiseri-Strater, 1996; Doorne and Ateljevic, 2005; O’Regan, 2010; 2016) and virtualisation (Bryman, 1989; Paris, 2009) are widely discussed. Chinese outbound backpackers, as an emerging market labelled with unique characteristics, require further research to provide deeper insight and to enrich the contemporary backpacker literature.
1.4.4 Why Chinese Backpackers in this study?

While the significance of conducting Chinese outbound backpacker research has been addressed, in order to link it to the reconceptualisation of the three-layer system of culture, the question ‘why choosing Chinese backpackers’ experiences as the empirical approach’ requires answering. Firstly, as mentioned earlier, academic research on Chinese outbound backpackers not only makes contributions to the Chinese backpacker literature, but also fits an emerging trend. Secondly, Chinese outbound backpackers will provide the ideal case to reconceptualise the three-layer system from the empirical approach, as they can be seen as mobile carriers and containers of value, which allows Western and Eastern cultures to meet, react, combine, reject or split during a backpacking trip. I conclude that Chinese backpacker culture is influenced by three main culture streams: the traditional landscape-appreciation travel culture (Frodsham, 1967); contemporary travel culture with characteristics such as being well-prepared before the trip and large engagements with ICT (Information Communication Technology); as well as Western backpacker culture. When travelling in an environment perceived as exotic, more encounters between different cultures and values will be taken in the hypermobile trip as intensive social interactions and sources of potential cultural confusion. In this case, various Western cultures challenge backpackers’ perceptions, cognition, and values, which determine their overall experiences. In addition, because of Chinese outbound backpackers’ distinctive characteristics of social media utility, they will be an appropriate research group for developing this conceptual framework in terms of investigating non-human actors, and the complex sociality maintained by them. Thirdly, in liquid modernity, Bauman (2000) uses backpackers as a metaphor of the ‘liquid modern’ man that flows through his/her life as a ‘nomad’ to emphasise the fluidity and the focus of individuals through this theoretical lens: backpackers are therefore illustrative of high mobility. Fourthly, while studying Chinese backpackers through a cultural lens, being a Chinese researcher can minimise troubles that might occur in terms of language gaps and issues of misunderstanding caused by language skills or cultural differences.
Besides, I have some backpacking experience, which makes me one member of the research group ‘Chinese outbound backpackers’, which facilitates data collection. As this section has given the background of Chinese backpackers, and has explained why I chose Chinese backpackers as the empirical context from which to reconceptualise the three-layer system, this chapter now turns to the aim and objectives of this study.

1.5 Aim and Objectives

The principal aim of this PhD research is to reconceptualise the three-layer system of culture in light of mobilities by exploring Chinese backpackers’ travel experiences in Europe. In order to achieve this aim, three objectives are identified as follows:

(1) to apply the three-layer system and mobile ethnography to investigate Chinese backpackers’ travel experience in Europe.

(2) to develop a conceptual framework to revisit the three-layer system of culture through the theoretical lens of liquid modernity and the new mobilities paradigm.

(3) to reconceptualise the three-layer system of culture through an abductive approach.

Objectives 1 and 2 build towards achieving the research aim from the empirical approach and the theoretical approach respectively. Objective 3 systematically combines the two approaches to reconceptualise the original system and proposes a ‘Fluid Networked System of Culture’ as a new system of culture to reflect mobilities.

1.6 Underlying Paradigm and Research Method
Various categories of cultural theories, social interactions, and functions of the dynamic network must be taken into account for conceptual research developed by multiple theories and paradigms, as well as generated through investigating travel experiences. In order to undertake an abductive approach to reconceptualise the original system and to propose a new system in the context of mobilities, an interpretivism paradigm looking at subjective meanings and social phenomena is more suitable for this particular research. In line with the interpretivist paradigm, I adopt the qualitative approach for this study to seek a stronger understanding of Chinese backpacker’s travel experience in terms dealing with cultural, social and material issues. Mobile ethnography will be introduced in the fieldwork in order to gain deeper insights into culture, travel experiences and the network of Chinese backpackers, as well as how these ideas merge and function throughout the trip. In addition, instead of testing a given framework, this ethnographic study provides a thick description (Geertz, 1994) that assists to co-construct the reconceptualised ‘Fluid Networked System of Culture’ from the empirical approach. Participant observation, in-depth interviews and reflexive reflection (auto-ethnography) will be combined as research techniques to collect data during corporeal travel (multi-sited ethnography) as well as activities online (netnography). More discussion about methodology and research methods will be undertaken in Chapter Five.

1.7 Structure

Figure 1-1 below shows an overview of the structure of this study. The thesis is constructed of ten chapters. After this, the introduction chapter, Chapters Two to Four contain the literature reviews, in which Chapters Two and Three construct the theoretical framework, and Chapter Four discusses the setting – Chinese outbound backpackers. As part of the theoretical framework, Chapter Two introduces the three-layer system of culture by applying its well-categorised features to review relevant cultural theories in cultural values, social contacts, and material affordances. Chapter Three builds up the theoretical constructs by reviewing liquid modernity and the new mobilities paradigm.
Theoretical critiques of the traditional three-layer system of culture will be undertaken in this chapter through the combined theoretical lens, on the other hand, this theoretical construct also suggests a networked and fluid format. More relevant literature of ICT, network sociality, and moorings will be critically reviewed in order to support the formation of the theoretical framework.

Chapter Four adopts two approaches to review Chinese backpackers’ characteristics and behaviour: from general backpacker studies to Chinese outbound tourism literature, in order comprehensively to understand this emerging group and its different streams of impacts.

Chapter Five introduces methodology and, specifically, the methods adopted in this study. This chapter begins by discussing the methodological framework. In terms of method, mobile ethnography will be adopted in this research. Mobile ethnography, in this case, includes netnography, multi-sited ethnography and auto-ethnography: these three ethnographies play different roles in the empirical research. In this chapter, I will discuss how data is being collected and thematically analysed into Nine themes, which are allocated into three main clusters, and discussed in turn, in the following chapters. In addition, this chapter outlines procedures, quality issues and ethics relevant to data collection.

Chapters Six to Eight, as the empirical findings chapters, discuss Chinese backpackers’ travel experiences from three angles. Chapter Six kicks off the empirical findings by discussing different types of social relations that were generated during the trips. The findings of group dynamics among Chinese backpackers will be discussed in this chapter to show the embedded influence of national cultural values in mobile behaviours. In Chapter Seven, discussions will focus on the various streams of values that negotiate and construct Chinese backpackers’ perceptions, identities, and understandings of backpacking. The paradox of being Chinese backpackers, which are balanced, conflicted and negotiated between Western backpacker culture and Chinese values will be discussed in detail. In Chapter Eight, I will then focus on the multiple affording roles of
materialities and technologies that facilitate network sociality, the practice of backpacker identity, and afford backpacker performances.

Chapter Nine, the final findings chapter, is a conceptual chapter that aims to systematically combine the theoretical and empirical approaches to achieve the reconceptualisation. This chapter starts by critiquing the three-layer system of culture through the theoretical lens, and provides insights into the empirical material to comprehend the construction of the new system. By this abductive approach, a ‘Fluid Networked System of Culture’ is proposed as the reconceptualised system to understand experiences in mobile and intercultural settings. Chapter Ten, the concluding chapter, reviews how the aim and objectives have been achieved and explores the implications of this study in its applications to broader areas of academic literature.
Figure 1-1 Structure of the thesis
CHAPTER 2 THREE-LAYER SYSTEM OF CULTURE

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will introduce the three-layer system of culture as a guideline to investigate Chinese backpackers’ experiences in this thesis. Difficulties of conceptualising culture have been addressed by Tylor (1871) as a ‘complex whole’. In this chapter, I am going to discuss why this three-layer system of culture is chosen as a framework to organise and review relevant theories of culture that construct backpackers’ experiences from various aspects. Narrowing into these three subsystems, several pertinent issues are addressed and discussed, such as Chinese values of harmony, intercultural communication, and material affordances to backpackers.

2.2 Complexity of the Tourist Experience

To understand Chinese backpackers’ experiences, the complex and multi-dimensional nature of the tourist experience (Ryan, 2010) needs to be addressed. Uriely (2005) emphasises the subjective nature of the tourist experience that tourists play a crucial role in the practice, meaning making, and interpretation. In addition, various stakeholders such as tourists, activities, tour operators, and social settings participate in the co-creation process that shows the multi-faceted concept of the tourist experience (Ooi, 2003). To understand the specific context of Chinese backpackers in the West, issues such as intercultural contacts, culture confusion and adaptation, unfamiliar food, facilities and materials, perceptions and experience of different cultures, all to various degrees influence their travel experiences. In order to tackle the complexity of this international travel experience, a framework comprising various theories is required.

The significance of culture has been highlighted by Ryan (2010) in his review of tourist experiences. He emphasises the differences that exist in cultures, languages, and interpretations to some extent.
can explain motives and perceptions of travel. In the intercultural context, encounters of different cultures create differences and familiarities in travel, and they are essential factors that influence the travel experience. Quan and Wang (2004) describe tourist experiences as an ‘organic whole’ consisting of peak (art, culture, heritage) and supporting (facilities, transports, accommodations) experiences, which complement one another. In addition, Graefe and Vaske (1987) emphasise the interactions between tourists and the tourism system, active participation, and emotional involvement significantly influence the overall tourist experience. In this case, for experience which engages with multiple players and is culturally rooted, a culture system that can categorise relevant theories of the multi-dimensional experiences in various levels is required to understand Chinese backpackers’ experience.

2.3 Definitions of Culture

Before introducing a cultural system to explore the travel experiences of Chinese backpackers, it is significant to address complex definitions of culture. During the cultural evolution in the 19th and 20th centuries, the distinction of high and low cultures was widely discussed. High culture is related to activities such as art, classical music, and haute cuisine. On the other hand, low culture stems from an interest in folklore, identifying a culture among ‘non-elites’. Applying ideas of high culture versus low culture, Tylor (1871, p.1) proposes ‘Culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, law, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society’. This definition emphasises many variables under the ‘complex whole’, which has been regarded as a classic definition of culture. Since then, culture has been widely studied in an anthropological context. In Kroeber and Kluckhohn’s (1952, p.181) monograph, they list 160 definitions of culture, and add their own: ‘Culture consists in patterned ways of thinking, feeling and reacting, acquired and transmitted mainly by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiments in artefacts, the essential core of
culture consists of traditional ideas and especially their attached value. The ‘complex whole’ nature of culture was addressed by Tylor (1871); it is noticeable that culture covers a wide range of disciplines and areas. This ‘complex whole’ definition of culture is aligned with the ‘organic whole’ that Quan and Wang (2004) used to describe tourist experiences.

### 2.3.1 Systems of cultural theories

In order to tackle the ‘complex whole’ of culture, many systems have been developed, such as Keesing’s (1974) three systems of theories (adaptive, ideational and sociocultural systems), Parson’s (1951) four systems of culture (behavioural, personality, social and cultural systems) to explain human actions, and White’s (1949a) three-layer system (technological, social and ideological subsystems). It is interesting to find out that White’s (1949a) three subsystems and Keesing’s (1974) three systems of theories are one to one correspondent: technological subsystem to adaptive system, social subsystem to sociocultural system, and ideological subsystem to ideational system. White’s (1949a) layer-cake system of culture provides a multifaceted category that offer comprehensive understanding of culture, in this case, backpacker experiences, from comprehensive and multidimensional aspects. The ideological layer helps to investigate Chinese backpackers’ perceptions and values in the intercultural context; theories in the social layer assist to explore interpersonal interactions, which functions a significant role in the experience creation; and the technological layer, which creates supporting experiences (Quan and Wang, 2004), plays the fundamental role in this cultural system (White, 1949b). In this review, the three-layer system provides the basic structure to organise culture-related theories in travel experiences (for example, intercultural communication and cultural anthropology) in order to construct the theories of culture for this study.

Based on the ‘complex whole’ of culture and the ‘organic whole’ of the tourist experience, the working definition of culture adopted by this study aims to understand backpacker experiences
from the three-layer culture system, which categorises and organises relevant culture theories. Culture, in this study, focusing on human beings themselves, looks at internal, mutual and external relationships and functions in order to refer to ideological, social and technological subsystems of culture.

2.4 The Three-layer Cake Model of Culture

In order to tackle the multidimensional backpacker experience, White (1949a)'s three-layer system of culture is deployed. These ideological, social and technological layers provide a comprehensive structure that allocate various theories of culture to fully understand Chinese outbound backpackers’ experiences. As a classic theory, this three-layer system of culture is widely adopted in various contexts; however, in tourism research it has only been used in understanding backpacker culture (Anderskov, 2002; Paris, 2009). To adopt this theory in the study of backpacker experiences not only expands the application of the three-layer system of culture in the tourism context, but the characteristics of mobilities and cultural exchange of international travel could also contribute to a renewed understanding of this theory.

Based on Marx’s general evolutionary models and Kroeber (1917)’s approach of understanding culture and socio-cultural system, American Anthropologist Leslie White suggested culture can be understood as sui generis - a system of its own kind:

'We may view a cultural system as a series of three horizontal strata: the technological layer on the bottom, the philosophical on the top, the sociological stratum in between... The technological system is basic and primary. Social systems are functions of technologies; and philosophies express technological forces and reflect social systems. The technological factor is therefore the determinant of a cultural system as a whole. It determines the form of social systems, and technology and society together determine the content and orientation of philosophy' (White, 1949b, p. 366).
White termed this three-layer system of culture as the ‘layer-cake model of culture’ (Figure 2-1), which has been metaphorically described as a ‘three-layer cake’ by Paris (2009) in his review of backpacker culture, and as a ‘pyramid’ by Freitas (1979) to understand civilisation. In this three-layer system of culture, the layer of technology acts as the foundation, primarily providing the infrastructure, materials, equipment and technologies to communicate and negotiate. Secondary to the technological layer is social and political organisation, which is constructed by human systems such as social, recreational and ethical systems. This layer focuses on presenting interactions of human beings through their behaviours. The top layer is the ideological subsystem, which represents the perceptions, values, and organisation of beliefs about human experiences. White (1949a) highlights the interrelationship between these three layers, but only the technological system one-way determines the social system, which will be critically discussed later. As a cultural materialist, White declared the predominating role of the technological layer by suggesting the technological system engenders the social system, as well as emphasising technology over ideology as it acts as the impetus of cultural change. In the general view of the technological system, all these three subsystems influence each other, thus evolving the entire system of culture. Keesing (1974, p.4) sums up: ‘cultural change is primarily a process of adaptation, technology… and elements of social organisation directly tied to production are the most adaptively central realms.
of culture’. Culture, in this context, explores the possibility for this study not only in the human origin of culture, but also connects firmly with technology and sociality.

Harris further developed cultural materialism by dividing culture into several levels (Harris, 2001). Aligning with White, Keesing (1974) also categorises cultural theories into similar three groups. According to White, these three layers can be applied to understand many cultural systems. White’s Science of Culture theory has been adopted widely to understand culture at various levels: social organisations (Katz and Kahn, 1978), leadership (Hackman and Johnson, 2013), behavioural changes (Edwards and Schiffer, 1995), social changes (Harper and Leicht, 2015), and human evolution (Richerson and Boyd, 2008). The three-layer system is also used as a departing point to further develop cultural materialism, and evolving hierarchical systems (Salthe, 1985). In the discourse of backpacker culture, Anderskov (2002) concludes backpacker culture as shared values of freedom, independence, tolerance, limited budget and interaction with locals by individual backpackers. In addition, Anderskov (2002) also emphasises that the backpacker culture is hierarchically structured from ideological to technological subsystem, but these three layers are also interdependent in the formation of the backpacker culture. This three-layer system of culture functions as the structure to organise theories of understanding backpackers’ experience. I am going to review relevant theories to Chinese backpackers’ experience categorised by this three-layer system in the rest of this chapter.

2.4.1 Ideological subsystem

On the top of the three-layer system, the ideological subsystem (Keesing, 1974) includes a series of ‘purely symbolic forms’, which include systems of norms, values and beliefs, and present as forms of philosophies, mythologies, theologies and daily common knowledge (Leavitt, 1986; White, 1949a). Ideological theories of culture, also defined as cultural anthropology, in contrast to the technological subsystem, understand culture from approaches of cognitive, symbolism, structure,
and present the social science from humanities facets, concentrates on areas of cultural variation between human beings, and look at human customs or cultural behaviour comparatively (Keesing, 1958). As a study investigate individuals’ experiences, relevant theories of ideological subsystem provide insights of perceptions, identities and emotions. In this thesis, the ideological subsystem focuses on Chinese backpackers’ fluid and embedded values, negotiating the perceptions and identities of East and West, as well as interpretations and practices of backpacker culture. Compared with the other two subsystems, the ideological subsystem is highly diverse, subjective and open to interpretation. In terms of its relationship with the two other systems of cultural theory, Bock (1969) highlights principles and social roles of the social subsystem as agents that ensuring broad and systematic coverage of ideological subsystem, whilst technological and social subsystems are more connected with the external and material world.

Peoples and Bailey (2011) conclude five key objectives of conducting research in the context of cultural anthropology. Firstly, deeply investigate and research particular communities’ lifestyles. Secondly, determine principles of human culture by comparing diverse cultures. Thirdly, understand related dimension of human life. Fourthly, study the causes and consequences of cultural changes. Fifthly and finally, promote the existence and importance of cultural differences. Followed by these five key objectives of conducting cultural anthropology, this review focuses on discussions about the differences between West and East, the dynamics of cultural flow as well as utilising mobile ethnography to investigate Chinese outbound backpackers in this hypermobile community. These five dimensions of cultural anthropology, stemming from human behaviour and lifestyle research, highlight cultural changes and differences, which to different extents are relevant to the research of Chinese backpackers’ experiences and behaviours. As key cultural theories related to human behaviour and human-related culture, this review then introduces behaviourism, functionalism, and cognitive anthropology, which work firmly with cultural anthropology in order to understand how it functions in relation to subjective and symbolic culture.
as well as the emphasis of human beings in the research. In this section, Chinese values key to the ideology in this study will be unpacked.

2.4.1.1 Behaviourism and Functionalism

As ideologies are relatively abstract and symbolic, it is crucial to address theories that link human behaviours and these values that make these ideologies more accessible. Understanding behaviourism and functionalism help to explore the complex process of negotiating ideologies in Chinese backpackers later in this thesis. Both behaviourism and functionalism understand culture from the perspective of human behaviour and clearly demonstrate that culture and behaviour are inseparable. Reisinger and Turner (2012) suggest that influences of culture on behaviours are both external and internal, which not only indicate how humans behave, but also help to determine the conditions and circumstances in which various behaviours occur. A deep and comprehensive understanding of culture will help with interpreting and predicting behaviour.

In this study, backpacker culture can be explained by behaviourism. Behavioural anthropologists understand culture as determining human behaviour (Barnlund and Araki, 1985; Potter, 1989). Rather than inheriting, they argue that cultural behaviour is about learning. Mead and Macgregor (1951) indicate that culture is a collection of beliefs, ideas, habits and traditions, shared by a group of people and learned by those who entered the society. This definition to some extent explains the learning characteristic (Pearce and Foster, 2007) and ‘imagined communities’ (Binder, Richards and Wilson, 2004) of backpackers, as well as sheds lights on the discussion of cross-culture behaviour, especially cultural confusion for those travellers who cross different cultural environments.

On the other hand, functionalism stems from the idea of sociology, and emphasises the role of culture as a set of rules for ‘fitting human beings together into a social system’ (Radcliffe-Brown
and Eggan, 1957). Functionalism helps to explain the embedded role of Chinese values in Chinese backpackers’ trips. Introducing culture in the context of functionalism helps researchers and travellers themselves to understand how and why we behave. It also provides directions and leads behaviour (Schneider, 1972). In this sense, culture is a socially acquired rule of human beings’ perceptions and actions, which provides explanations of reasons and functions of human behaviour.

Based on the understanding of human origins of culture, both behaviourism and functionalism indicate that culture is the foundation of interaction, and that the interaction patterns depend on cultural variations. For this research in particular, understanding culture from behaviourism and functionalism stresses the significance of culture in this study: the behavioural understanding of culture suggests the importance of the ‘learning’ part of culture interaction and communication in between humans, whilst functionalism addresses culture in a higher position for indications and explanations of how we behave. Behaviourism and functionalism provide the theoretical foundations for further review of Chinese values, cross-cultural behaviour and culture confusion.

2.4.1.2 Cognitive anthropology

Cognitive anthropology, from a fluid view, explains that Chinese backpackers perceive and experience differently from one another. This cognitive perspective challenges understanding behaviour purely from either behaviourism or functionalism. Reisinger and Turner (2012) argue that behaviour is relatively dynamic and differing from one to the other. In addition, other than stereotyping people or things into certain types, current trends of thinking from a liquid modern view suggest the complexity and diversity of the world, which also challenges the adequacy of cultural definition of behaviourism and functionalism. From the view of cognitive anthropologists, culture is a system of collective programming shaped by human brains, which distinguishes one group from another (Keesing, 1974; Hofstede, 1989). One step further, Keesing (1974) criticises
the argument of Schneider (1972) for understanding culture as rule to indicate how humans behave. Instead, he suggests rules are created by a culturally patterned minds. In this case, to understand Chinese backpackers from the aspect of ideology, it is essential to be aware of the negotiation process of multiple streams of values onto individuals’ perceptions.

2.4.1.3 Chinese values and harmony

The influence of cultural values on individuals has been investigated widely in various cultural contexts (Hofstede, 1980; Adler and Graham, 1989; Armstrong, Mok, Go, and Chan, 1997; Pizam et al., 1997). In terms of Chinese culture, several studies explore the impact of Chinese values, particularly Confucian ideology, on consumer behaviour (Lowe and Corkindale, 1998; Qian, Abdur Razzaque and Ah Keng, 2007; Hoare and Butcher, 2008; Pan, 2009; Du, Fan and Feng, 2010; Zhang, 2012), satisfaction, and loyalty (Hoare and Butcher, 2008). In tourism, the relationships between these Chinese cultural values and tourist experiences, motivations (Lyiri, 2006; Fu, Cai and Lehto, 2016), preferences and expectations (Mok and DeFranco, 2000; Tse and Hobson, 2008) has been emphasised. In order to understand Chinese tourists, some key Chinese cultural values have been identified in relation to Chinese tourist’s behaviours (Yau, Chan and Lau, 1999; Gilbert and Tsao, 2000; Gong, 2003; Hoare and Butcher, 2008). Taking account of the context of tourism, Mok and DeFranco (1999) identify Chinese cultural values of respect for authority, interdependence, face, group orientation, harmony, and external attribution as influential factors that guide Chinese tourists’ behaviour. Beyond traditional values, Pearce, Wu and Osmond (2013) suggest a Triple-C (Confucianism, Communism and Capitalism) gaze to provide a conceptual lens to understand the influence of contemporary Chinese society’s influence on Chinese outbound travellers.

Fan (2000) suggest that, among various schools of philosophies that shape current Chinese values, Confucianism is the most influential and widespread. It provides a guideline of political, economic
and social constructions, as well as shaping individual values and interpersonal relations (Yeung and Tung, 1996; Fan, 2000). Confucianism is a set of values that guide Chinese people to position themselves towards interpersonal relations, society, and nature. Its vision of society emphasises the sense of engagement follows a particular social order by stressing the importance of hierarchy, relationships, and social harmony (Markus and Kitayama, 1994). In tourism, besides respect for literacy and history, Confucian values of harmony, respect for authority and guanxi predominant social relations in travel experiences (Pearce, Wu and Osmond, 2013).

The current system of Chinese values has been changing with the communist government, globalisation and Western influence. Consumerism (Gerth, 2010), individualism (Lu, 1998; Wang and Lin, 2009; Yan, 2010), and communism (Feng, 2009; Pearce, Wu and Osmond, 2013) have shaped modern Chinese values. However, in the research reconfiguring Chinese cultural values in tourism, Hsu and Huang (2016) argue that, acknowledging the transformation in the Chinese system of values in terms of social relationships, Chinese society still follows the traditional domain.

The significant and fundamental role of the Confucian concept of harmony has been widely discussed in the literature (Qian, 2001; Tjosvold, Hui and Sun, 2004; Tang, 2006; Kewk and Lee, 2010, 2015). Highlighted in 2008 Beijing Olympics opening ceremony, the notion of harmony presents the consistency of Chinese cultures. It has been interpreted in different ways. Crang (2015) interprets harmony as ‘balance’: it helps dealing with potential conflicts and tension, finding and achieving balance in the society, between people and the external environment (Xu et al., 2014). Ye (2006) argues that, based on the understanding of harmony, the society is structured in a particular order by every single element playing their own roles. Additionally, a state of harmony is achieved when different things are interrelated but also carry out their own functions. In tourism, harmony has been adopted to explain how to reduce social conflict and direct group interactions.
(Yang, Zhang and Ryan, 2016), Chinese tourists’ attitudes towards animals (Cui and Geoffrey, 2012) and their relationships with the natural landscape (Crang, 2015).

In terms of interpersonal relations, several conceptual frameworks (see Mok and Defranco, 2000; Kewk and Lee, 2010) have been proposed to link various cultural values with the notion of harmony in order to investigate Chinese tourists’ behaviour. Kewk and Lee (2010) suggest harmony as the core conceptual link with traditional cultural values of respect for authority, conformity, and guanxi in tourists’ behaviour. Correspondingly, Mok and Defranco (2000) also argue the notion of harmony as the central theme in terms of tourist behaviour. Six Chinese cultural values (harmony, face, group orientation, interdependence, respect for authority, and external attribution) are identified in their study to look at the group travel experiences of Chinese corporate leisure travellers in Australia. This study suggests that these cultural values are embedded in the Confucian value of Li (propriety). As one of five moral principles in Confucianism, Li looks at interpersonal relationships and helps to understand Chinese corporate tourists’ group dynamics. It is suggested in this study that travelling with their colleagues, subordinates and bosses, Chinese travellers still maintain their societal norms and value systems present at work, even during travel.

i Genuine and surface harmony

Huang (1999; 2006) suggests two major types of harmony in interpersonal relationships: ‘genuine harmony’ refers to sincere and holistic relationships, whilst ‘surface harmony’ is widely used to cover discord and disagreements by appearing conflict-free on the surface. Correspondingly, Leung and Lu (2002) suggest a dualistic model of harmony by applying a value-instrumental perspective to classify harmony as ‘harmony enhancement’ and ‘disintegration avoidance’, which are similar to Huang’s typology. Huang (1999) further argues that genuine harmony is rather difficult to achieve, and Chang (2001) indicates that most Chinese interpersonal interactions, particular with acquaintances, are social performances at a relatively surface level. Compared with direct
confrontations, Chinese people still prefer surface harmony as a tool to sustain the relationship, although it is not optimal (Leung and Wu, 1998). For people who do not know each other travelling in groups, given the rather short period of time, surface harmony is more likely to exist than a genuine one. To further conceptualise the notion of group harmony in tourism, I am going to further explore group orientation, respect for authority, conformity, guanxi and keqi: these five Chinese cultural attributes that closely link with or sufficiently affect the functions of group harmony.

**ii Group orientation**

Harmony in the group dynamic cannot exist without the Chinese collectivistic and hierarchical nature of interpersonal relationships. From a collectivistic society (Hofstede and Bond, 1984; Hsu, 1985; Everett, Stening and McDonald, 1987), individuals find their own values when group goals are achieved (Lu, 1998; Jiang, Chen, and Liu, 2010). Roles and obligations are assigned in each relationship and form the political and social structure (Yao, 2000; Tamney and Chiang, 2002). On the other hand, social boundaries are defined by the hierarchical structure of the society. Fu, Lehto and Cai (2015) argue that self-interests are protected ‘in-group’. Therefore, to maintain collective harmony is vital to ensure the functioning of group dynamics. In the tourism context, literature suggests that Chinese tourists practice this group-orientation in travel and that they prefer travel in groups rather than individually (Mok and Armstrong, 1995; Mok, Armstrong, and Go, 1995; Wang and Sheldon, 1995; Ap and Mok, 1996). Besides reasons of convenience, economic reasons and risk avoidance (Kim, Guo and Agrusa, 2005; Fu, Lehto and Cai, 2012), the value of group plays a crucial role in the decision making. Given the nature of group orientation of Chinese tourists’ travel patterns, it is significant to value the role of group harmony plays to maintain and balance the travel group.

**iii Respect for authority**
Social hierarchy, as a result of the large power divide in China (Hofstede, 1980), leads to a strong respect for authority in Chinese daily practices (Yau, 1988). As discussed earlier that Confucianism allocates roles in society, five of Confucius’s fundamental relations were established to link various roles, and this is believed to be an early root of respect for authority: between sovereign and minister, father and son, husband and wife, old and young, and friends. Confucianism values proper relationships among these five, which determines the way of interpersonal relations and the functions of society, such as social hierarchy and respect for the authority of the interpersonal relations and the society (Bond, 1986; Moise, 1995). Respect for authority as a cultural value has been largely involved with other cultural values in the discussion of harmony in tourism, particularly as a key concept in group interactions (Mok and DeFranco 1999; Kwek and Lee, 2010; 2015). In the context of Chinese backpackers, respect for the authority reflects the crucial role of ‘head donkey’ (leader of Chinese backpacker group) in the Chinese backpacker community (Lim, 2009).

**iv Conformity**

The Confucian construct of Zhong-Yong (the middle way) suggests harmony can be achieved by following the middle way and discouraging extremes (Li, 2004). In interpersonal relations, the concept of Zhong-yong can be understood as a cultural value of conformity, which suggests the suppression of individual goals and interests, as well as forbearance in order to pursue collectivistic harmony (Leung, Koch and Lu, 2002; Baron and Kerr, 2003). Guided by the principle of harmony, compromise, as well as conflict and confrontation avoidance are common practices in Chinese societies and organisations (Bond and Hwang, 1986; Moise, 1995). Chinese tourists prefer to travel in groups, to get along with group members, and to respect others’ preferences and suggestions: the keys of conformity to achieve group harmony. Hsu and Huang (2016) suggest that to build a sense of harmony, Chinese tourists consider themselves as team players, and the value of conformity to some extent influences their preferences and group decisions in tourist activities. In
addition, to practice the value of conformity, although group harmony is maintained, suppressed individual motivations could potentially lead to a negative travel experience.

v Guanxi

Guanxi as a Chinese cultural value has been broadly discussed in the investigations into Chinese interpersonal relationships in business, society, and organisations (Buttery and Wong, 1999; Wong and Chan, 1999; Wong and Tam, 2000). Peng (1997) and Chen and Chen (2004) provide comprehensive understandings of ‘guanxi’, which beyond its literal meaning of ‘relationship’, is defined as mutual obligations, commitments, and understandings between two parties. In tourism, Kwek and Lee (2010) argue that guanxi provides a guideline and influential drive for Chinese tourists in the practice of group dynamics. Although the study of guanxi by Kewk and Lee (2010) is based on the relationship extension of corporative travellers from the workplace, studies also suggest that other types of tourists also willing to build up strong links with their travel companions (Fu, Lehto and Cai, 2012; Pearce, Wu and Osmond, 2013). As key cultural factors that determine Chinese interpersonal behaviours, to build up and maintain a good ‘guanxi’ helps to achieve group dynamics and it is beneficial to the function of group dynamics.

vi Keqi

Compared with other cultural values, the value of keqi tends to provide a guideline for practice in interpersonal relationships. ‘Keqi’, refer to ‘well-manner politeness’ (Yao, 1983), which is a personal attribute as well as an embodiment of harmony in Chinese communication to keep a courteous distance from an acquaintance. Based on this courteous distance, keqi shows an impetus to develop the relationship to the next level (Feng, 2004). Chen (2014) argues that the keqi way of communication is the way to sustain the harmonious relationship. Neither to strangers nor to those with close relationships, keqi specifically applies to acquaintances, who require prudent and
cautious communicating skills. For group travel, the practice of keqi is a crucial practice to build up relationships to achieve guanxi and a harmonious communication climate (Xiao, 2004).

2.4.1.4 negotiating ideologies

In terms of the ideologies of this study, backpacker culture and Chinese values are two main streams that construct and co-create Chinese backpackers’ identities and travel experience. Based on previous literature reviews, I link backpacker culture with behaviourism, as backpacker culture can be understood as a collection of beliefs, ideas, habits and traditions that are practiced by backpackers, and learnt by those who want to be backpackers. On the other hand, I link Chinese values with functionalism, as most behaviours of Chinese backpackers can be traced from and explained by the deeply rooted Chinese values, and these values highly determine and influence Chinese backpackers’ behaviour. Negotiating these two, cognitive anthropology reflects how individual Chinese backpackers perceive these two streams of culture. In other words, how these two systems of values negotiate, balance, and function in the identity and experience constructions of Chinese backpackers. In Chapter Seven, I will use an empirical approach to explore how Chinese backpackers practice negotiating ideologies.

2.4.2 Social subsystem

Social interaction is the key motivation of Chinese backpackers (Chen, Bao and Huang, 2014). In this context, the social subsystem focuses on behavioural patterns (Leavitt, 1986) among Chinese backpackers, as well as interactions between host and guest. White (1949a) determined two types of social groupings in the social system: the first social grouping is related to serving the needs of internal human organism, which can be understood as the need for interaction among Chinese backpackers; on the other hand, the other social organisation is concerned with human beings’ adjustment to the external world. White (1949b) highlighted the significant of the later social grouping and emphases the technological subsystem as a dependent factor that enables various
levels of social interaction. The relationship between technological subsystem and social subsystem has been approved by the significant cultural change from tribal society to civil society, which determined and influenced by the technological transition. In his age, White (1949b) defined key processes of adjustment to the external world are food getting, defences from enemies and protection from the enemies. After seven decades, social structure as a dependent factor has been essential impacted by significant changes of the technology and massively influenced by globalisation and mobility. Therefore, elements from the outside world for adjustment have been changed. Nevertheless, the relationship in between social and technological subsystem still maintains, and the understanding of this relationship is significant for studies about evolution of culture. In the process of cultural development, social evolution is the consequence of technological evolution (White, 1949b). However, social subsystem is not simply determined and controlled by the technological subsystem, it also conditions the operation of the technologies and materials in order to control and limit upon the extent to which the technology can develop and expand in the social subsystem. As in between social subsystem and ideological subsystem, the ideology is performed by and representing social interaction and activities. In this context, the influence of ideology on the social subsystem is about the role of different values in the intercultural communication, which will next be unpacked.

Besides looking at the social subsystem vertically in relation to other subsystems, horizontally, social system provides a platform for social contacts, especially for a study looks at Chinese backpackers who have distinct cultural entity, travelling in an exotic and mobile setting. In this respect, cross-cultural communication and cultural adaption should be addressed for this particular issue in relation to discussion in social subsystem.

2.4.2.1 Cross-cultural communication studies
To study Chinese backpackers in Europe, it is essential to address issues of cross-cultural communication. Culture identifies the uniqueness, value and belief of the social unit (Leavitt and Bahrami, 1988), which leads a sense of common identity of a society or community. According to Trompenars and Hampden-Turner (1993), Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov (1997), as well as Czinkota and Ronkainen (2012), elements such as language, economics, religion, politics, customs and material items generate cultural differences, which reflect in communication patterns both verbally and non-verbally (Reisinger and Turner, 2012). People from different cultural backgrounds may face problematic issues in communication, such as misinterpretation, misunderstanding and confusion. In this context, intercultural related issues occur when backpackers travel in a destination with exotic culture. Chinese outbound backpackers, in this case, act as representatives and carriers of Chinese culture, encounter these cross-cultural issues throughout their trips. Intercultural studies help to explain why and how Chinese backpackers react and behave while facing Western culture.

Intercultural communication is a field of research, which looks at the behaviour of people from different cultural backgrounds, as well as how they make effects to communicate cross cultures. It is noticeable that cross-cultural communication involves various disciplines such as cultural anthropology, psychology and established areas of communication. In this study, intercultural communication issues will be mainly about cross-cultural communications between West and East.

2.4.2.2 Cross-cultural behaviour

Researchers have highlighted the role of cultural factor in different culture backgrounds to explain the variations in travel behaviour (Graburn et al., 1995; Pizam and Sussmann, 1995). Maoz (2007) stresses travel motivations differ from both nationalities and destinations. For backpacker research specifically, Cohen (2003) and Maoz (2007) investigate this phenomenon particularly among Israeli backpackers, and compare them with Japanese tourists, which leads distinct differences. Similar
to Japanese tourists, Chinese tourists come from a highly collective society, have a higher level of risk sensitivity, which means they prefer their own food and culture while travelling in order to avoid themselves to an unknown and strange experience (Hofstede, 1980). Risk sensitivity is a key factor to distinguish Eastern and Western tourists, especially evident for Asian tourists such as Chinese, Japanese and Thai. Unlike the excitement and fun seeking for Western tourists, Chinese tourists prefer sightseeing, guided tours and shopping. Armstrong and Mok (1995) suggest understanding Chinese tourists’ behaviour from the aspect of Chinese cultural values. Discussed in the previous section, Chinese values, although belonging to the ideological layer, have a significant impact in sociality and cross-cultural communications. In this sense, it is crucial to understand cultural attributes, and how they affect social interaction. More characteristics and motivations of Chinese outbound backpackers will be discussed in Chapter Four.

In the context of intercultural communication, the focus is stressed on the multifaceted nature and the influence of social interaction of culture. Culture, in this case, is the sum of people’s perceptions which leads to the existence of shared understandings and similar culture (Porter and Samovar, 1988; Urriola, 1989); therefore, culture can be referred to as differences between various groups of people who perceive the world differently (Potter, 1989). The importance of differences in culture as well as how these differences affect interpersonal interactions are main research topics in many studies (Triandis et al., 1972; Hofstede, 1980; Landis and Brislin, 1983).

In addition, cultural differences also create differences in verbal communication. Language, as a key tool for communication, distinguishes one culture significantly from another. It also develops different expressions, values and perceptions. In this respect, several anthropologists highlight the close relationship between language and culture, some even address culture as information and communication (Kluckhohn and Kelly, 1945; Sapir, 1964). As a tool for communication, English is widely used during international travel, which is a big challenge for most Mandarin speakers from
mainland China. For this case specifically, Chinese backpackers who travel without tour guides will face more challenges than guided tourists. Besides verbal communication, non-verbal communication in the intercultural context involves a wider range of factors, such as body language, use of space, use of physical distance between people, and so on. Therefore, the skill of participant observation plays a crucial role in relation to discovering and interpreting these reactions in intercultural communication.

2.4.2.3 Social contact in a tourism context

In terms of social contacts in a tourism context, this study focuses on engagement with material culture, tourist-host contacts, tourism culture, and most importantly, cultural confusion and adaptation of tourists. Jafari (1987) suggests that tourism culture is a mixture of tourist and host-residual culture, producing a distinct culture at each single destination. The term ‘contact’, as an interpersonal encounter, can refer to a very brief trip as well as a long-term relationship. Social contact as everyday encounters with people of different cultural background has potential to lead to positive, negative, or superficial outcomes (Fridgen, 1991), which is also referred to Allport (1979)’s theory of ‘contact hypothesis’. Based on significant differences between Western and Eastern culture, lots of cultural problems occur in social interaction between Western hosts and Chinese backpackers. In a tourism context, the host-guest contact provides an opportunity for both from different cultural backgrounds to learn more about each other’s cultures and fosters social interaction (Bochner, 1982). Looking at the negative side of contact hypothesis, social contacts in tourism is the most superficial form of cultural encounters (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 1997). As a result, on one hand, perceptions between host and guest leads to stereotyping, which may create several communication problems due to linguistic, gesture, spatial, time and status differences (Pearce, 1982); on the other hand, compared with immigrants and international
students, culture shock theory might not have too strong an impact on travellers, which will be discussed specifically in the cultural confusion section to follow.

Backpackers can, however, be treated as an exception from general tourist groups. Maoz (2007) indicates the anti-tourist behaviour of backpackers. They tend to pursue experiences of local lifestyles, meet locals, and would rather not go sightseeing and shopping. In this respect, backpackers’ social contacts are regarded as much deeper and culture-based than tourists’. However, these ideas of anti-tourists (Maoz, 2007) and individualists trying to escape from the tourist ‘bubble’ (Cohen, 1972) have been challenged by the mainstreaming of backpackers (Larsen, Ogaard and Brun, 2011), which will be discussed further in Chapter Four. In addition, Chinese or Asian backpackers are quite different from Western backpackers in terms of behaviour. For instance, compared with immersing themselves among complete strangers (Murphy, 2001), Bui, Wilkins and Lee (2013) argue that Asian backpackers tend to encounter backpackers of the same nationality. Thus, more insight is required to investigate the intercultural encounters of Chinese backpackers in order to discuss to what extent the phenomenon of mainstreaming and nationalities impacts social contacts.

As discussed earlier, although backpackers tend to have advantages in host-guest communication than mainstream tourists, many challenges in intercultural communication must still be noted. Misinterpretations, misunderstandings, and confusion by different patterns of verbal and non-verbal communication occur if participants of the contact do not conform to each other’s cultural patterns of interaction and expected standards (Jensen, 1970; Wolfgang, 1979; Argyle, 1994). The existence of cultural differences reflects directly on the impact of social interaction in the tourism context. For example, significant cultural differences in American, European, Asian and Australian societies with opposing cultural orientations and expectations lead to different understandings of
what constitutes appropriate behaviour in terms of social interaction in a tourism setting; therefore, culture confusion and adaptation are introduced in order to explain this phenomenon.

2.4.2.4 Culture Confusion

In an intercultural setting, Chinese backpackers experience a series of psychological challenges and cultural unfamiliarity at the early stage of a trip. In order to understand certain behaviours of Chinese backpackers, it is essential to review the psychological changes of tourists when they encounter a new culture. In the intercultural literature, many relevant studies adapt the culture shock theory and U-curve model (Oberg, 1960) to explain psychological changes and acculturation in a new environment with a different cultural background. However, Hottola (2004) argues that people might like to call their confusion a ‘shock’ only because it sounds more exciting and attracts more attention from their reference group. Conversely, Hottola suggests applying the theory of culture confusion and intercultural adaptation in a tourism context, because culture shock might not fit specifically with the nature of tourism. Before Hottola (1999; 2004), Ward and Kennedy (1993) already critically compared culture shock with adaptation or adjustment. They declare that, instead of the depression of culture shock, more attention should be paid to cultural adaptation. Cultural adaptation or adjustment emphasise a process of learning, where tourists are required to be repeatedly disoriented and confused in order to find the right path along which to proceed, through a process of trial and error. Culture confusion explains the process when somebody is sticking to his or her old habits rather than adopting new ones in an alien environment realises that their current knowledge is either useless or incorrect. Hottola (1999) points out the wider concept of the culture confusion, which is a learning process involving mixed emotions and feelings from intercultural encounters.

It is relatively clear to distinguish culture confusion from culture shock. Although the expression of ‘confusion’ is not as exciting as ‘shock’, culture confusion stresses the complexity and diversity
of the individual, thus focuses on both the problematic part of the adaptation process and the frequently simultaneous presence of learning, enjoyment and success. In other words, culture confusion provides a wider context for understanding both positive and negative emotional processes of the entire travel experience; also highlighting the significance of adaptation and learning.

To apply culture confusion to understanding intercultural communication and adaptation process, tourists’ experience of adaptation and opposition should be introduced. Although travel is a short-term experience in terms of intercultural encounters, it is an intensive one: various circumstances and encounters take place in a relatively short space of time. Tourist experiences both succeed and fail in the learning process, especially at the first stage, during which they are challenged by hardship mentally and physically when entering the destination country. Hottola (2004) takes backpacking as an example, declaring that the respective emotional stances of adaptation and objection are contributed by initial feelings of euphoria and disappointment. The confusion created by the combination of these feelings leads tourists either accepting or rejecting new information, which develops into a kind of equilibrium, adaptive, or oppositional. For the case of backpacking, as continuous destinations are changing, backpackers do not have enough time to immerse and adapt to the local conditions; therefore, only a small minority of them develop high levels of either adaptation or opposition.

2.4.2.5 Travel Group Dynamics

For Chinese backpackers who are strongly group-oriented, besides interaction with others, group dynamics among travel companions also need to be addressed. In the era when package holiday was in fashion, the social group of the tour was explored in various aspects, such as cruise holidays (Yarnal and Kerstetter, 2005), couch holidays (Quiroga, 1990; Tucker, 2005), and incentive holidays (Kwek and Lee, 2010). Crompton (1981) identifies four kinds of influences for social groups, and
argues that the interactive nature of the travel group results in a solid influence on group members’
behaviours. In terms of interpersonal interactions with travel companions, Kelly (1981)
conceptualises the effect of group interactions onto the leisure experience. It is worth noting that
the repositioning of individuals and self in the social group comparing with travelling alone (Gilbert,
1992; Tuomela, 1995). Yarnal and Kerstetter (2005) argue that members of the group are linked to
obligations, and represent on behalf of the group. This social tie encourages the focus on the
collective group rather than the individual.

Quiroga (1990) summarises characteristics that influence the formation and development of social
groups. They include the setting, the physical proximity, the amount of shared time, the brief
existence of these group, the heterogeneity, companions’ shared circumstances, and the awareness
of sharing travel experiences. Although Quiroga’s work focuses on travel groups on a package
holiday, these characteristics also apply to self-organised travel groups. Thus, travel companions
come from similar cultural backgrounds, and encounter different language and customs in an
intercultural setting encourage the group affiliation. Meanwhile, the physical proximity and the
mobile setting intensifies the potential conflicts and misunderstanding among travel companions.

In previous studies into travel groups, a dichotomy of package tour groups and solo individual
travellers is commonly used. These studies focus on social groups in an organised tour with a tour
guide and pre-arranged transport and accommodation, which is quite different from self-organised
travellers. In addition, group dynamics of friends and families on holiday is rather different from
strangers travelling as part of a group. There are more unpredictable elements for the latter. With
the popularity of individual travelling, the group dynamic among travel companions, how it
changes overtime, and how it affects overall travel experience are issues are worth exploring.

2.4.3 The technological subsystem
The technological subsystem, representing non-human actors in the creation of backpacker experiences, plays a crucial role in this system of culture. As the bottom of White’s layer-cake model, the technological subsystem views culture from the evolutionary and ecological approach, which acts as the fundamental and primary factor in this system (Keesing, 1974). The technological subsystem of culture in this sense can also be understood as material culture, primarily represents tools adapted by human beings for negotiating their environment in order to satisfy their basic needs and construct or reconstruct the society. In terms of the function of the technological system, Steward (1955) conceptualises that it acts as the medium between the natural environment and society. In addition, Marx (1867, p.406) indicates the function of technology in the whole cultural system: ‘Technology discloses man’s mode of dealing with nature, the process of production by which he sustains his life, and thereby lays bare the mode of formation of his social relations, and of the mental conceptions that flow from them’. Studies of Gouldner, Peterson, and Miller (1962) and Heise, Lenski, and Wardwell (1976) both claim that the technological dimension is the most influential factor in shaping the whole cultural system.

Understanding experiences from the technological subsystem provides insights into the significance of material culture facilitating and enabling the creation and enhancement of travel experiences. As the bottom layer of the three-layer system of culture, materials such as hostels, public transport, and the backpack play fundamental roles that afford backpackers’ mobilities and shape particular patterns of experience. For instance, hostels’ common areas meet the interacting need for backpackers, whilst the backpack to a certain extent confirms backpackers’ identities. More roles that material culture plays in backpacker experience will be discussed in the following section.

2.4.3.1 Material Affordance – The Case of Backpacker
Originally defined by Gibson (1979), the concept of ‘affordance’ looks at the potentiality that the external environment can offer for embodied performance. The notion of affordance is relational, which connects bodies and related materials. In tourism studies, the notion of material affordance offers a theoretical lens to understand the role of materials in tourists’ performances and experiences (Edensor, 2006; Larsen, 2008; Germann Molz, 2012; Germann Molz and Paris, 2015). In this context, backpacker-related infrastructure and equipment such as backpacks, public transport, and hostels play significant roles in constructing a backpacking culture. These elements not only supply the basic needs of backpackers, but also created and improved by backpackers for the convenience of undertaking backpacking trips. On the other hand, technologies and infrastructure keep developing based on increasing requirements of backpackers and social interactions in the globalisation context. For instance, the needs to share travel experience instantly and to have real-time interactions with friends and relatives far away from home facilitates the development of social media platforms and mobile internet technology. This idea of interactions between social and technological systems challenge what White (1949b) suggests, namely that social subsystems are only determined by the technological system. In this section, I am going to discuss key materials that ‘afford’ backpackers’ embodied performance, and at the same time shape backpackers’ characteristics.

**i The Backpack**

The backpack, in this case, shows its multiple functions in backpackers’ experience. As an object, it engages in backpacking activities as an essential role and also participates in backpackers’ identity construction, in general, affording cohesion and weaving texture into the backpacking experience (Walsh and Tucker, 2009). In this case, the performance of the backpack not only helps in constructing backpacker identities, but also acts as a key role in the configuration of backpackers’ embodiment.
As a high-value object in the backpacking trip, backpacks may contain clothes, travel documents, footwear, medicine, important personal information, and identification. Walsh and Tucker (2009) argue that more than acting merely as an essential piece of equipment during a backpacking trip, the backpack, as part of collective consciousness, offers backpackers ontological proof of their being. Based on this function of the backpack in the ideology among backpackers, Walsh and Tucker (2009) further argue that backpacks orchestrate a backpacker hierarchy: the material conditions differentiate less experienced backpackers from more experienced backpackers. Some backpackers even make their backpacks look older on purpose, in order to indicate that they are more experienced and are authentic backpackers. This hierarchical phenomenon may be magnified in the context of Chinese outbound backpackers, as Chinese culture care more about social hierarchy and ‘face’ issues. However, arguably, the trend of flashpacking to use various suitcases to replace backpacks challenges the backpack’s symbolic role, particularly for Chinese backpackers, who have been regarded more similar to flashpackers. This will be discussed in Chapter Four.

Moreover, the role of backpacks throughout the trip illustrates how material culture is intimately relevant to embodied performance (Warnier, 2001). On one hand, backpacks contain necessities and facilitate the trip; on the other hand, the size or the weight of the luggage at some point might confine movement. In this respect, backpacks are an integral part of backpacking, embodying and co-producing backpackers’ experiences.

**ii Backpacker hostels**

Similar to backpacks, backpacker hostels are one of the most visible symbols of the backpacker culture. Backpacker hostels relate massively with backpackers’ socio-spatial practices, and act as one part of the global system enabling and shaping the flow of backpackers (O’Regan, 2010). In addition, as the representative of backpacker enclaves, and key non-human actors of the network,
backpacker hostels support and facilitate mobile sociality and carry out an essential role in backpackers’ experiences.

The hostel is an infrastructure that acts as the central point of backpacker practice while mooring, by providing a platform or enclave where the socio-spatial practice is enacted, knowledge and information are exchanged, and one’s identity can emerge and be validated. As its mooring function, the hostel plays a significant part within the system of interrelated institutions developed to support backpacker mobility. Viewed from the system of culture, backpacker hostels perform in two patterns: one as non-human actors: supporting and facilitating mobilities of social components; the other as a medium between social components: buffering culture confusion, increasing social contacts as well as maintaining and strengthening the network. The sociality function of backpacker hostels has been addressed by Urry (2003), who suggests that they enable rich, multi-layered and dense interactions. From the perspective of the performance turn, the backpacker hostel is significant to those who produce a network that enables embodied performances to occur (Urry, 2005).

The shared space (common room, dorm, and kitchen) is one of distinguishing features of the backpacker hostel, which is an important conduit in the exchange of ideas, information, and material goods. It is also a place for supporting a range of travel experiences, ranging from companionship, belongings, reflection and learning. In terms of facilities, backpacker hostels in those popular destinations have developed immensely complex infrastructures and programmes for backpackers in modern times. Most backpacker hostels now introduce Internet cafés in their common areas, for backpackers’ easier access to information and in order to update their social networks. It is worth noticing that common spaces currently provide platforms for network-maintaining, as well as building up new social networks. The phenomenon of virtual moorings by updating travel blogs and sharing travel photos on social networking sites has become a modern
trend, which is significant to ground many backpackers within their social networks even as they lead a mobile lifestyle (Germann Molz, 2012). However, the balance between network building and maintaining is difficult to achieve: it is becoming common that backpackers tend to sit on the sofa with their laptop connected to their virtual networks, rather than chatting and making face-to-face social contacts in the same physical space. It will be worthy to find out whether the network’s weak ties and the strong ties are changing positions in mobile sociality. If so, does it mean the role of physical backpacker enclaves as a social space for facilitating social interactions do not exist anymore? In addition, do backpacker hostels in the Western countries make sense for Chinese backpackers in terms of buffering and controlling cultural confusion? For instance, most hostels have English-speaking staff, which seem little help for Chinese backpackers dealing with cultural confusion.

**iii Public transport**

Travel is the central part of the overall backpacker experience and certainly is more than a case of travelling to, from, and in-between enclaves or destinations (Cohen, 2003; Larsen, 2001). Transport, contributing massively to the whole backpacker travel experience, is an integral mobile infrastructure to facilitate mobilities of backpackers. It is interesting that, although public transport is a mobile object, travellers inside are kept relatively still. In addition, currently more and more public transport provides wireless hotspots, and many backpackers stay overnight on trains to save budgets. To some extent, public transport is a mobile form of backpacker enclave with the same function of mobile sociality, but does not provide a platform for the build-up networks in terms of guest-host interactions.

Backpacking around Europe is always closely associated with rail, bus, and air travel in order to cover a wide range of destinations. There are varieties of low-cost carriers, inter and euro rail passes, and low-cost coaches available for backpackers to choose from if concerned by limited budgets.
In terms of social activities inside these mobility objects, Johnson (2010) argues that transport facilitates a range of experience not too dissimilar to the activities associated within hostels, and there are considerable overlaps in experiencing moments of travel and dwelling. In general, emphasising the sociality in public transport suggest attention should also be paid to social activities between backpacker enclaves, and calling for a more comprehensive investigation of the travel experience.

iv Automobilities

In addition to public transport, the car is also used widely by Chinese backpackers during their trips. Compared with public transport, the car’s advantages of flexibility (Urry, 2004), adventurousness (Featherston, 2004), and privacy (Butler and Hannam, 2013) have been addressed in the literature. Moreover, deeper experiences can be perceived from ‘sensescape’ (Larsen, Axhausen and Urry, 2006, p.268) by interacting surroundings in unique ways (Sheller and Urry, 2004). However, Sheller (2004) addresses that using a car in a foreign environment can also lead to a range of negative emotions such as frustration, anger, or fear.

For Chinese backpackers, the private and controlled space of the car (Pesses, 2010) provides an environmental bubble that avoids continuous interactions with others outside the group (Butler and Hannam, 2012; 2013), but creates a space for intra-group interactions. As addressed earlier, group dynamics play an essential role in travel experiences. For Chinese backpackers who tend to travel in small groups, the space created by a private vehicle offers a chance to strengthen their relationships. Vehicles, in this case, act not only to support their mobilities, but also to afford conversations, debates, and arguments within the group.

2.4.3.2 Social Affordances
In addition to the physical affordances, Larsen (2008) and Germann Molz and Paris (2015) suggest ‘social affordances’ by ICTs that afford sociality of flashpackers, as well as their friends and families back home. Information sharing is considered the biggest issue in the technological system for backpacker culture. Not only in the technological system, but Paris (2009) argues that technological innovation also plays a significant role in social systems to construct the backpacker culture. At this level technology, ranging from alternative guidebooks to online backpacker forums, represents a solid structure for backpacker culture. This backpacker culture influences massively on facilitating information and culture transfer, not only among current backpackers but also in between generations (Sørensen, 2003).

Moreover, the wide adoption of technology among backpackers also makes a contribution to the mainstreaming of backpacker culture, as backpacking is becoming much easier – based on various information sharing platforms and support for accommodation and public transport. Reflecting the relationship between technological and social subsystems, the social system is constructed and supported by non-human actors in the tourism context, such as guidebooks, backpacker infrastructure, backpacker enclaves, and the Internet. Besides the significant role of guidebooks, public transport, and hostels with respect to contributions of interaction among backpackers and backpacker culture creation, recent studies (Sørensen, 2003; Adkins and Grant, 2007; Paris, 2008) have indicated that expanding online communities have significantly influenced travel style and communication methods between backpackers. More discussion of how ICT facilitates mobile sociality will be undertaken in the next chapter.

In general, this three-layer system of cultural theory functions mutually and systematically in mainstream culture and subculture as a whole, in order to provide a theoretical framework for this study. However, the structure of the ‘three-layer cake’ might not remain the same in a mobile setting, which will be discussed in the next chapter.
2.5 Conclusion

This chapter introduced the three-layer system of culture to understand the complex theories in relation to travel experiences. Based on the main structure of the three-layer culture system, this chapter has reviewed several relevant culture theories, which can be categorised into three clusters in relation to human activities: ‘external’, ‘internal’ and ‘mutual’. ‘Internally’, this chapter reviewed cultural theories of behaviourism, functionalism and cognitive anthropology to provide a comprehensive understanding of various values in the experience creation, from a cultural anthropological aspect. The embedded Chinese notion of harmony and related cultural attributes as the key values of understanding functionalism in this study were discussed in this chapter. The ‘mutual’ relationship has been addressed not only between layers of this cultural system, but also implies the core element of intercultural communication in this study. In this section, I explored relevant literature about intercultural communication and group dynamics to understand intra-group and outer group social relations in the mobilities. Furthermore, looking at the culture ‘externally’ suggests the importance of material surrounding in backpackers’ experience. Material affordances and social affordances were introduced to provide a theoretical lens to understand the function of material culture in backpackers’ embodied performances. Functions of key non-human actors in backpackers’ journeys such as the backpack, hostels, and public transport were discussed in the technological subsystems. ICTs as the key to afford distanced sociability were unpacked, and will be further explored in the next chapter. This chapter has uncovered various theories and elements that are relevant to backpackers’ experience-construction by the guideline of the three-layer system of culture. However, this static categorisation is problematic in the current mobile world, which will be discussed further in the following chapter.
CHAPTER 3 THEORETICAL CONSTRUCTS: LIQUID MODERNITY, NEW MOBILITIES PARADIGM, AND NETWORKS

3.1 Introduction

In Chapter Two, various culture theories in relation to the three-layer system of culture were addressed. As a system developed in the era of solid modernity, its hierarchy and solidity have been identified. The trend of globalisation, virtualisation and speedy expansion of backpacking forums requires a more fluid and dynamic view of culture to conceptualise these ideas. In this chapter, I am going to develop the theoretical framework of this study. By doing so, first I am going to introduce liquid modernity and the new mobilities paradigm as the theoretical constructs of this study. Secondly, based on the characteristics of these two theoretical constructs, I will further unpack issues of network sociality, ICT, and network capital. A conceptual framework then will then be built to describe the process of reconceptualisation from the theoretical approach.

3.2 Theoretical Constructs

3.2.1 Liquid Modernity

Various turns and theories explain diverse and complex social phenomena. Among these, the introduction of new theoretical turns in social science studies shifts from ‘old and rigid’ categories and typologies of modernity to fluid, interdisciplinary and permeable borders of liquid modernity. Liquid modernity or late modernity, introduced by Zygmunt Bauman (2000), emphasises the ‘nomadism’ metaphor of individuals that shift their social roles among social positions, relations, lifestyles, jobs, and places. Differing from postmodernity that abandons and declares its theoretical lens in opposition to modernity, Bauman (2000) considers liquid modernity as a chaotic extension of modernity with the sociological and technological change.
To differentiate from liquid modernity, Bauman explains ‘solid modernity’:

*The principal icons of the era were the Fordist factory, with its simple routines, and bureaucracy, in which identities and social bonds meant nothing. The methods of control in this period were the panopticon, Big Brother and the Gulag. It was in this period of history that the dystopias of Orwell and Huxley made sense to people (which they do not any longer) and that the defense of individual autonomy and creativity against such things as mass culture offered by critical theory appealed to a wide body of citizens’ (Bauman 2000, p.22).

Here, Bauman describes solid modern society as an inflexible, socially hierarchical, and mass production-oriented world. Based on this statement, liquid modernity is about post-Fordist, fluid, globalised and individualism.

In liquid modernity, time and space become detached, and the social structure has changed. This time-space compression (Harvey, 1989) suggests the development of technologies that lead a shift in the spatial and temporal dimensions of social life. As a result, Putnam (2000) noted a decline of dense and community-oriented sociality. Bauman (2007) also supported this weakening of ‘dense networks of social bonds’ (p.58). This shift provides implications for network sociality (Wittel, 2001) that replaces community-oriented sociality. More discussion of this will be undertaken later in this chapter.

In this thesis, I am going to apply liquid modernity as one theoretical construct. The metaphor ‘liquid’ suggests relative looseness, fluidity and networked nature of current society (Vogel and Oschmann, 2013). In addition, the metaphor of ‘liquid’ also suggests the blurry boundary of the dichotomy of home versus away, or work versus leisure. Furthermore, liquid modernity also challenges categorisations and typologies in the research. In this case, theories that developed from solid modernity cannot provide adequate explanations for some current issues. The three-layer system of culture addressed earlier in Chapter Two with static hierarchy and solid categorisation is one classic theory developed in the era of solid modernity. Maoz and Bekerman (2010) argue that
modernism is no longer suitable for understanding travel experiences. Instead, liquid modernist thinking that focuses on the subjective, multiple and negotiated features of individuals’ experiences (Uriely, 2005), provides a sufficient explanation of Chinese backpackers’ travel experiences. In addition, as a chaotic continuation of modernity, the concept of liquid modernity on one hand can provide systematic critique of the three-layer system of culture in the mobilities; on the other, it retains the main elements of the original system in the process of reconceptualisation, which relies strongly on the guideline of this characteristic in Chapter Nine.

The wide adoption of liquid modernity in social science research is developing with, and to some extent is influenced by, the trend of globalisation and mobilities. In the liquid modern perspective, boundaries are blurring, angles are multiplied, and the social worlds we are researching are much more complex, diverse and uncertain. For example, Bauman (2000)’s ‘liquid modernity’ redirects research in social science away from the ‘static’ structure of the modern world to see how social entities comprise people, machines, and information or images in the system of movement. This redirection to some extent challenges the hierarchical structure of the three-layer system of culture I introduced in Chapter Two. For mobilities studies, liquid modern thoughts successfully shift from ‘solid and heavy’ modernity to lightness and fluidity, which fit perfectly with the current increasing speed of mobility trends. In this case, lots of possibilities for mobilities research have been broadened: studies which used to be based on immobile settings are seeking their capabilities in terms of mobilities. Especially for social interactions on the move, a modern aspect in social science fails to explain the movement of various objectives, people and technologies. On the other hand, a mobilities turn based on the liquid modern aspect can examine how images and communications are intermittently on the move.

3.2.2 New mobilities Paradigm
For backpackers, abilities to move physically and virtually have been regarded as a confirmation of status (Germann Molz, 2006; Hannam, Sheller and Urry, 2006; Richards and Wilson, 2004). The introduction of the new mobilities paradigm provides an opportunity to explore mobile and immobile issues that related to Chinese backpackers’ experience in light of the focus of theories and methods of mobilities. The emergence of complex global mobility systems has led to the core of contemporary mobilities theory (Urry, 2000; 2007; Adey, 2010; Cresswell, 2011), which involves new perspectives to understand social lives, daily experiences and social interactions. In this case, mobilities not only relate to those significant issues of movement, but also connect much more firmly into immobile settings (Graham and Marvin, 2001) and daily social lives (Massey, 2012). Therefore, the ‘mobilities turn’ or a ‘new mobilities paradigm’ is introduced to make sense of social networks that significantly rely on mediated communication and increasingly stretch across space, physically and virtually. The new mobilities paradigm seeks an academic toolkit consisting of alternative theoretical and methodological approaches to recast the social sciences (Hannam, 2009; Sheller and Urry 2016).

thinking through a mobilities ‘lens’ provides a distinctive social science ... a mobilities paradigm is not just substantively different, in that it remedies the neglect and omissions of various movements of people, ideas and so on. But it is transformative of social science, authorizing an alternative theoretical and methodological landscape ... this paradigm brings to the fore theories, methods and exemplars of research that have been mostly subterranean, out of sight (Urry, 2007, p.18).

Hannam, Butler and Paris (2014) suggest that the introduction of the ‘new mobilities paradigm’ enables the centralisation of travel and tourism in the social and cultural life. In addition, Sheller and Urry (2006; 2016) argue that the new mobilities paradigm has been spreading into and transforming the social sciences by putting social relations into travel, also connecting and relating different forms of travel with complex patterns of social experience, especially conducted through long distance communication. In other words, social networks maintain and expand during the trip,
not only by contact with friends and relatives through social media or mobile phones, but also by tourists creating new social contacts on the move.

Explaining how this new paradigm redirects the understanding of social science, Hannam, Sheller, and Urry (2006) argue that this mobilities paradigm transcend disciplinary boundaries and addresses the discussion of fundamental ‘territorial’ and ‘sedentary’ precepts of twentieth-century social science. A variety of disciplines and subjects including anthropology, cultural studies, geography, migration studies, science and technology studies, tourism and transport studies, and sociology have all been involved in forming this new paradigm. Urry (2000) argues that the “diverse mobilities that are materially transforming the ‘social as society’ into ‘social as mobility’ including imaginative travel, movements of images and information, virtual travel, object travel and corporeal travel” (p. 186). Therefore, the new mobilities paradigm is more diverse and complex, which not only looks at mobile bodies themselves, but is also combined with information and various patterns of mobility (Cresswell, 2011). In this respect, the mobilities turn suggests interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary research on mobile social phenomena, and broadens the research interests of social sciences in mobilities by addressing various factors from a number of angles.

Understanding the characteristics of the new mobilities paradigm (Hannam, Sheller and Urry, 2006; Cresswell, 2011) helps when exploring the function of this mobilities turn in social studies as well as addressing its significance and impact as a liquid modern perspective of social science. In addition, these characteristics provide an alternative way of understanding backpacker research. Firstly, the mobilities turn stresses the role of fundamentally geographical facts of life. Since the idea of centrality to what it is to be in the world, it is easily connected to various forms and scales of movement, which are relevant within the research field that have normally been studied separately. For instance, studies of transportation and accommodation are always undertaken separately, while the mobilities turn suggests them as significant factors for the whole backpacking
travel experience. Both of these should be included, together with other factors to see how they interact, interconnect and construct the whole travel experience. Thus, transcending disciplinary boundaries between tourism studies, leisure studies, and transport studies is significantly important (Coles et al., 2005). Secondly, studies in the mobilities turn often link humanities, science and social science together across different scales of moving. For example, studies of backpacker mobilities through time and space involve discussion of offline and online communities, identities, hostels, mobile technologies, activities and experiences. Thirdly, a more ‘networked’ pattern of social life has been produced by multiple and intersecting mobilities. This network looks not only at human beings themselves but also objects related to human beings’ mobilities. The mobilities paradigm suggests that all places and objects are tied up into at least one network of connections, which means that nowhere can be an isolated ‘island’ (Sheller and Urry, 2006). In this case, material culture and those forms of stillness, places, stops, and immobilities that are enabled by or enable mobilities are significantly important to this research (Germann Molz, 2012). It is a trend that there are many new places and technologies to enhance the mobilities; also many to heighten the immobility of travellers such as immigration offices for outbound travellers, and associated visa issues (Timothy, 2001). Fourthly, developments of mobile methodologies are also emphasised besides mobile theorisation to prevent seeing mobilities from the privileged notions of boundedness and the sedentary (Büscher and Urry, 2009). Mobile methodologies challenge significantly the traditional way of researching social science. The most prominent example is that ethnography has gone mobile (Cresswell, 2012). Ethnography has moved from deep engagement in a single site, to analysis of several sites (multi-sites ethnography) in one research project, to ethnography that moves along with, or besides the object of research (mobile ethnography). More relevant discussion of mobile ethnography will be undertaken in the methodology chapter.

3.3 Information Communication Technologies (ICTs)
In addition to constant moving of people and places, the mobilities of communications, information and images also function significantly in the construction of social lives (Hannam, Sheller and Urry, 2006). ICTs, in this case, play inseparable roles that facilitate and support connectedness and togetherness. According to Germann Molz (2012), Information and Communication Technologies, which are adopted to order, arrange and mediate life on the road, are central to the mobile world. In addition, the growth and development of ICT is allowing and encouraging new forms of coordination of people, meetings, and events to emerge. In other words, ICT is one of the key factors to maintain networks in a wide range of geographical distribution, instantly and effectively. Furthermore, the ubiquitous usage of ICT in daily lives and travel leads to blurring the boundaries between traditional binaries such as home/away, leisure/work, and presence/absence in traditional tourism theorisation (Hannam and Knox, 2010). This de-dichotomy of tourism that brought by ICT also responds the trends of the liquid modernity discussed earlier.

The push from material changes and technological development speeds up mobilities of people: machines, information, capital and ideas, all of these make networks increase and move at a rapid pace (Sheller and Urry, 2006). Assuredly, for Chinese backpackers who are tech-savvy, their travel experiences are strongly reliant on ICT. The introduction of ICT in mobility successfully intersects articulations of the movement between physical and virtual spaces, and also creates new fields of mobile sociality. Thus, Larsen, Urry and Axhausen (2006) declare that a multiple form of network has been established through physical travel, virtual and mobile communications. These mobile devices and Internet-related technologies are regarded as symbols of contemporary mobile sociality rather than simply treated as technological objectives. Social relations, therefore, break the barriers of geographical spaces and are connected through virtual communities by the Internet and mobile technologies. Recently, traditional socialities based on face-to-face interaction have started being replaced by virtual communication through mobile phones, emails, and websites. It is noticeable
that, besides human beings’ movement, the flow of images and communications actually or potentially structure social life. In this case, mobilities research should also include movements of images and information in all types of media. These forms of communications embrace one-to-one interactions such as text messages, mobile phone calls, as well as many-to-many contacts through platforms of social networks, which are increasingly embedded in computers and mobile devices.

In a tourism context, technological, social and cultural developments are significantly changing the nature of travel and communication, especially in regards to distance. Social media is easily accessible by mobile devices while on the move, enabling travellers increasingly to engage in their virtual trips (Urry, 2000). This phenomenon is more prominent for backpackers, and is regarded as a crucial feature of backpacking (Murphy, 2001; Sørensen, 2003). Pendergast (2010) indicates that the demographic of backpackers (18 to 35 years old) strongly links itself with technology. In addition, as a group of travellers who are ‘on the road’ for longer periods than most tourists, it is already a fact that backpackers have embraced the use of ICT before, during and after their trips (O’Regan, 2008; Paris, 2009; Young and Hanley, 2011). Mascheroni (2007, p.532) also declares that ‘one of the most distinctive features of backpacking today is the consistent use of new media while on the move’. Therefore, investigating the convergence of travel and communication, especially communication based on technology will provide an insight into the intersecting mobilities through which backpackers develop certain forms of sociality. In terms of the role of ICT in relation to tourist experiences and everyday life, Uriely (2005) and Urry (2007) argues that technology will not detract from tourist experience, and the distinction between travel experience and daily life has been weakened through practices of virtual networks.

ICT has significantly been incorporated into backpackers’ physical travel practices, which not only satisfies backpackers’ needs for gathering travel information, but also allows backpackers to stay in
touch with their personal networks or communities. In this case, certain forms of sociality are produced by backpackers when ICT is adopted into the intersecting mobilities. Manuel (2001) suggests that backpackers’ sociality is a network sociality, which is centred by individual and surrounded by material supports in the Internet and social media. In addition, the complex intersection of the mobile sociality of backpackers has been addressed (Urry, 2002; Mascheroni, 2007): backpackers engage in various personal and mobile communities based on the interweaving of both virtual and corporeal travel, which strongly relies on media and technology of transport. With supports of ICT, face-to-face interaction is mobilised ‘in a new kind of mobility nexus’ (Hannam, Sheller and Urry, 2006, p.4).

3.3.1 Virtual Communities

The virtual community in backpacking is a good example by which to show the contribution of ICT to mobile sociality. Virtual or online communities are used by netizens (active users of the Internet) to share information (Illum, Ivanov and Liang, 2010). To highlight the ‘sociality’ of virtual communities, Wittel (2001)’s ‘network sociality’ term is preferable to explain social relations, which are not based on shared experience, but primarily on data exchange. Currently, various travel websites or travel forums (for example, ‘Thorn Tree’ of Lonely Planet and ‘Qyer’) are extremely popular among backpacker communities. These websites are used by backpackers before, during, and after trips for information-sharing, reporting of actual experiences and looking for travel companions. Ong and du Cross (2011) emphasise the importance of virtual backpacker forums to enable Chinese backpackers to develop the sense of community as an alternative to negotiating the limited physical mobility. In terms of experience, Wearing, Stevenson and Young (2010) argue that these travel forums allow reflections on the travel experiences to take place immediately, with a combination of text, image and interpretation. It is a space available for travellers to interact with other travellers in the material travel space and non-travellers, through the virtual space. Furthermore, Jensen (2008) suggests such online travel communities are spaces to gather
‘knowledge, identity, performance and aesthetic to communicate (ideas) not only about tourism, but also about living in a global society’ (p. 503). Thus, discussion forums, travel websites and social networking sites are defined as ‘community-oriented media that clearly fit the expressive nature of backpacking’ (Jansson, 2007, p.17). Therefore, a conclusion can be drawn that these virtual travel communities have huge impacts on backpackers’ perceptions of a destination and their decision-making, which will significantly change the travel patterns of backpackers. In addition, besides contacting their friends and relatives through social media, online forums are more likely to provide a platform for backpackers to engage with their audiences, most of whom are strangers. These virtual communities have transformed the way that knowledge and travel information are produced by decentralised, democratised, and distributed structures. Hannam, Butler and Paris (2014) emphasise the issue that the high level of trust has been generated from these virtual spaces (Paris, 2011) even though these virtual relations are largely relying on ‘weak ties’ between strangers. Backpackers rely essentially on these user-generated contents, such as TripAdvisor and Qyer.com, in their decision-making.

It is noteworthy, however, that the popularity of mobile devices and virtual communities in travel does not mean the virtual travel is replacing the corporeal travel. Instead, Wang, Yu and Fesenmaier (2002) argue that the Internet and ICT are increasingly integrated into corporeal travel practices. Besides obvious example of GPS supports in mobile devices for corporeal travel, Urry (2003) states that the growth of social communication devices is matched equally by the increasing scale of the corporeal travel. In terms of spaces, Moores (2004) suggests that rather than being placeless of cyberspace, these mobile communication flows provide the modern experience of being in two places at once. In addition, these diverse intersecting mobilities also pluralise social relations. In this case, physical travel still should be regarded as the main body of backpacker travel, combined with material communication devices and integrated infrastructures to construct whole travel experiences. Germann Molz (2006)’s interactive travel is a case in point showing the intersection
between physical travel and mobile technology. According to Germann Molz’s definition, ‘interactive travellers’ are those who travel ‘with’ and ‘on’ Internet, which also can be used to describe flashpackers, who are backpacking with a larger budget.

3.3.2 Surveillance

ICT mediates the relation between travellers and their audiences in real-time. Germann Molz (2006) argues the visibility in this social relation is incorporated by online travel websites. On one hand, online audiences can see the world through travellers’ gaze, by formats of photography, video and texts; on the other hand, backpackers make themselves visible in various ways. In Germann Molz's words, backpackers make themselves visible to the ‘surveilling gaze’ of the audience. Firstly, the travel body is traceable by photos they post and the itineraries they share online. At the same time, the audience can perceive emotions and attitudes such as the pleasures and anxieties of backpackers as they become the subjects or objects in the stories they write. This trend leads to a tendency of professional travel writers to 'go online', and to start their travel blogs and SNS (Social Networking Sites) to share instant travel experiences through new media. In China, many experienced backpackers turn into famous celebrities as they share travel experiences on their ‘weibo’ accounts, which have thousands of followers. Sensing this popularity, publishers invite many of them to write physical books, which facilitate imaginary travel for a wider audience.

The issue of surveillance has been addressed in discussions between mobilities and information communication technologies (Bennett and Regan, 2002; Green, 2002; Germann Molz, 2006). As mentioned earlier, backpackers are watched by their audience through social media or online forums, which brings both positive and negative repercussions for mobile social relations (Cooper, 2002). On one hand, having a constant presence online can be seen as a positive side, which allows constant communication for backpackers, who are hypermobile and do not follow planned itineraries. On the other hand, this continuous presence might also make backpackers feel
oppressed. For some backpackers, they are expected to keep updates in order to appease worried relatives and friends. These updates thus become supplied surveillance from their parents to know where they are and know whether they are safe or not, which to some extent limits their freedom of travelling. Thanks to the development of ICT, travellers can always be contacted by any means of social media or instant messengers; therefore, they can never hide or escape from this implied surveillance. Germann Molz (2006) suggests the expectation of visibility and availability by audiences through online social networks may exacerbate rather than appease. Even backpackers forewarn the web audience they might lose signal or Internet connection when they enter some areas (Dickinson, Hibbert and Filimonau, 2016). Nevertheless, parents and friends informed by this channel start worrying about backpackers after only a few quiet days. This shed lights on Chinese outbound backpackers by two thoughts. Firstly, differing from backpackers from the West, Zhu (2005) suggests that part of Chinese backpackers corresponding to the ‘explorer’ according to Cohen (1974)’s typologies, which means while backpacking, Chinese backpackers may tend to choose adventure activities, such as hiking off-the-beaten-track, where Internet connections sometimes are probably unavailable. Secondly, the ’one child policy' from the 1980s leads to the 'dependent nature' of the Chinese new generation. Their parents thus care and worry more about their son’s or daughter's safety when they go on a trip. More discussion in relation to the characteristics of Chinese backpackers will be undertaken in Chapter Four.

New ties have been established by ICT between physical travel and mediated communication to link space and place together, which act as the function of ‘social glue’ (Vertovec, 2004). Hybrid sociality links firmly with these travel-related technologies, which is not reducible (Germann Molz, 2012). As mobile connectivity and disconnection occur, lots of social issues through a wide range of cyber-devices and integrated places, Hannam, Sheller and Urry (2006) suggest that better theorisation and research should be undertaken to investigate the interdependence between changes of corporeal travel and virtual communications, especially focusing on the increasing
coverage of mobile communications and new forms of virtual and imaginative mobility. It is worth noting that backpackers not only have one-way benefits from ICT, but also establish their own virtual communities or mobile communication practices which give rise to forms of virtual mobility.

### 3.3.3 Technologies of Separation

Discussed in the previous section, the ubiquitous usage of technology on holiday increases tourists’ awareness of the obligation to maintain a certain level of virtual presence to connect with their daily networks (Larsen, Urry and Axhausen, 2007). This togetherness, even on holiday, leads some tourists to seek for experiences of being unplugged; a kind of digital detox (Paris et al., 2015; Dickinson et al., 2016) to meet their expectations of travel, which is escapism and reversal of everyday life (Cohen, 1979). The virtual absence could potentially enhance tourists’ experience by focusing more on surroundings and travel companions. On the other hand, Bull (2007) uses the term ‘technologies of separations’ to describe some tourists’ use technology as a tool to escape from physical interactions. Hannam, Butler and Paris (2014) suggest that the proximity that virtual connections successfully separate and distract tourists from their physical experiences, which does not guarantee to produce ‘thick embodied socialities’, especially when tourists suffering from cultural confusion (Hottola, 2004) in the intercultural contexts. In this scenario, instant connectivity enables tourists to be emotionally and mentally in their familiar environment (White and White, 2007) whilst physically mobile.

### 3.4 Networks on the move

The trend of liquid modernity and the new mobilities paradigm reconfigure the relationships among people, places, information, and materials. A complex ‘assemblage’ of mobile bodies, new technologies, infrastructures, as well as virtual and networked spaces has been addressed by German Molz and Paris (2012) to describe the complexity and togetherness of tourism. Hannam, Butler and Paris (2014) suggest that the definition of space has been reconfigured by the cyberspace,
for its focus on human interactions rather than merely physical proximity. The new technologies mobilise the concept of space and provide multiple networks to enable co-presence of backpackers (Paris, 2009). Social relations in this case shift from a compact community-base to a widely-spread networked format. In the era of liquid modernity, human beings and their daily activities are strongly networked in this global and increasingly mobile world. Networks are ‘appropriate instruments for a capitalist economy based on innovation, globalisation and decentralised concentration’, and also for a ‘culture of endless deconstruction and reconstruction’ (Castells, 1996, p.470). With developments of ICT and transport, networks, which are spatially distributed at any time and over people’s life course, are becoming even more closely linked, widely spread, more instant, and also more complex (Larsen, Urry and Axhausen, 2006). Social interactions beyond distance, communicate across virtual and physical spaces, successfully broaden and complicate the network compared to just two decades ago. Human actors are now highly connected within certain networks in their everyday lives, even the relatively isolated backpackers (who declare independence). Their social relations with relatives and friends from home are maintained through emails, Skype, Social Networking Sites and phone calls; at the same time, they are strengthening their networks by making new friends and contacting locals during the trip, and also by communicating with strangers on backpacker travel forums.

3.4.1 Network sociality and social networks

Sociality in this respect refers to the tendency of development of social links and lives in communities. It is worth noting that sociality has seen a trend moving from community-oriented sociality to network sociality. Differing from the spatial denseness and social overlapping of a community-oriented sociality, the network sociality relies massively on transport and communication technology, and disperses widely in time and space. Sociality no longer develops within neighbourhoods, workplaces and schools, but goes beyond geographical distance (Larsen, Urry and Axhausen, 2006) and maintain co-presence between the virtual and the physical worlds.
Wellman (2001) introduces the term ‘networked individualism’ to explain the role of ubiquitous connectivity in the creation of networked sociality that goes beyond the limitation of geography. In short, network sociality is de-localised, mobile and over-distant (Castells and Cardoso, 2006; Wittel, 2001). In addition, Hannam, Butler and Paris (2014) emphasise the role of material ‘stuff’ in the network of temporal movements that helping to constitute tourism: they are assembled and reassembled in dynamic configuration (Sheller and Urry, 2006). The reason for addressing sociality here is because it focuses on how social links develop within the network, that is to say, for a study on travellers themselves, it is significant not only to look at networks, but also to the making of those networks.

To look at social networks in travel specifically, Larsen, Axhausen and Urry (2006) conclude that several travel modes play roles in mobile social networks. These modes include physical travel of human beings and movements of objects, imaginative travel through images and memories, virtual travel through the Internet, and communicative travel through letters, phone calls or ICT. Thus, social networks on the move cover both virtual and corporeal travel: travellers not only can be mobile, but also sit at home undertaking imaginative travel and linking themselves to the world. This travel social network also stresses the significance of material and social affordances: physical travel cannot be undertaken without mobile objects and immobile infrastructure whilst virtual travel, communicative travel, and imaginative travel strongly rely on ICT. This leads to the discussion of network capital.

3.4.2 Network Capital

Aligning with network sociality, network capital helps to unpack the capacity of socialities in the current pattern of social relations. Generating and sustaining the concept of ‘social capital’, which depends on spatially compact and densely knit communities (Putnam, 2000), ‘network capital’ facilitates richer and more interdependent patterns of sociability (Larsen, Axhausen and Urry, 2006).
This network capital involves networking tools of emerging technologies and transport, organises and orchestrates networks, especially of those ties that live beyond the reach of daily face-to-face relations. In other words, network capital suggests a smaller world spatially and temporally by spreading its networks and building connections among people who are geographically dispersed, especially for those imaginative, virtual and communicative travellers. It is worth noting that this network capital is crucial to modern societies. Without sufficient ‘network capital’, people may face the issue of social exclusion since social networks have become more dispersed (Cass, Shove and Urry, 2005). In this respect, network capital becomes highly pertinent from the understanding of the new mobilities paradigm, which suggests travellers seek to lead their trips more spatially spread.

As discussed, networks are practised in a complex way, which not only focuses on everyday face-to-face interactions and communications, but also emphasises other forms of interactions through material or information networks of cars, trains, planes, mobile phones, social media and online forums. With the development and usage of ICT, the mobilised social networks have made it common to have ‘strong ties’ at a long distance. Network capital is linked by stillness and facilitated by immobilities. In the next section, I am going to discuss moorings, and in this particular case, backpacker enclaves, in order to understand the significant role that these immobile infrastructures play in mobile sociality.

3.4.3 Moorings

The new mobilities paradigm emphasises the importance of moorings and immobilities in mobilities research (Hannam, Sheller and Urry, 2006). It is crucial to address the function of moorings to the mobile social network. The metaphor of ‘mooring’ implies particular sensibilities of stillness-in-movement that are reflected in the term’s maritime connotations of safe harbour (Germann Molz, 2012). In terms of travel, mooring suggests a need to stop and rest during a trip, but not to be locked (figuratively) into place. Moorings thus provide physical infrastructures and
spaces for backpackers to party, rest, and feel secure. With the intermittent moment of physical stillness, emotional connection and social embeddedness, mooring enables travellers to connect during the trip. Set in between mobilities and stillness, mooring involves the understanding of networks on the move: both infrastructural and virtual mooring should be taken into account for a discussion to understand the lived qualities of mobile sociality. The study of mobilities involves massive immobile infrastructures that organise the intermittent flow of people, goods, information and images. Various studies of immobilities or stillness have been undertaken by focusing either on those material infrastructures supporting contemporary mobilities or on those social structures or power equality that work to regulate and control mobilities of particular groups of people (Verstraete, 2004; Hannam, Sheller and Urry, 2006; Cresswell, 2011).

3.4.4 Backpacker enclaves

Backpacker enclaves, in this sense, can be understood as either a ‘safe haven’ (Wilson and Richard, 2008) where backpackers can retreat in order to control and cushion culture confusion or, a space for increasing social contact. Backpacker enclaves function different roles between actors inside the network of backpacker travel, facilitate, and adjust the function of the network. In this respect, the role of a backpacker enclave is to provide a space to facilitate meaningful interactions between backpackers, and to share their values and identities (Murphy, 2001; Sørensen, 2003), encouraging cultural contact for backpackers and locals (Teo and Leong, 2006; Wilson and Richards, 2008). They are also regarded as ‘metaspaces’, which are capable of cushioning culture shock, allowing perceived control, and respite from life ‘on the road’ and unfamiliar destinations (Hottola, 2004; 2005).

The permeability and penetration of the backpacker enclave are worth noting seeing as backpacker enclaves are an important platform for the construction of backpackers’ experiences. In this regard, Wilson and Richard (2008) argue that backpacker enclaves should be understood as a complex
mixture of experiences, which can help to mediate the ideology and practices of backpacker travel, but more importantly in this case as the product of social actors’ contacts and communication. The influence and impact of interactions and the nature of the enclave space are mutual, which are defined by the term ‘suspension’ (Richards and Wilson, 2004). Rather than being totally isolated and completely immersed in local culture, this idea of suspension states that backpackers are willing to connect both locally and globally. In this sense, backpackers are relatively well-protected from culture confusion, without being separated completely from the outside world. Therefore, a balance is maintained by relevant infrastructure.

The backpacker enclave is relatively dynamic. Wilson and Richard (2008) suggest viewing the backpacker enclave as a product of a series of apparently opposing forces, which are constantly changing. This suggestion implies that, while looking at backpacker enclaves, studies should not only stick to immobile infrastructure, but also be endowed with broader spaces and mobilities, which are possibly involving and sharing dynamic forces. Physically, enclaves are sites of backpacker hostels, internet cafés and tourist information centres, which provide points of social contact not only with locals and travellers, but also with the wider world and strangers on online forums (Germann Molz, 2006; Teo and Leong, 2006). In addition, public transport, as a mobile object, can also be regarded as a mobile enclave for social contact between backpackers, some coaches and trains even provide wireless hotspots, which offer opportunities for travellers to remains part of their networks back home and more widely online. The backpacker enclave provides a tangible setting involves human and non-human actors to co-produce travel experiences and backpacker culture. The function of this network is set in these enclaves, which are based on various assemblages of these people and materials moving throughout time and space.

3.4.5 Regulation and Limitations of Mobilities
On the other side of stillness is the state border that limits and regulates mobilities. After 9/11 and SARS, regulations and control of state borders have become increasingly strict. Particularly for Western countries, anti-immigrant sentiment keeps strengthening. In this case, according to Cunningham (2009, p.143), states borders have become ‘depoliticized’ and ‘the securitization of international borders became more acute, as states… deepened enforcement measures at their international boundary lines’. For the Schengen states in Europe, travellers are virtually unimpeded to cross national borders. Therefore, the Schengen mega-region has imposed much stricter regulations and barriers on those potential tourists outside of it, in order to prevent illegal immigration and secure the safety of its nationals (Bosworth, 2008). In the case of Chinese outbound backpackers planning travel to Europe, they normally are required to obtain two visas in order to enter the UK and countries in the Schengen area. Illegal immigration is still the top concern of rejecting visa applications for Chinese residents; especially for those do not provide a working statement or show enough money in their accounts when applying for their visa. In this case, immigration issues and the friction caused by borders significantly impacts Chinese backpackers’ mobilities, particularly shaping decision-making for their travel routes: Britain may become an alternative choice since it requires an extra visa, while the Schengen area will be popular as Chinese travellers prefer covering as many countries as possible.

3.5 Theoretical Framework

So far, this chapter has introduced liquid modernity and the new mobilities paradigm as theoretical constructs. Based on this, ICT, as the crucial element that reshaped the landscape of communications and togetherness in the current liquid modern and mobile world, was discussed. Building upon this, literature review of network sociality and network capital was undertaken to further explore the nature of social relations of the current society. Instead of applying the original three-layer system of culture, in this section I am going to propose a theoretical framework that
modifies the three-layer system through theoretical constructs discussed in this chapter, and the three-layer system of culture introduced in Chapter Two to create the theoretical approach as part of this abductive research.

In this respect, this theoretical framework provides conceptual insights and develops the traditional three-layered system of culture in a mobile and intercultural setting. This theoretical framework suggests to break the hierarchy of the three-layer system of culture, to re-position and reshape the actors in the system, and to create a network format system in terms of mobile tourism.

As discussed in Chapter Two, based on Marx’s general evolutionary models, White (1949a) and Keesing (1974) suggest that culture as an integrated system is formed by three subsystems: technological, social, and ideological. A three-layer cake as a metaphor has been suggested by White (1949a) and Paris (2009) to visualise the system of culture and the mediate role of social layer in between technological and ideological by declaring the social structure has resulted from the convergence of technology and ideology. Although the interactional nature has been suggested, Paris (2009) understands the three-layer culture as a solid and stable system rather than mobile networking system. However, in current late-modernity, and the specific mobile settings of this study, it is essential to rethink the function of this system by breaking the hierarchy of the three-layer system of culture and re-positioning these three layers in another order or performing within a different model. Applying this system to understanding mobile individuals, complex scenarios and dynamic social relations challenges the simplicity of the three-layer format; therefore, there is a need to re-conceptualise the system of culture in a broader setting.

In this case, this framework theoretical is suggested to shed light on understanding changes and developments of this solid and traditional three-layer culture system from the theoretical lens of liquid modernity and the new mobilities paradigm. This framework first aims to provide a ‘theoretical revisit’ of the three-layer system of culture; secondly, as part of the abductive study, it
also offers a conceptual guideline for data collection to construct the empirical approach. From the theoretical lens, the conceptually modified three-layer system of culture will no longer operate in a three-layer format. However, the ‘chaotic extension’ feature of the liquid modernity suggests to maintain the same elements from the original model, whilst the fluid features and the networked sociality propose a more liquid, dynamic, and complex pattern of the transformed model.

The reconceptualised three-layer system of culture is aimed to look at mobile individuals, their relationship and experiences in a mobile setting, which is relatively different from the traditional steady and concrete setting of the three-layer system of culture. While travelling through time and space, the solid ‘three-layer cake’ transfers into a relatively mobile, dynamic and fluid network. In this network, the social individuals, material actors as well as ties in between, link, cross and integrate among elements extracting from the three-layer system of culture. In the mobile intercultural setting, this modified system is highly dynamic and fluid: actors and social relations are moving and switching positions towards social individuals according to the circumstance they encounter.

Figure 3-1 visualises the process of transformation of this proposed theoretical framework: each layer of the cultural system adapts or transforms into new patterns and forms. In light of the network sociality and network capital discussed earlier, the social layer and technological layer turn into human and non-human actors, forming the basic structure of the network. The intangible and flowing ‘culture flows’ represent the ideological layer in the culture for its abstract characteristic and the fact that multiple streams of values flow within this system. In addition, the technological layer also acts as a foundation or ‘ground’ to support and facilitate the movement and function of the network.

An idea of ‘culture flow’ is suggested to represent the ideological subsystem of culture in the theoretical framework. The traditional idea of the ideational theory of culture understands it from
approaches of a cognitive, symbolic and structural system. In the context of tourism, Paris (2009) declares that the ideological subsystem represents the organisation of beliefs about the human experience. While in the mobilities context, the ideological subsystem focuses on shared values, perceptions and beliefs of backpackers, as well as the creation of knowledge during the trip. In terms of ideology, ‘culture’ – from a cultural anthropological perspective – looks at shared values and cognitive anthropology, in which people follow a system of collective programming shaped by human brains, distinguishing one group from another (Keesing, 1974; Hofstede, 1989). Welk, Richards and Wilson (2004) and Paris (2009) suggest that backpacker ideology remains stable compared with technological and social subsystems. However, this argument is based on understanding backpacker community as a scene. Five ‘pillars’ of backpacker ideology suggested by Welk, Richards and Wilson (2004) are more like backpacker characteristics than ideologies. In the hypermobile and intercultural context, shared values and beliefs travelling through time and space are no longer stable but relatively liquid and dynamic, with different streams of values negotiating in the process. In this case, human bodies acting as permeable containers contain culture flows merging and splitting through travel bodies’ movements and encounters. The role of culture flow in this proposed framework is twofold: on one hand, the culture flow leads a shared value and unique culture entity that controls and directs backpackers’ behaviours and perception; on the other hand, it is shaped by the performance of backpackers’ social activities through time-space specific pattern.

Based on the focus of Chinese backpackers in this study, the social layer of the cultural system develops into social actors in this theoretical framework. The practice of social actors carries and performs the culture flows that transform from the ideological layer. Behaviourism and functionalism successfully link the abstract and intangible culture with human behaviours, in order to support human activities to some extent performs and represents culture. In this layer, social network is constructing, rebuilding and collapsing through social contacts. Social contacts in this
context are based significantly on material supports and engagements, particularly technology and facility; on the other side, pull back by some factors such passport control and migration policies. These elements support, restrict and balance the function of the network; therefore, this theoretical framework emphasises the importance of non-human factors in the travel experience, but also emphasising the core element of the network is social interactions and social actors, in other words, human beings. In this respect, the social layer transforms into a network structure, which are not only limited in the social subsystem, but are also highly engaged by the technological subsystem, declaring the importance of ICT and infrastructure. Internally, the technological subsystem acts as an active actor in the function of the whole transformed system, which function through the whole experiential process; externally, it is the ‘ground’ of the travelling space of the network as well as the three-layer culture system.

**Figure 3-1 Transformation Process of the Theoretical Framework**

In this respect, transformed elements from the three-layer system of culture merge, complement and regulate each other in the same space. Visually, this travel space is like a *pocket-sized universe* (Figure 3-1), which includes drifting clouds (culture flow), constellations with certain patterns...
linked by stars (human and non-human actors), as well as solid grounds (material culture) support and maintain the operation of the whole ‘universe’. From the theoretical lens of the new mobilities paradigm and liquid modernity, this ‘universe’ is relatively chaotic and social actors inside are often hypermobile. Except the ‘ground’ formed by the material and technologies is relatively steady, other objects are very dynamic in the mobilities. The movement of culture flows, the changing positions of social and non-human actors, switching roles of weak tie and strong ties, as well as changes among these movements, all depend on the external circumstances and what the social actor (Chinese backpacker) encounters. This implies that the outcomes of the travel experiences are diverse, as every individual is unique and scenarios for social contacts are always different in various time and space settings.

This conceptual framework successfully assembles various theoretical lenses and turns addressed earlier. Firstly, it reconstructs the hierarchal three-layer system into a network format, which refers to the liquid modern view of contemporary studies. Secondly, it highlights the movement and the dynamic social relations on the move, as well as a network highly connected by various actors, which refers to the new mobilities paradigm and the network sociality; thirdly, it accentuates supports and engagement of non-human actors in the network. As Wittel (2001) suggests, network sociality is a technological sociality insofar as it is deeply embedded in communication technology, transport technology and technologies to manage relationships. The complexity and dynamic nature of this network provides a more adequate explanation of Chinese backpackers’ experiences, and provides a more accurate system to guide data collection.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has developed the theoretical framework of this thesis, based on the theoretical constructs of liquid modernity and the new mobilities paradigm. The literature review of network sociality and network capital further supports the network format of mobile relations. Additionally,
the review of ICT supports the engaging role of information technologies in networked social relations. Visually, the theoretical framework re-constructs the three-layer system of culture and sets it in a dynamic, liquid modern and mobile context, which emphasises de-boundaries, interdisciplinary, mobile relations, and the significance of materials. This theoretical framework on one hand highlights the importance and contribution of non-human actors as network capital, on the other – differing from ANT – as a study focused on individuals and their relations, it still stresses the key role of social interactions as the sociality of the network. ‘Network’, as the key component of this chapter has been further discussed, stickiness and stillness of moorings, and backpacker enclave as the example in the context were explored to gain better insights into the idea of network. In addition, ICT as an essential component has been explored, as it has changed the way of communication and the social structure of the network. The theoretical framework emphasises the nature of diversity and complexity of travel experience, and addresses human beings in the central role of utilising materials, engaging technologies and co-practicing changes of culture flow. Travel experiences of Chinese outbound backpackers are utilised to examine and explore the function of this network. In the next chapter, I am going to review characteristics and development of Chinese backpackers in order to explore their complex travel experiences.
CHAPTER 4 THE SETTING - CHINESE OUTBOUND BACKPACKERS

4.1 Introduction

Chinese outbound travellers are now more confident to travel than ever before. Therefore, outbound backpacking, a new trend of travel for experiencing independent, freedom and life-achievement, is increasingly popular for the Chinese young generation. For decades, backpacker studies have principally looked at backpackers from the West to less developed countries in the East (du Cros and Jingya, 2013). However, with the trend of globalisation and the mobilities, Cohen and Cohen (2015b) call for a paradigm shift beyond Eurocentrism in the mobilities. In addition, Jin and Wang (2016) identify that research of Chinese outbound tourism remains unexplored. Responding to this, this study investigates Chinese backpackers travelling around the world, particularly the intercultural phenomenon between East and West. Differing from the growing outbound backpacking trend, research on Chinese backpackers is relatively limited; it remains largely unexplored in the literature of Chinese outbound backpackers in Europe.

In this abductive study, Chinese outbound backpackers were chosen to reconceptualise the three-layer system of culture from the empirical approach. In order to do so, it is imperative to review and define who are Chinese backpackers, as well as their characteristics and backpacker culture. This chapter introduces two approaches to narrow down the definition of Chinese backpackers: one is from Chinese outbound tourism, and the other is from the Chinese backpacker literature, aiming to obtain a critical understanding of Chinese outbound backpackers. In the first section, this chapter provides a route to understanding Chinese outbound backpackers from the Chinese outbound travel market. More attention is specifically focused on the independent outbound travel market, within which a large group of Chinese backpackers identify themselves. In the second
section, the Chinese backpacker literature is understood, by comparison with Western backpacker literature and the influence of Chinese culture.

4.2 Chinese outbound tourism

In 1997, the United Nations World Travel Organisation (UNWTO) predicted that China would be the fourth biggest outbound source market, with a market share of 6.4 percent, by 2020 (UNWTO, 1997). 19 years later, the development and growth of the Chinese outbound tourism have proved that the estimates of UNTWO are too conservative: by 2015, the number of Chinese outbound tourists already reached 120 million, from 12.13 million in 2001, and a year-on-year 19.5% increase from 2014 despite the post-2008 economic slowdown. (CNTA, 2016). Now, China is the Number one source market in Asia-Pacific, which still grows with a considerable speed with diverse market segments and products (ITB, 2016). According to UNWTO (2014), Chinese travellers spend US$129 billion on outbound travel in 2013, making them the leading source market in the world. This huge Chinese outbound market, however, should consider tourist flows to two Special Administrative Regions (SARs) of China (Hong Kong and Macau). According to Arlt and Burns (2013), the number of tourists visiting ‘real’ foreign countries accounts for 30 percent, which was 36 million in 2015. This figure remains a significant market in terms of outbound tourism.

The development of Chinese outbound tourism should attribute to the policy and governance of China National Tourism Administration (CNTA) and the Ministry of Public Security. Before 1998, outbound travel was highly restricted and only available for official purposes. Since 2000, these two governmental bodies have been working together to promote Chinese outbound tourism by relaxing the restrictions and simplifying visa application procedures. Meanwhile, from 1998, the Chinese government had implemented the Approved Destination Status (ADS) to monitor, but also promote these destinations for Chinese outbound group travellers to experience outbound leisure activities. By January 2013, there are 148 countries included in the list of ADS. Today almost
every important destination for the Chinese market has received the status of an authorised tourism destination, being able to receive group tourists (Fugmann and Aceves, 2013). Shao Qiwen, chairman of the China National Tourism Administration (CNTA) believes that promoting Chinese outbound tourism has mutual benefits. He declares ‘by continuing to send Chinese travellers to Europe, the benefit will eventually flow back to China’ (Elliott, 2013).

4.3 Chinese independent outbound travellers

Although the ADS is designed specifically for Chinese outbound group tourists, it plays a crucial role in terms of encouraging Chinese travellers to take outbound trips as well as providing opportunities for guest countries to understand Chinese tourists. The monopoly of packaged group tours has been broken up since the late 1990s. According to CNTA (2012), there were among 20.32 million outbound tourists in 2011, 7.7 millions of whom were independent travellers, with a market share of 30%-40% (Gao, 2013). This number is experiencing unprecedented growth with the confidence of Chinese travellers and the development of virtual platforms. It is noticeable that this independent travel phenomenon is becoming more important in China domestically and internationally (Ong and du Cros, 2011; Reuters, 2007). This trend can be seen as a response to stereotypical reporting and the disparagement of Chinese group tourists (Fugmann and Aceves, 2013).

The independent segment of Chinese outbound tourism has been identified by recent studies (Li et al., 2011; Ong and du Cros, 2011; Chen, Bao and Huang, 2014; Prayag, Cohen and Yan, 2015). The fast development of Chinese independent travellers is also influenced by a number of external factors. Firstly, the growing affluent population and sophisticated customers lead to a demand for specialist and activity trips rather than mainstream tours (UNWTO, 2012). Secondly, although the visa application procedure is still relatively complicated, the Chinese government is working closely with European countries to achieve a better visa scheme for independent Chinese tourists, such as
ten years US visa, and two years' UK visa from 2015. The liberalisation of visa application procedures significantly contributes to the growth of outbound tourist numbers (Wang and Davidson, 2009). Thirdly, a wider set of information resources both from travel markets and social media (Wu and Pearce, 2016) provides more confidence for Chinese travellers undertaking individual trips abroad. The growth of the number of students and Chinese people living abroad is also a key factor that drives the development of Chinese independent tourism (Arlt, 2013), since travel is always bundled with study for international Chinese students. With the outbound travel market becoming increasingly mature, the focus of the market also shifts from offer-driven to the demand-driven, especially due to the rise of online booking and review sites and information tools. Specialist outbound travel websites such as ‘qyer.com’ or ‘eueueu.com’, as well as professional travel bloggers, provide platforms for consumers to decide, plan and share their trips, which make individual travel possible even for those with limited travel experience.

While overviewing the whole Chinese outbound travel market, Chinese group tourists still act as the main force of Chinese outbound tourists at present, especially in Western countries. According to China Outbound Tourism Research Institute (COTRI), there are at least 150 million Chinese people waiting to join this kind of group (COTRI, 2012). Most of these tourists have less travel experiences, are highly price sensitive, and have no or very little language skills to confront the destination alone. These tourists are seeking intense sightseeing experiences. Travelling five countries in nine days is a standard packaged tour in France, Germany, Holland, Belgium and Luxemburg, which is a typical product in the Chinese outbound travel market. Besides, having fewer days of annual leave compared with other countries, Kristensen (2013) understands this as the need for the social recognition: for Chinese travellers, the number of places visited is a trophy. This case equally applies to Chinese independent travellers: a typical trip for backpackers dwelling in one destination for a long period of time is not socially interesting for most Chinese travellers.
Although sharing the same characteristics of travelling to many countries in one trip, Chinese independent travellers with significant demographic characteristics, differentiate themselves from Chinese mainstream tourists. A number of these independent travellers have travelled in groups before and are now seeking individual or small group experiences that allow them to stand out of the mass tourism flow. Lim (2009), Arlt (2013) and Xiang (2013) investigate the socio-demographic characteristics of Chinese independent travellers. They conclude that these new Chinese travellers are labelled as young, well-educated, higher income level and upwardly mobile professionals who stress the importance of cultural communication and prefer to identify themselves as ordinary folk instead of the ‘rich and free person' assumed by the general public. For Western destinations such as European countries and America, the main source market is in Tier-1 cities such as Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou, with increasing numbers of travellers from other affluent cities from the east coast of China.

Differing from Western independent travellers driven by diverse motives, the main motivation of Chinese independent travellers is sightseeing, which is similar to Chinese group travellers, as they have the same need for social recognition and same limited annual leave; what makes the difference is the sense of being independent and self-organised (Xiang, 2013). In order to take a position of control during the trip, especially for Western destinations, they tend to do a lot of ‘homework' before their departure. There is a huge different between Chinese and Western travellers in terms of the decision-making process. Chinese independent travellers prepare a lot before departure, such as the arrangement of a travel itinerary, gathering travel information, purchasing and booking travel products (for example, accommodation and transport), as well as budget and allocation of tourism expense and time. This behaviour is firmly related to the Chinese traditional learning attitudes towards travelling as well as the relatively riskless nature of the Asian traveller (Maoz, 2007). A notable behavioural difference between Chinese group tourists and independent travellers has been made: the former rarely make preparations before the trip and mostly rely on a guide and
arrangements of tour operators during the trip, whilst the latter are much more active in terms of planning, and lots of decision-making is made during the trip. This behaviour leads to the significant role of the Internet and social networking sites during an independent outbound trip, which will be discussed in more detail later.

There seems to be a paradox, however, and even irony that Chinese independent travellers are on one hand declare freedom-seeking is the most important travel motive to differentiate themselves from others; on the other hand, they are well-prepared, which results in low flexibility for their trips. In addition, with more ICT and social networking sites involved during the trip, the core of independent travel is somewhat reduced by a term of surveillance, which was discussed earlier in Chapter Three.

In terms of the practices of Chinese independent outbound tourists, Xiang (2013)'s study finds out that differing from renowned Chinese shopping enthusiasm abroad, few Chinese independent outbound tourists take shopping as their key travel motivation. They tend to see it as a part of tourism activities, and a consequence of the Chinese gifting culture. In addition, Chinese outbound independent tourists do not tend to go 'off the beaten track', and are quite conscious of safety issues in terms of choosing activities and destinations. In this case, they might visit the same mature destinations as group tourists, but spent a much longer time there. All of these characteristics of Chinese outbound tourists shed light on investigating Chinese outbound backpackers.

To understand Chinese backpackers, it is also important to look at the approach of the Western backpacker literature, which plays a significant role in shaping Chinese backpackers' identity, and motivating them to undertake backpacking journeys. For decades, backpacker research has mainly focused on backpackers from affluent capitalist societies, who travel to less affluent societies (Hollinshead, 1999; Westerhausen, 2002; du Cros and Jingya, 2013). Currently, with the process of globalisation and the development of the Chinese economy, it is time to scrutinise the issue further.
by taking a Chinese perspective of the Western host and the Eastern guest (Bui, Wilkins and Lee, 2013).

4.4 Traditional Chinese Travel Culture

Jin and Wang (2016) argue that studies of Chinese outbound tourism cannot overlook the mixed influence of various schools of philosophies, religions, and recent ideologies. To understand Chinese backpackers, it is crucial to understand their cultural roots and origins. Chinese values were discussed in Chapter Two, and this section is going to focus on the distinct characteristics of traditional Chinese travel culture. Before the booming phenomenon of mass tourism in the 1990s, China has a long tradition of travel, which is more focused on nature rather than the human world in the Western tradition (Yan and McKercher, 2013). At the very beginning, long-distance travel was discouraged during the Qin Dynasty (221-206 BC), which was influenced significantly by the ideology of Confucianism: ‘one should not travel far away while his parents are still alive’ (Yu, 1994). This discouragement of travel perfectly expresses Chinese philosophy of ‘filial piety’ (孝).

However, with more engagements of cultural creation such as poetry and paintings depicting the beauty of the nation, travel has been regarded as a force that can cultivate the mind, broaden horizons, provide recreational opportunities and abreact negative emotions (Fan, 1992; Zhang, 1992). Since the Han Dynasty (206 BC-220 AD), travel has been continuously encouraged, particularly among literati. One step further, during the Ming Dynasty, the Confucian doctrine was fine-tuned by the famous scholar Tung Chi-chang (1555–1636), who suggested that ‘traveling is as important as reading a thousand books’ (读万卷书，行万里路).

It is noticeable that among Chinese traditional culture, mountains and river (shan-shui) (Frodsham, 1967) are two themes that predominate both art and poetry in ancient China. In this respect, landscape appreciation as one of the most distinctive representations of traditional Chinese culture,
lasts from the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Century until the 19\textsuperscript{th} Century. Landscape appreciation has a massive influence on Chinese culture, not only on cultural achievements, but also on lifestyle. In ancient China, going back to the countryside to achieve spiritual achievement and salvation was a trend for intellectual and political elites to escape from the social mess (Salazar and Zhang, 2013), this tendency, alternatively, shows landscape appreciation as a key motivation of Chinese travellers.

### 4.5 Chinese backpacker research

Compared with Western backpacker research that covers a range of disciplines, the research into Chinese backpackers is still in its very early stages. Interestingly, the developing pattern of Chinese backpackers differs from the traditional West: from ‘drifter' and ‘wanderer’ to ‘flashpacker’ (Paris, 2012) and ‘lifestyle traveller’ (Cohen, 2011). Zhu (2005; 2007; 2009) argues that the development of Chinese backpackers was based on tourist typologies defined by Cohen (1974): Western backpackers derive from the ‘drifter' whilst Chinese backpackers originate from the ‘explorer’ (Zhu, 2009). Although this argument lacks of other support from the literature, it is easy to find that many adventure clubs are gathering adventurous travellers naming themselves backpackers, emphasising travel ‘off the beaten track' by undertaking various extreme activities. In addition, traditional Chinese travel culture as discussed earlier might shed light on Zhu (2009)’s argument. Landscape appreciation influences Chinese individual travellers' perceptions and travel patterns. Consequently, they prefer to involve themselves in nature but to some extent ignore social interaction in travel, which is otherwise emphasised by Western travel culture. Chen, Bao and Huang (2014) highlight that, arguably, social interaction is the key motivation for Chinese backpackers, in contradiction with the idea of ignoring social contact by adventure travellers. In general, although Chinese independent travel is to some extent influenced significantly by landscape appreciation and travellers’ self-identity, we still cannot equate Chinese outbound backpackers to adventure travellers.
Moreover, the evolution of Chinese backpackers is far more complex. Since 2000, with the booming outbound tourism, Western backpacker culture has started to influence the development of the Chinese backpacker: Chinese people started yearning for freedom and self-education during backpacker trips, which developed into a key motivation of independent travel. According to Chen, Bao and Huang (2014)’s research, Chinese backpackers are not different from Western backpackers in terms of travel motivations, which are mainly driven by social interaction, self-actualisation, destination experience, as well as escape and relaxation. In addition, with the development of ICT, information is more mobile, instant and penetrative. Not surprisingly, Chinese travellers are fond of these new technologies both for doing ‘homework’ before the trip and maintaining networks during that trip.

Furthermore, findings by Ong and du Cros (2011) suggest that Chinese traditions stemming from Confucian ideology significantly influence Chinese backpacker culture in terms of gender bias. According to this traditional culture, Chinese backpackers fulfil their gender roles during backpacking. Males are supposedly more assertive, adventurous and rugged, while females tend to be more submissive, domestic and gentle. Further research is suggested on this aspect to make a contribution to the nature of social interaction and gender in the travel ethnographies in young generations of Chinese backpackers. Thus studies on the behaviour and perception of Chinese backpackers will be a different and culturally nuanced ‘story’ from general backpacker tourism research. In addition, Lim (2009) and Luo, Huang and Brown (2015) suggest the practice of social hierarchy among group Chinese backpackers. Thus, more attention to various streams of influence, and the uniqueness of culture entities should be paid in studies of Chinese backpackers.

4.5.1 Donkey Friends

‘Donkey Friends’ (驴友) and ‘travel’ (旅游) are homophones in Mandarin. Homophones as wordplays in Chinese are a sort of language joke where one speaker implies another meaning than
what is actually being said. This wordplay with homophones is a way for the Chinese to express irony, humour or, rhyming. To use ‘donkey friends’ to express outdoor travel companion seems a bit strange, but Chinese is based on tones, which gives its users a great variety of wordplay based on homophones that, over time, have expanded rapidly within modern Chinese language. In addition, the stereotype of donkey always bringing large luggage coincidently suits the image of backpackers. The Donkey Friend originates from the Sina travel forum (Seawolf, 2009); ‘donkey friend’ is a respectful name given to outdoor fans, which includes backpackers and adventure travellers.

As one of the few cases of primary research on Chinese backpackers, Zhu (2009) compares Chinese backpackers with Western backpackers in China and there are three contrasting characteristics reported of Chinese backpackers. Firstly, Chinese backpackers are generally older than backpackers from Western countries, which reflects the relatively weak ability for independent travel among the Chinese younger generation. Zhu analyses the deeper reasons for this phenomenon. The first reason is the inveterately traditional Chinese culture. Chinese teenagers, who grow up in an extremely high-pressure education system, are often good at theories but ‘weak in practice’. During a long trip, Western teenagers reportedly show better ability in terms of dealing with emergency issues than Chinese people facing the same situation. The second barrier comes from social pressure and governance. The ‘gap year’ – understood as taking a year off to travel, volunteer or work abroad – is considered a rebellion against orthodoxy, and is not acceptable in either the Chinese educational system or the Chinese moral code. In addition, the ‘one child policy’ leads to a result of ‘excessive attention’ on only children from their parents, which certainly hinders the development of backpacker tourism among Chinese teenagers. In ancient Chinese, the master said: ‘When your parents are alive, do not travel far’. In Chinese culture, the concept of filial piety is rooted in society; therefore, a traveller who ventures far away from home is to some extent regarded as someone who is an idler or irresponsible.
The second difference Zhu suggests is consumption capability. Chinese backpackers tend to spend more money than Western people. One reason is many Chinese independent travellers label themselves as backpackers; however, they are not sensitive enough about their travel budgets. Another reason is Chinese backpacking has developed from adventure travel (Zhu, 2009), rather from ‘drifting’ or ‘wandering’ as it has in Western countries (Cohen, 2011). Thus Chinese backpackers spend more money on accommodation and various kinds of facilities for outdoor activities. An early study by Zhu (2005) also indicated a trend amongst Chinese backpackers to travel as ‘flashpackers’ (Paris, 2011). In this case, Chinese backpackers have a bounteous travel budget compared with ‘normal’ backpackers.

The third difference Zhu focuses on is the maturity and tolerance of backpackers between West and East. Generally, Chinese backpackers are less experienced compared with Western backpackers in terms of travel frequencies. For transport and accommodation, Chinese backpackers require more supports from supplemental facilities than Western backpackers. Finally, regarding risk perception, Chinese backpackers show greater risk sensitivity.

Lim (2009) also concludes three ‘Chinese characteristics’ of ‘donkey friends’. Firstly, Lim stresses the role of the Internet in constituting the whole Chinese backpacker experience, and suggests, besides physical backpacker enclaves, online enclaves require further research. Sharing and gaining backpacking experience and sources on some key travel forums is the main channel for Chinese backpackers to collect information. Also, since Chinese backpackers normally do not travel alone, Chinese travel forums help backpackers to form travel communities by making friends who are going to the same destination. In keeping with this line, Ong and du Cros (2011) employed virtual ethnography to observe the motivations and interactions of Chinese backpackers through a tourism forum in order to offer insight into Chinese backpacker outbound travel in Macau.
The second ‘Chinese characteristic’ reported by Lim (2009) is that Chinese backpackers create a ‘distinct cultural entity’ by introducing a particular linguistic and behavioural code, such as ‘donkey friends’, ‘donkey travel’, and ‘masochism’. This phenomenon, with a strong involvement of Chinese vocabulary and slang, is independent of common backpacker culture and is a unique communicational code for Chinese backpackers.

The last character Lim mentioned is the core value and ethos of social interaction among Chinese backpackers. Since Chinese backpacker tourism is ‘out of line’ with Western backpacking development, they tend to stress communities while backpacking other than the ‘carefree’ attitude reported of Western backpackers (Lim, 2009). Nonetheless, Chinese backpackers do tend to stress freedom, equality, democracy and altruism during their trips.

Besides Zhu (2009) and Lim (2009), the study by Ong and du Cros (2011) also concludes three characteristics of Chinese backpackers, which hold that they tend to be: more communal in nature; highly active socialisers in travel forums; and lean towards shorter lengths of stay. Kristensen (2013) points out that highly social active socialisers in travel forums results in many backpackers become celebrities within Chinese social media, attracting millions of viewers who marvel at their latest travel achievements. A number of them have even signed contracts with publishers and become professional travel writers. The reason for the popularity of these Chinese backpacker celebrities could be the significance of ‘word-of-mouth’ exchanges in Chinese culture, on the hand, the value of social recognition is one important pushing factor: pictures or travel diaries are powerful tools used to create an edge within the social media world, thus heightening one’s social status (Kristensen, 2013).

Influenced by traditional Chinese culture discussed in Chapter Two, characteristics of Chinese backpackers are massively related to Chinese cultural values. High power distance mainly reflected in a high social hierarchy in backpacker communities. According to Lim (2009), a ‘head donkey’ is
comparably common in Chinese backpacker communities. In addition, high-risk sensitivity was addressed by Xiang (2013) and Maoz (2007) earlier when discussing the destination choice and ‘doing homework’ habits. Furthermore, the collectivistic culture results in Chinese backpackers emphasising the importance of communities and preferring to travel as a group and to value group interaction (Luo, Huang and Brown, 2015), which are relatively different characteristics to those attributable to Western backpackers.

Differing from distinct differences in characteristics between Western and Chinese backpackers, Chen, Bao and Huang (2014) argue that, in terms of motivations for backpacking, Chinese backpackers are not significantly different from those from the West. In the setting of Western long-haul travel, a study by Prayag, Cohen and Yan (2015) suggested that self-fulfilment, socialisation, and relaxation are important motives for young Chinese outbound travellers. It is noticeable, however, that with the trend of blurred boundaries in liquid modernity, there are few differences between Western backpackers and Chinese backpackers, as well as backpackers and mainstream tourists (Larsen, Ogaard and Brun, 2011).

Beyond donkey friends’ characteristics and motivations, Luo, Huang and Brown (2015) adopt a netnographic approach to compare Chinese backpackers and Western backpackers in terms of their travel behaviours. Luo, Huang and Brown (2015) compare similarities and differences among the choice of accommodation, travel organisation, lengths of the trip, on-road social interaction, and on-road travel activities. These are five backpacker criteria for the backpacker definition (Pearce, 1990). In the findings, Luo, Huang and Brown (2015) highlight that Chinese backpackers tend to travel in groups, and enjoy group interaction in comparison to Western backpackers who tend to travel alone and to meet ‘others’. The preference of staying in camps and guest houses, as well as hiking as the most popular on-road activities show the influence of adventure travel in
Chinese backpackers' identity. In addition, wider choices of accommodation and shorter lengths of trips also show the flashpacking stream of influence.

4.6 Chinese backpackers: Adventure travellers or Flashpackers?

Two approaches have been addressed to understand Chinese outbound backpackers from different perspectives. The first angle looks at the emerging flow of Chinese independent outbound travellers. The second perspective looks at the conceptual idea of backpackers, which traces back to the typology of tourists (Cohen, 1974). Thus, I suggest that Chinese backpackers are complexly influenced by the idea of an ‘explorer’ from Cohen (1973)’s typology, the emerging Western backpacker culture (which encourages independence and freedom), as well as Chinese values. Even though the concept of its origination from ‘explorer’ arguably still requires more academic support, current Chinese backpacker culture can be understood as the combination of Western and Eastern cultural flows.

So far in this chapter, these two approaches show the unique characteristics, and indicates the multiple values that influence and construct the current Chinese backpacker. From the approach of independent travellers, many scholars understand backpackers as being part of independent travellers (Hyde and Lawson, 2003; Prayag, Cohen and Yan, 2015). Whilst Nash, Thyne and Davies (2006) consider independent travellers and backpackers as largely synonymous. Thus, characteristics that tech-savvy and affluent budgets of Chinese independent travellers also apply to part of Chinese backpackers' characteristics as an influence on modern Chinese travel culture. These characteristics also match Chinese backpackers to flashpackers (Paris, 2009). In addition, the ‘backpacker ideology’ (Welk, Richards and Wilson, 2004) cannot fully be practised by Chinese outbound backpackers in Europe, because of visa application procedures. Both the Schengen visa and the British tourism visa are valid for only relatively limited periods of time, and require
independent Chinese travellers to provide booking details regarding transport and accommodation, as well as a comprehensive itinerary. These requirements challenge backpacker characteristics, such as flexibility of itineraries and taking longer trips. More ethnographic insight is suggested in order to find out how Chinese backpackers cope with these regulations in their overall travel experiences.

The other approach indicates a strong relationship between adventure travellers and Chinese backpackers, which seems to lead to another direction for independent Chinese travellers. Chinese adventure travellers always identify themselves as ‘donkey friends’, which causes ambiguity as those independent travellers stress the importance of cultural interactions and independence, but do not undertake any extreme activities also declare themselves as ‘donkey friends’. Two main factors are driving exploration from other directions, as well as giving rise to issues about the definition of Chinese outbound backpackers. Firstly, Chinese outbound travellers are known as highly risk conscious, which stands opposed to adventure travel. Secondly, ‘donkey friends’ stress the importance of natural experiences rather than social experiences, which to some extent differs from the value of backpacking travel. Although Zhu (2005) suggests Chinese backpackers are influenced significantly by adventure travel, the term ‘donkey friend’ cannot represent Chinese backpackers, particularly Chinese outbound backpackers.

In this case, I suggest Chinese backpackers can be roughly divided into two main categories, given the complex nature influenced by multiple streams of culture. The first category is adventurous travellers who claim themselves as donkey friends, who are significantly influenced by landscape appreciation as found in traditional Chinese travel culture. The other category is the affluent and tech-savvy flashpackers, who are the main force of Chinese independent travellers. Both groups are highly influenced by Chinese values such as group orientation, interdependence and conformity in terms of practising backpacking. Although the adventure traveller cluster of Chinese backpackers is relatively popular, in terms of outbound backpacking (especially outbound backpacking in the
West), the cultural barriers and visa restrictions still play key roles that prevent this group of Chinese adventurous backpackers from travelling. Instead, flashpackers predominate Chinese outbound backpackers.

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter has explored Chinese outbound backpackers from two approaches: Chinese outbound tourism and backpacker literature, not only reviewing the literature of the Chinese outbound market and backpacker characteristics, but also critiquing Zhu's (2009) argument that Chinese backpackers originate from the ‘explorer’. To sum up, the development of Chinese backpackers was influenced by various factors: the ‘explorer’, Chinese traditional culture, China's governance and policy, as well as a changing society; these are all to some extent shaping current Chinese backpacker culture. With the high engagement of ICT and relatively affluent backpacking budgets, Chinese backpackers share many common characteristics with flashpackers, as suggested by Paris (2009). Demographically, Chinese backpackers are senior and well-educated; in terms of motivation they have no significant differences from Western backpackers, but have higher risk concerns and prefer to travel in groups. Contradictorily, the impact of landscape appreciation deriving from traditional Chinese travel culture, drives the ‘explorer’ side of Chinese backpackers. Consequently, the uniqueness of Chinese backpackers requires special attention and further research. This is supported by Uriely, Yonay and Simchai (2002), who suggest that studies from different parts of the world reveal certain commonalities and differences in both the forms and the content of backpacking. In addition, the setting of Chinese outbound backpacker travel in Europe brings thoughts of negotiating ideologies, which are dynamic and performed by backpackers’ daily practice; this also stresses the importance of building and maintaining networks during the trip, both virtually and physically.
CHAPTER 5 METHODOLOGY

5.1 Introduction

This methodology chapter aims to build a bridge between theory and practice, for the purpose of creating and developing knowledge by conducting fieldwork and analysing data. As a study adopting an abductive approach, Chapters Two and Three constructed the theoretical approach, whilst this chapter will show the design and practice of the data collection and analysis. Table 5-1 shows an overview of research approaches that will be adopted in this study.

Table 5-1 Research Overview

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Philosophies/Paradigms</th>
<th>Positivism</th>
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<td>Action research</td>
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netnography, not only to cover the intersecting networked sociality both corporeally and virtually, but also to seek a comprehensive understanding of the experience from multiple perspectives. I will also discuss how I collected the data from June to November 2014. Issues such as reflexivity, ethics, quality and data analysis will also be covered in this chapter.

5.2 Research Philosophies

Research philosophy is the foundation of the research, which determines the system of beliefs and assumptions of the researcher in terms of their perception of realities, knowledge and researchers themselves. In this case, it is essential to discuss research philosophy at the beginning of the methodology chapter in order to connect the research approach, strategy and technique systematically. Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2011) suggest there are four paradigms that structure research in social science: positivism, realism, interpretivism and pragmatism. These four research paradigms, represent four different worldviews for realities and knowledge production with related research strategies and techniques. Four terms are introduced to inquiry paradigms: ontology, epistemology, methodology, and axiology (Creswell, 1994; Denzin and Lincoln, 2011; Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2011). Among these four inquiry paradigms, knowledge production (epistemology) relies largely on a researcher's definition of reality (ontology). What knowledge the researcher wants to gain determines the methodology (Jones, 1993). For researchers themselves, axiology reflects value and ethics of the researcher throughout the research process.

5.2.1 Positivism/Quantitative vs. Interpretivism/Qualitative

Positivism and interpretivism are two paradigms leading opposite directions of research in terms of perception of realities and knowledge, research strategies, and techniques. Adopted from natural science, the positivist paradigm in social science believes in the existence of the real and observable
Researchers discover the fact from objective and measurable quantitative data, in this case, the positivism paradigm tends to be associated with a quantitative approach (Goodson and Phillimore, 2004) and mainly in line with a deductive approach, by testing a hypothesis. In terms of the researcher, the positivism paradigm argues that value-free research, which means there is no researcher interference in the data, makes sure the contribution to knowledge by this research is unbiased and accurate.

Differing from the positivism paradigm of adopting a quantitative approach to contributing knowledge or testing a hypothesis by measurable data, interpretivists see social science as a complex world, which can be understood from those who operate within it (Goodson and Phillimore, 2004). In this case, the researcher is not just a value-free tool to test a hypothesis, but more engaged with the research in the production of knowledge, and this engagement provides a contextualised understanding of activities based on participants’ narratives and experiences. Similar to the positivism paradigm associated with the quantitative approach, the qualitative approach is in line with the interpretivism paradigm in order to capture the richness of the world through creating new meanings, narratives, perceptions and interpretations. Rather than applying natural science in the quantitative approach, Sandelowski (1994) locates qualitative studies at the meeting place between science and art, which helps to understand the human dimensions of society from an emic or insider’s perspective. Qualitative research, therefore, refers to the meanings, concept, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols and descriptions of things (Berg and Lune, 2011).

In terms of epistemology, positivism stands on the viewpoint that only observable phenomena can provide credible data; on the other hand, knowledge production for interpretivism is more about subjective meanings and social phenomena, which is leading another direction to the positivist perception of knowledge. In relation to different ways of obtaining knowledge, Carson et al. (2001) suggest that positivism provides possibilities to obtain hard, secure and objective knowledge, which
is governed by hypotheses and stated theories. Differing from positivistic studies focusing on generalisation and abstraction, interpretivism is understood through ‘perceived’ knowledge, which is adopted for understanding a specific and concrete context.

While choosing research philosophy, there is not any paradigm that is better than another. The choice of philosophy highly depends on the research question. In this case, making the decision of the paradigm and research approach for this study should focus back on the research question: to reconceptualise the three-layer system of culture in the mobilities, by exploring Chinese backpackers’ travel experiences in Europe. This study, thus, investigates Chinese backpackers, and focuses on travel experience and theory reconceptualisation, which are engaged by various factors in a longitudinal timeframe. Clearly, travel experience, which is culturally rooted, cannot meaningfully be expressed by numbers (Berg and Lune, 2011). For a study looking at unmeasurable and complex sociality and a dynamic network functioning without certain routine, the interpretivism paradigm is more suitable than other research philosophies in this particular research. In addition, reviews of Chinese outbound tourism study undertaken by Jin and Wang (2016) suggest that most studies related to this issue take a quantitative approach. Studies using an emic approach can bring richer insights of Chinese outbound tourists’ travel experiences. Furthermore, the reconceptualisation process embeds in a liquid modern and mobile setting, which requires engagements of the researcher in knowledge production rather than testing hypotheses. This co-production of knowledge with researchers is associated with the inquiry paradigm of interpretivism.

5.3 Research Strategy

Mobile ethnography as the research strategy is adopted in this study. Among several research strategies in qualitative research, ethnography is preferred in this study firstly because the empirical study is about understanding the experiences of Chinese backpackers. In this case, ethnography provides an opportunity for me to immerse in Chinese backpacker groups to observe their daily
activities and to travel together in order to understand their travel experiences. Secondly, this study aims to reconceptualise the traditional three-layer culture system and to propose a new system in light of mobilities; given the theoretical framework from the literature, the inductive nature of ethnography ensures the adequacy to provide the empirical approach in this abductive process of reconceptualisation. Thirdly, adopting multiple research techniques in the ethnography (Hammersely, 2006) provides more flexibility for the researcher to combine various research techniques according to the research setting and occasions. In this study, assisting participant observation as the dominant research technique, the semi-structured interview was utilised particularly to explore perceptions and feelings, which are difficult to access through participant observation. Combining various techniques in this study ensured the quality of data and the richness of the writing accounts (Atkinson, 1995).

5.3.1 Ethnography

Rooted in 19th Century Western anthropology, ethnography has been applied in different disciplines such as sociology, psychology and human geography (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). As a descriptive account of a community or culture (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007), ethnography suggests researchers immerse in, or engage with the field in order to gain an insight of human beings’ daily lives and culture of the community, by undertaking research methods such as participant observation and in-depth interviews (Kozinets, 2009; Palmer, 2001). In the tourism context, ethnography as a research strategy is widely adopted in anthropological studies to put both tourists and hosts at the centre stage of tourism research. The focuses of these studies are on the cultural, economic, or social impacts of relevant communities or people. Recently, ethnography has been an appealing research strategy for backpacker studies, particularly on the aspect of mobilities and culture (Germann Molz and Paris, 2013), because a sustained presence in backpacker groups has allowed researchers to interact closely with backpackers (Anderskov, 2002; Sørensen, 2003). In these studies, the mobile characteristic of backpackers has been highlighted. In order to
emphasise the mobile nature of backpacking studies, Sørensen (2003) calls for emerging mobile methods, which are more impromptu in terms of the design of fieldwork for backpacker studies rather than classic ethnography. In this case, recent ethnographic studies on backpackers adopt different types of emerging ethnographies to study mobile enclaves corporeally (Johnson, 2010) and virtually (Ong and du Cros, 2011; Luo, Huang and Brown, 2015). When investigating mobile groups, traditional ethnography, which stresses immersing in one location fails to understand the dynamic of sociality and culture of the group; on the other hand, emerging ethnographies such as multi-sited ethnography and netnography make relevant research possible in this context. In this case, by following the researched group, this study involves different types of emerging ethnographies, specifically netnography and multi-sited ethnography. These two types of research strategies were adopted at different stages of the trip.

Ethnography is mainly about fieldwork. For traditional ethnographic studies, the field is relatively obvious, whilst in the case of mobile ethnography, it breaks the anthropological way of conducting place-based and immersive fieldwork for a long period, but is moving towards a more hybrid and mobile mode of research. Based on Marcus (1995)’s new understanding of the world system and a global trend of online activities, mobile methods recently are widely discussed theoretically and practised empirically. For Chinese outbound backpackers as a researched group, the field is not only sited across multiple destinations they have travelled, but also across multiple virtual locations, such as travel discussion forums, blogs, and social networking sites, which requires us to fully engage in their backpacker journey by moving with Chinese backpackers across both physical and virtual spaces. Therefore, this study is going to combine multi-sited ethnography and netnography as the research strategy to obtain a comprehensive understanding of Chinese backpackers’ experiences.

5.3.1.1 Multi-sited ethnography
Marcus (1995) suggests there is a tendency that fragmented and diverse accounts are replacing a firm sense of world system framework. Trends of time-space compression, liquid modernity, the new mobilities paradigm, and globalisation are leading to a macro perspective view of the world system. These cultural processes have provided ideas and impelled the emergence of multi-sited ethnography by arguing that traditional single-sited ethnography is no longer suitable for many contemporary studies. On the other hand, multi-sited ethnography, with its powerful conceptual visions (Marcus, 1995), has significantly influenced academic research, especially anthropology. In this respect, multi-sited ethnography makes cultural studies of the mobile group possible.

There are several modes of techniques for conducting multi-sited ethnographies. The most obvious and conventional mode is to ‘follow the people’ (Marcus, 1995), which can achieve a deep engagement in a mobile community’s worldview by travelling with them (Morris, 2004). Other techniques (for example, following the object, following the metaphor, following the plot, story or allegory) are also widely adopted in a wide range of studies, especially for highly mobile communities such as migrants and tourists.

Looking at this research specifically, Chinese backpackers are the research group to ‘follow’. Bärenholdt (2004) indicates that the technique of ‘following the people’ involves ‘shadowing’ mobile bodies through overt methods, as well as sociological ‘stalking’ (covertly). This technique involves occasional, intermittent conversation and experience at particular places and moments. More interactions are highlighted for this particular technique. Johnson (2010) suggests mobile ethnographers should be effective at dealing with informants, activities and actions, because the whole setting, including the objectives and the researcher, turns into an organisation of ‘moves’ (Büscher and Urry, 2009); therefore, investigating how these mobile elements interact and organise is essential in order to undertake empirical research. Broadening the number and the range of the field allows researchers to trace research groups from site to site and to collect data along the way.
The researcher has to travel with Chinese backpackers in order to achieve a comprehensive understanding of their community culture, mobilities, networks and experience built upon these dynamic factors.

5.3.1.2 Netnography

While Marcus (1995)’s multi-sited ethnography is mainly based on physical settings, it is significant to involve another method to collect data online, which is an essential part of many human beings’ daily lives. For Chinese backpackers specifically, their tech-savvy characteristics and active online communities have been highlighted in studies of Chinese backpackers (Lim, 2009; Ong and du Cross, 2011). Virtual ethnography (Hine, 2000) or netnography (Kozinets, 2009) thus act as an essential part of the methodology being introduced in this research, not only the pre and post trip, but also an increasing trend of adopting ICT and SNS during the trip.

The same as multi-sited ethnography, the introduction of netnography as a research method in social science had been questioned by academics until it succeeded in conducting research in industry (Kozinets, 2009). Today, millions of people use the Internet to communicate and interact through online communities, making it necessary to introduce netnographic research in order to obtain a deeper understanding of the behaviour and culture of various online communities. Lyman and Wakeford (1999) address the importance of studies in the digital world in order to catch up with the fast growing trends in social science. Recently, due to the impact of digital media in various communities’ daily lives, ethnographers are more interested in the digital world as a new field site (Hine, 2005).

At a research technique level, Netnography, set online, is a participant-observation method. It is designed to understand online cultural and communication phenomena by collecting computer-mediated social interaction (Kozinets, 2009). In addition, netnography breaks the boundaries of
location limits, and supports the arguments of multi-sited ethnography. For this backpacker experience research, netnography will help to ‘gain a reflexive understanding of what it is to be part of the Internet’ (Hine, 2000 p.54) by sharing experiences or observing participants’ activities online.

Miller and Slater (2000) highlight three advantages of conducting ethnographic research online. Firstly, the virtual world provides a more researcher-friendly environment for ethnographers to approach their informants and undertake observation. Secondly, as a digital format, it is easier to forward an email to respondents or informants’ friends and families; thus it is a useful tool for taking advantage of snowballing. Thirdly, as a digital format, it is a huge advantage to be able to copy, share, and import to software for further analysis. This saves costs and time expenses related to transcription.

5.3.2 Challenges

There are several criticisms challenging the mobile ethnography, especially from the perspective of anthropological methodologies, which are mainly from conceptual challenges of traditional ethnography. Anthropologists argue that the revolutionary idea of mobile (virtual) ethnography attenuate the power of fieldwork (Marcus, 1995). Based on this, questions arise, such as how far an ethnography can be stretched and can be still regarded as ethnography? Is it practical that an ethnography takes place in many fields for a sustained period? Is ethnography letting its roots too much away from its anthropological origins in terms of becoming more powerful and focusing on a wider range of issues? To answer these queries, it is essential to understand the new trends of the world system mentioned earlier and the interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary fact of current social science research.

Mobile ethnography also poses challenges for ethnographers. Büscher and Urry (2009) challenge the possibilities for researchers to participate in every single site, including physical and virtual
spaces, as well as intangible communication. This also raises the concern of the researcher’s budget and time. It is crucial to take this realistic issue into consideration, and this influences significantly the scale and period of fieldwork. This concern also determines the proportion of conducting corporeal fieldwork and netnography.

For netnography as a methodology specifically, Kozinets (2009) argues for the distinctness of online settings. The uniqueness of online communities shows that netnography should be seen as another methodology compared with a general notion of ethnography. From the perspective of technique, Hine suggests that, compared with the holistic description of ‘face-to-face interaction and the rhetoric of having travelled to a remote field site’ (2000, p. 10), virtual ethnography is ‘wholeheartedly partial’ (2000, p.65). Hine thus suggests that it is unnecessary to draw a distinction line between online and offline fields. In addition, based on the idea of ‘following the people’, it is unnecessary to draw any boundaries between the fields, and this is also suggested by mobile ethnography. The field here is not about its range and number or physical existence, but where activities are undertaken by the researched group. For Chinese backpackers, the move freely across physical and virtual spaces during the trip and the experiences from these two spaces link together intensively so that, in this case, it makes no sense to research them separately.

For empirical concerns, O’Reilly (2008) argues that the key concern when doing ethnographic research online is the real identity of participants, in other words, it is necessary to pay extra attention to who the participants really are and the validity of what they are saying. In addition, observing online activities ‘unannounced’ can be much easier to be criticised as ‘spying’ (Clark, 1998) in terms of ethical concerns; therefore, accessibility and how an ethnographer presents themselves is a difficult issue and should draw more attention at the early stage of conducting netnography.
Currently, the choice of field sites, as well as the format of data for ethnography are faced with more possibilities in a wider context (Hine, 2000; Miller and Slater, 2000; Orgad, 2005; O’Reilly, 2008). With the development of ethnography, more forms of data both virtual and corporeal are coming out to choose from while conducting research. It is worth noting that, when undertaking the technique of ‘following the people’ (Marcus, 1995), various ethnographic approaches can be combined, reorganised, and designed in a suitable way in order to fit the research objective.

5.4 Research Techniques

Participant observation, semi-structured interviews and informal conversational interviews are key research techniques of ethnography, and were introduced to collect data in this study. In general, participant observation was used throughout both virtual and corporeal fields in different stages of the trip, whilst interviews were conducted during the journey. In addition, some materials that explain participants’ behaviour during the trip were collected to support explorations of participants’ planning of trips (written itineraries) and attempts at cross-cultural communication (for example, drawings used to interact with local pub owner while ordering food). In this section, I will discuss participant observation and in-depth interviews these two key research techniques.

5.4.1 Participant Observation

Participant observation, with distinct features of exploring a researched group’s daily life (Burgess, 1984; Silverman, 2011), was adopted as the main technique for data collection in this study. As a study looking into Chinese backpackers’ social relations and how different cultures shape this group of people in their backpacking experiences, participating in a researched community’s daily life and cultural practice provides insights into informal and spontaneous behaviour (Malinowski, 1922; Bates, 1990). In addition, Malinowski argues that participant observation understands a phenomenon from the viewpoint of the ‘native’, as well as minimising distractions caused by the researcher in situ.
Gold (1957) identifies four positions of researchers, in terms of their levels of immersion: complete participant, participant as observer, observer as participant, and complete observer. The complete participant is covert, and risks to lose a sense of objectivity by immersing in the community and going ‘native’; in opposite, the complete observer is overt and detached. The role of observer can be more flexible and mobile, as well as ranges from full immersion to spending a small amount of time in the community. Noticeably, some ethical concerns come with the extent of participation, especially for those observers who are covert. Palmer (2001) indicates that participant observation is supposed to be the least satisfactory in terms of ethical grounds. Clark et al. (1998) argue that covert research might lead to accusations of ‘spying’. In addition, O’Reilly (2008) also addresses that participant observers should take bigger risks with issues of legality if observing illegal community or culture, such as gun and drug culture. Thus, academics themselves should seek a balance between overt and covert, while also taking their subject, profession, occasion and themselves into account (Punch, 1994). Considering these issues, this study uses overt participant observation throughout the data collection considering the feasibility of this research. My role of researcher was announced at the beginning of each study when I contacted potential informants, and the observations started right after obtaining informants’ consent. Before meeting informants in person, observation in the first stage was conducted in the discussion forum and discussion group. In the second stage, participant observation was supported by informal conversational interviews, and was the main data source when travelling with informants. Simultaneously, online observation was conducted to record informants’ activities referring to their physical mobile behaviours. Participant observation continued at the ‘after the trip’ stage, where data was collected through informants’ inner-group communications via WeChat, and experiences recorded through online travel journals.

Although this study applied an overt approach by revealing the role of the researcher in the first instance, over time, informants started to forget my role as a researcher. Instead, my role as a
Chinese backpacker became more appealing to my informants. In order to minimise the impact caused by their regarding me as a researcher, I tended to maximise the ‘backpacker self’ when I was with them, and worked on my field notes without them noticing. This attempt to conduct participant observation is supported by Charmaz (2006, p.25): ‘ethnographers are more likely to participate than observe because their aim is to understand something from being inside it rather than trying to look in from outside’. This also reflects the discussion of emic and etic approaches in this study. The etic approach, which focuses on the principles and interests of the ethnographer, helps to draw the boundary and to highlight the focus of this study; nevertheless, I tended to apply an emic approach in data collection in order to achieve an insider’s view (Given, 2008) to understand how Chinese backpackers perceive the world around them.

5.4.2 In-depth Interviews

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were utilised in this study to explore informants’ emotions and perceptions throughout the backpacking experience. The in-depth interview is a suitable research technique for this study as it allows interpreting the complexity and irreducibility of human experiences from multiple perspectives (O’Reilly, 2004). In this ethnographic study, the role of in-depth interviews tended to be a supporting research technique to participant observation in order to dig deeper in certain topics and discover informants’ opinions, some of which are difficult to acquire from daily observations, whilst some can provide more explanations of what has been observed. A semi-structured format was adopted rather than an unstructured or structured format, as it provided flexibility for informants to express their feelings by offering open-ended questions; on the other hand, with a clear interview agenda, the semi-structuring authorised me to take control the overall flow of the interview.

In this study, I designed two versions of interview agendas. The first version was for those key informants I travelled with throughout their whole journeys. Two interviews were designed for
each informant in the first version: one was conducted at the beginning of the trip, and the other at the end. The first interview tried to understand informants’ preferences, expectations and attitudes, which can be beneficial as a reference to understand participant observation. The second interview summarised informants’ travel experience and explored their perceptions and feelings which cannot be fully obtained by participant observation. The second version was designed for those Chinese backpackers I met during the trip. In total, 21 interviews were conducted from 14 participants, and the average length was 45 minutes. Among these 21 interviews, 14 out of them are from my 7 key informants whom I accompanied throughout their trips, and 7 from participants I met during my trips.

5.5 Reflexivity

As part of knowledge production, the role of the researcher is highlighted in qualitative research. Goodson and Phillimore (2004) suggest that, in order to gain a better understanding of researchers themselves and their interactions in the field, they are required to acknowledge and question their own culture and identity. In this section, the reflexive turn will be highlighted to comprehend the role of the researcher in the meaning-making process. In addition, I am going to unpack myself as a Chinese backpacker and a researcher to evaluate how my ‘research self’ and ‘human self’ (Lather, 1986; Eisner, 1991) fit in this research setting.

5.5.1 Reflexive Turn

Reflexivity is the capacity where researchers reflect their own values and behaviours during the process of material collection and account writing (Feighery, 2006). The importance of reflexivity has been addressed since the 1980s, together with the pressure of textual criticism, culture theory and political debate about social constructions of reality (O’Reilly, 2008). These concerns are reflected as the ‘reflexive turn’ (Clifford and Marcus, 1986), which explores rhetoric in description and interpretation of ethnographic research. In social studies, Ruby (1982) suggests that the lived
experience and worldview of the researcher impact massively on their studies. The reflexive turn highlights the fact that researchers, with their own ontologies, are different in terms of decision-making or preferences of research focus, interpretation and ensconced in a scientific and disciplinary environment (Spencer, 2001).

The issue of reflexivity in methodology is mainly about the discussion of the ‘human self’ and the ‘research self’ (Lather, 1986; Eisner, 1991). Peshkin (1988) explains how researchers normally bring two ‘selves’ with them into the field: ‘the human self that we are in everyday situations and the research self that we fashion for our particular research situation’ (p.270). The ‘research self’ works for the ideology of science that is emphasising ‘scientific objectivity’. The objectivity of science suggests separating subject from object by asking researchers to remain detached and dispassionate in order to do ‘good’ science (Lather, 1986). According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2011), scientific knowledge with objectivity should remove or try to avoid researchers’ personal experiences and emotions. In this respect, various devices are adopted in order to avoid researchers’ biases and to retain objectivity in the research, such as: anonymity, impersonality, detachment, and impartiality. All these are suggesting knowledge, which is ‘out there’, over and above us, and something controls and dominates us (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). On one hand, the objectivity of knowledge remains, and the subjective biases are minimised; however, on the other hand, Guba and Lincoln (1994) argue that the focus on objectivity leads to the depersonalisation and suppression of the researcher’s self and voice, which is the ‘human self’ of the researcher.

5.5.2 Reflexive Methodology

A reflexive methodology demands continuous, intentional, and systematic self-introspection of the researcher throughout the whole process of research (Berg and Lune, 2011). Dupuis (1999) advocates the use of empathy in the entire process of reflexive methodologies, which suggests researchers incorporate personal feelings, emotions and experiences in the analysis. Reflexivity, at
this point, is mainly reflected in researchers asking themselves questions about their perceptions and emotional issues raised at different stages of the study, and how these explain the phenomenon under study (Kleinman and Copp, 1993). The use of empathy throughout the research process also enriches the presentation of the work by weaving emotions and personal experiences into writing. Ruby (1982) argues that researchers as ‘data-gathering instruments’ should outline the specific process by which they gather data. This requires researchers to detail explicitly in their written account how their human selves, emotions and personal experiences influence or affect their decision making and data interpretation. Based on this, O’Reilly (2008) argues that ethnographers should provide readers with a full description of their research, including mistakes, misgiving and disappointments, which provides the opportunity for future researchers to evaluate the written products. More discussion in relation to these issues will be undertaken later in the quality issue (Section 5.10).

Furthermore, reflexive methodology also collaborates and embraces informants and the researcher in the meaning-making process, as discussed above, from the perspective of reflexivity, knowledge is no longer just ‘out there’ but with more engagements with the researcher. Dupuis (1999) recognises the importance of developing a trusting relationship in qualitative research as well as incorporating explicitly self-disclosure of the researcher throughout the research process. This also reflects the idea of conducting auto-ethnography in this study. Lather (1986), one step further, suggests researchers to provide a platform for participants’ critical reactions in terms of the researcher’s worldview, which will contribute to the reflexivity of the work.

Methodologically, engaging both the ‘human self’ and ‘research self’ throughout the research, reflexivity not only suggests the importance of the role that researchers in co-constructing knowledge, but also allows researchers to ‘sign’ on their own work (Eisner, 1991) with their personal experience and emotions by presenting researchers’ studies in their unique voice with
various ways. This allows me to combine and match various research techniques according to the situation in order to capture the moment.

5.5.3 The Researcher as a Chinese Backpacker

Identifying myself as a Chinese backpacker, I acted as an ‘insider ethnographer’ (O’Reilly, 2008) in this study. Although being criticised as too subjective as an insider ethnographer, O’Reilly (2008, p.114) argues that ‘outsiders are less trustworthy, less discerning, lacking commitment to the group, or having no political axe to grind’; in opposite, insider ethnographers have greater access, find it more convenient to target potential interviewees, and easier to interpret responses correctly and obtain knowledge ethically. According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), researchers are required to explicitly and continually assess the impact of factors such as personal experiences, belief systems, motivations and tensions on their work.

As an experienced backpacker myself, I have been questioned about my impact on the nature of the Chinese backpacker group in this study. Lather (1986) argues that a ‘good science’ with credibility, honesty and authenticity does not mean removing the self from a scientific inquiry. He stresses the importance of conscious and deliberate inclusion of both the research self and the human self in the research process (Sandelowski, 1994). Other than minimising the influence, I emphasised the importance of ‘human self’ and treated myself as one of the researched Chinese backpackers; one who has travel experience in Europe and who resides in the UK. I took my background into account, as with other researched backpackers, and tried to balance the role of myself as a backpacker and myself as a researcher during the process. I highly valued the role of co-constructing knowledge in the research process, by openly engaging with the collective experience with informants (Jones, 1993), not only as a researcher immersing with informants, but also as a researched backpacker who creates sociality and travel experience with other backpackers.
Being a reflexive self, I kept reflexive notes throughout the fieldwork to note down my feelings in my dual role of being a researcher and a backpacker. These auto-ethnographic notes are used as part of the data to understand the group dynamic among Chinese backpackers. Being reflexive allowed me to openly engage with my informants without being limited by hesitations or nervousness of being too subjective. In addition, this dual role during the study provided me with a rich interpretation of backpackers’ experiences by being one of the donkey friends, and co-creating the travel experience alongside them.

5.6 Research Design

Considering tourist experience as a phasic construct (Neuhofer, 2014), a liner three-stage model (Killion, 1992; Craig-Smith and French, 1994) was adopted in the research design: before the trip, during the trip, and after the trip (Figure 5-1). Netnography was conducted through the online backpacker forum Qyer.com and China’s most popular social network, WeChat. Qyer.com is a leading Chinese outbound travel site founded by a group of Chinese backpackers in Germany 2004. The literal meaning of Qyer in Chinese is ‘poor (budget) travel’, which is the philosophy of this online community. As one of the most popular travel websites for outbound backpackers, Qyer.com was initially designed for outbound backpackers in Europe, but is now used for destinations all over the world. The focus on European destinations and the emphasis on budget travel make Qyer.com more suitable than other similar travel sites for my research. On the other hand, WeChat, as a combination of social media and instant messenger, offers the best access to informants’ online activities and connectedness.
I undertook a longitudinal approach by accompanying three groups of Chinese backpackers from the same group on three different trips to achieve a deep understanding of their travel experience. During the ‘before the trip’ stage, I contacted informants through the section called ‘looking for travel companions’ on Qyer.com. Netnography started here, and data was collected by contacting my informants, forming the group, to trip planning and preparation. Data including chat history, social media posts and forum discussion was collected through both Qyer.com and WeChat. At the ‘during the trip’ stage, I travelled with my informants and collected data moving in between corporeal and virtual fields by adopting multi-sited ethnography and netnography. The ‘after the trip’ stage focused on my informants’ post-trip activities. At this stage, netnography was used to explore Chinese backpackers’ travel experiences from WeChat Moment (social media channel).
posts and online travel journals. Throughout the process, I kept a reflexive note to record feelings of myself as a backpacker, and interactions with my informants. In total, 570 A4 pages of transcripts from field notes, interviews, reflexive notes, online posts, online chats, and travel journals were collected as raw data.

As an abductive study, the theoretical framework provided outlines for data collection. Table 5-2 shows corresponding research design in relation to the three-layer system of culture. Based on these specific elements as the guideline, I further developed the action plan for participant observation (Appendix) and question design for the in-depth interviews. It is worth noting that I kept an open approach for both designs in order to generate emerging themes from this empirical approach.

5.7 In the Field

5.7.1 Pilot Study

My pilot study was conducted in the Netherlands and Belgium, in April 2014. The study was aimed at examining how efficient multi-sited ethnography and netnography were if adopted as research strategies, in order to meet the aim and objectives of this study. I undertook two mini studies during this pilot: two groups of informants were contacted through Qyer.com. During the pilot study, I adopted different research techniques including semi-structured interview and participant observation. After the fieldwork, I analysed a small sample of data and checked the quality of the results by reflecting on the research question.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5-2 Relevant Research Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>I ideological level</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social level</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Technological Level</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
After the pilot study, I found it is essential to focus more on the area I would like to explore, rather than observing everything from the field. In this case, I revisited the theoretical framework and built stronger links between the empirical approach and the theoretical approach (Table 5-2) in order to ensure the quality and coherency of the data collected. The action plans and interview outline were also modified, according to Table 5-2. Furthermore, as a first-time ethnographer, the pilot study also helped me to get ready for some technical skills, such as observation and note-taking.

5.7.2 Access

Figure 5-2 shows the process of informant selection, access and choice of the field. I started my first stage of fieldwork from June 2014 by contacting potential informants through Qyer.com (穷游网). After obtaining a Schengen visa and receiving approval from the administrator of Qyer.com, I started looking for my potential informants on the Europe forum. Qyer.com, with user-friendly design on their ‘buddy-up section’, ensures smooth access to informants.

**Figure 5-2 Participants and Fields selection process**
5.7.3 Informants Criteria and Field Choice

After gaining approval from the administrator, I started to participate in the section ‘Backpacking in Europe’. In this section, European destinations are divided into 16 sub-sections. Most subsections consist of more than one country, and the combination of destinations mainly depends on the location and the similarity of the cultures, from Chinese perception. For example, Spain, Portugal and Andorra are combined as a sub-group, whilst the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxemburg are combined as another. While choosing destinations, I located my three studies in three of these sub-sections. The first trip was undertaken in Spain and Portugal, the second study was a road trip around the UK, and the third study was conducted in Poland. The duration of these three trips also differed: The Southern European and UK trips lasted around a month and two weeks respectively, whilst the Poland trip only lasted one week. Table 5-3 gives an overview of these three trips.

Table 5-3 Field Trip Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trip</th>
<th>Destination</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Group Size</th>
<th>Informants’ Age Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Spain + Portugal</td>
<td>34 Days</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>24 - 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>16 Days</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>40-45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>7 Days</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Purposive sampling was used in this study, as it allows researchers to target and select the right group of people to answer the research question and meet the researcher’s aims and objectives (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2011). After choosing destinations, I participated actively in these three sub-groups to recruit my informants. Qyer.com is accessible for all online users without
registration, and there are no criteria to become a member. I did not draw a line to distinguish Chinese backpackers from other types of travellers in this research, instead, the informant selection criteria were based on characteristics of typical backpackers (Richards and Wilson, 2004), Chinese backpackers (Zhu, 2005), and emerging trends of backpackers such as flashpackers, which are more suitable for the characteristics of Chinese backpackers. One fundamental criterion was that selected informants identified themselves as backpackers. The process of informant selection was operationalised by judging potential informants’ chat history on the posts, personal chats, and final confirmation. From their itineraries, flexibilities and openness of the journey, I made the final decision to confirm informants.

In order to explore the structure and dynamics of the three-layer cultural system in the mobile setting, I decided to cover various groups of Chinese backpackers. Reflecting among these three trips, I have been to Spain and Portugal previously, it was my first time visiting Poland, and I live in the UK. So as the ‘human self’, I played different roles among these three trips in terms of my experiences and expectations. I tried to match up different ages, genders, backgrounds, group sizes, travel experiences, and durations of the trips (Table 5-3). Although this study did not attempt to test these variables, it is interesting to see how travel experiences were created among these differences.

5.7.4 Fieldwork

The travel group was formed through Qyer.com before the journey began. Wayne, Luke and Joey are key informants of this study (shown as darker orange in Table 5-4). Each of them had distinct backgrounds and motivations to shape this backpacking trip: Wayne is an architect and taking a career gap, Joey is a full-time student from Paris majoring in fashion design, and Luke is an experienced backpacker who has already travelled for half a year. This was his final trip before going back to China. They represent different types of Chinese backpackers. I travelled with them
as a group for a month, and data was collected through daily observations, plus two semi-structured interviews with each informant. Other participants (Lydia, Zhang, Lucy & Sam, shown as light orange in Table 5-4) in this study are Chinese backpackers who we met on the road. Data was collected from those four through an in-depth interview. The trip was unexpectedly extended for ten days since my wallet was stolen in Lisbon. I continued my fieldwork until our final stop in Madrid. While waiting for an alternative visa to be provided by the UK Home Office, I conducted auto-ethnography more intensively during this period to look at my own experiences and encounters as a solo Chinese backpacker.

**Table 5-4 Informants Information Trip 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Travel Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WAYNE</td>
<td>Guangdong</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>Architect</td>
<td>Southeast Asia/China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LUKE</td>
<td>Sichuan</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Bachelor’s degree in US</td>
<td>Graduated student</td>
<td>Most places in the world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JOEY</td>
<td>Xinjiang</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Undergrad in Paris</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>France/Belgium/China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LYDIA</td>
<td>Guangdong</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Master’s in the UK</td>
<td>Graduated student</td>
<td>Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TED</td>
<td>Jiangsu</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Accountant</td>
<td>Southeast Asia, Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LUCY &amp; SAM(COUPLE)</td>
<td>Shanghai</td>
<td>33/34</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Teacher/Self-employed</td>
<td>Europe, South Asia, America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LILY</td>
<td>Sichuan</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Undergrad in China</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>China</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key Participants

Backpackers met on the road
The second study (Figure 5-4) was conducted in the UK from September to October 2014. Differing from the diverse backgrounds of informants in the first study, participants in the second study share more in common. These informants are all in their 40s, self-defined as backpackers, well-educated, affluent, and combined national holiday and annual leave in order to take this trip (Table 5-5). This group of Chinese backpackers represent a big source market from Chinese backpackers, who are older than Western backpackers, and more affluent (Zhu, 2005). Although they are well-travelled, it was their first time finding travel companions online. This gives interesting outputs for this study. I travelled with Gigi and Jocelyn for 16 days, while Kate only joined this study for eight days due to her limited holiday allowance. By doing a road trip, we did not encounter other Chinese backpackers. In this case, the data of this study was collected only from participant observations and interviews with key informants.
Table 5-5 Informants Information Trip 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Travel Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GIGI</td>
<td>Guangdong</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>MBA</td>
<td>Marketing in a Bank</td>
<td>New Zealand, Southeast Asia, Japan, South Asia, Iran, Morocco, Europe, China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JOCELYN</td>
<td>Guangdong</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>HR in a Bank</td>
<td>Australia, Japan, Southeast Asia, China, Eastern Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KATE</td>
<td>Hunan</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>MBA</td>
<td>Clothes trading</td>
<td>Sri Lanka, Europe, Southeast Asia, Australia, China</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key Participants

Backpackers met on the road

Figure 5-4 Fieldwork 2: UK
For the third study (Figure 5-5), I was planning to take two small trips in a row. For the first trip, my key informant was Jennifer, in her 30s, who works in an international company. The rotation of her job gives her opportunities to fulfil her dream: to travel around the world. During this four months’ rotation in Amsterdam, she took nearly all weekends to travel. For the second trip, potential informant Harry, who had just finished his Master’s course in the UK, was planning a trip before going back to China. There are many professionals and international students such as Jennifer and Harry who take this opportunity to backpack around Europe. The preliminary plan was that I would travel with Jennifer in Poland, meet Harry, and travel with him to Norway. Since both Harry and Jennifer had a relatively strict schedule in terms of time, it was challenging to schedule both of them into the same trip. Alternatively, I combined two studies into one trip.
However, Henry’s application for a Schengen visa was declined after I had booked all of my own travel tickets. I decided to continue my trip, since both the train and air tickets were not refundable. Instead of participant observation, I conducted an interview with Harry through Skype, after the trip. During the trip to Poland, we met up with two other Chinese backpackers, and I conducted interviews with them as well (Table 5-6). Interestingly these two other Chinese backpackers we met during the trip had jobs with a similar nature to Jennifer’s, and this group of people have been overlooked in the Chinese backpacker literature.

**Table 5-6 Informants Information Trip 3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Travel Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>JENNIFER</td>
<td>Beijing</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>MBA</td>
<td>IT</td>
<td>Europe, Southeast Asia, America, Turkey, West Asia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JERRY</td>
<td>Sichuan</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>IT</td>
<td>Europe, America, China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JUESTIN</td>
<td>Beijing</td>
<td>35-40</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>IT</td>
<td>GCC, Europe, US, Southeast Asia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HARRY</td>
<td>Shanghai</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Master</td>
<td>Graduated Student</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The informants across the three trips are different types of Chinese backpackers. Some are main groups of Chinese backpackers identified in the literature (Zhu 2007; Lim 2009), such as affluent backpackers who are older than the Western backpackers in my second study. Besides flashpackers, career gapers, experienced backpackers, and international students in the first study are also identified as main forces of Chinese backpackers. It is interesting to see that there are some ‘professional nomads’ who use their work allocations as a chance to travel. With the trend of globalisation, this way of backpacking, combining leisure and work, could potentially see a new trend in Chinese outbound backpacking groups.
5.8 Data Analysis

In this study, multiple techniques are involved in data collection and rough notes were also taken during data collection. At the end of any given travel day, it is necessary for the researcher to turn these rough notes into more coherent notes. Categorisation of materials is essential throughout the whole data collection process in order to gain better analysis of how the material refers to theories. In terms of ethnography, ‘thick description’ (Geertz, 1973) will be the key theme while moving to data analysis and the rhetoric stage. In qualitative studies, analysis, writing and interpretation to some extent are inextricably linked (O'Reilly, 2008; Silverman and Marvasti, 2008). In the analysis process, interpretation is essential in order to transfer collected materials into presentable arguments. In order to minimise the missing authenticity at the data analysis stage, data were coded and analysed in Chinese, and only translated in the stage of writing. In addition, self-reflexivity played an essential part in the discourse, not only to enrich the narrative from another perspective but also help me to re-check the creditability of the interpretation.

Thematic analysis was adopted in this study. This approach allows a researcher to interpret empirical material and seek emerging themes in order to seek answers from the conceptual framework (Patton, 1990). In addition, Veal (2006) stresses that the thematic analysis approach is based on a combination of deductive theories and inductive empirical materials. The conceptual framework will lead the categorisation and determines certain themes at the first stage, while interpretation and deeper insights within or across these themes will lead to another stage, where the proposed conceptual framework will be examined critically.

After three-rounds of coding, nine themes emerged by combining ideas among and beyond three layers of the cultural system. These nine themes are: group orientation: a paradox of risk concern; maintaining the group harmony; interaction outside the travel group; material affordance of mobilities; collective intelligence; connectedness; Chinese backpackers’ interpretation of Western
backpacker culture; backpacking as a rite of passage; Chinese outbound backpackers: a conflict between Chinese and Western ideologies. Instead of focusing on one single layer of the cultural system, most themes include two or three layers in order to see the reconceptualisation of the cultural system in light of mobilities. These nine themes were allocated in three findings chapters, which will be discussed later in this thesis.

5.9 Ethical Issues

Ethical issues are about moral and responsible daily practice in research (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2011). According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2011), three moral principles of ethical research practices have been addressed: respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. Among these three principles, issues such as informants’ privacy, anonymity, safety, as well as considerations of distributive justice for those who benefit from the study and those who do not. In addition, ethical concerns should cover the whole research procedure, from research design to writing up and analysing results.

Among these three moral principles, more attention should be paid to having respect for Chinese backpackers as the researched group of my study. While designing research and gaining access, I ensured that backpackers who participate in the study and gatekeepers of the travel forums are fully informed by explaining participant information and obtaining informants’ consent through literary agreements, not only for gaining the right to utilise their data, but also protecting the personal rights and privacy of the informants themselves. In terms of observations, consent was implied while observation was undertaken in a public area; whilst conducting participant observation in private areas and online forums where registration is required, I also fully disclosed my presence. Particularly for netnography, Kozinets (2009) stressed that it is crucial to declare a researcher’s affiliations and intentions throughout the research.
While moving into the data collection stage, issues discussed in the accessing stage should be maintained, such as participants’ safety, confidentiality and anonymity. More issues arising in the data collection stage are about research techniques; particularly for observations. Bryman (2003) brings up the issue of ‘reactivity’, which is more about participants’ reactions towards a researcher and research instruments. During the data collection process, I used different types of techniques to collect data, such as a camera, traditional note-taking with recordings, as well as screenshots taken from social media. I informed my informants of all these research techniques. When they felt uncomfortable with one research technique, I adopted an alternative one. In addition, I also drew a clear line for what is permissible to observe and what is not. In this case, the action plan for observation functioned as a reminder to the ‘human self’ that do not cross the line and observe informants’ behaviour related to their personal lives. Furthermore, I also maintained confidentiality and anonymity at the stage of analysis and reporting.

5.10 Quality Issues

A number of quality issues can be identified in relation to conducting qualitative research. Different from quantitative studies applying criteria such as generalisability, objectivity, reliability and validity, qualitative studies use different criteria to evaluate the quality of qualitative research. For this study, trustworthiness, rich rigour and sincerity were applied to ensure the quality of this research.

5.10.1 Trustworthiness

In terms of a scientific inquiry, trustworthiness is to ‘demonstrate truth value, provide the basis for applying it, and allow for external judgements to be made about the consistency of its procedures and the neutrality of its finds and decisions’ (Erlandson, 1993, p.29). Credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability are four criteria of trustworthiness (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Decrop, 2004).
Referring to the trustworthiness, verisimilitude, and plausibility of research findings, credibility in qualitative studies is more about the personal and interpersonal skills in terms of dealing with the interactive and participative relationship between the researcher and their subjects (Henderson, 1991; Decrop, 2004; Tracy, 2010). In this case, credibility can be enhanced by thick description, triangulation and informant verification. For an ethnographic study, thick description is one of the most significant means to achieve credibility. It is essential to provide a complex and expansionistic depiction that explicates culturally situated meanings and abundant details (Geertz, 1973). To ensure a thick description of this study, at the stage of data collection, I tried to capture detailed moments by comprehensive field notes, and used self-reflective techniques to note down my own experiences. During the ‘writing up’ stage, I tried to paint a clear picture of the situation by combining different sources of data, and explained in as much detail as possible in order to make my experience concrete for readers. In addition, these ‘thick descriptions’ also explore and access tacit knowledge and transfer into presentable data.

Thick description can also enhance the transferability of qualitative research. While statistical generalisation of qualitative data is inapplicable for qualitative research, knowledge generated through qualitative methods can still analytically transfer to other objects (people, settings, phenomena, etc.). Transferability is achieved when a reader can transfer the study to their own situation to create the idea that readers have experienced the same thing in another arena. Although this study uses Chinese backpackers as a case to reconceptualise the traditional three-layer system of culture, later in this thesis, I will also have a section to discuss how the reconceptualised system can be adopted in other settings.

What triangulation suggests in social science is to use information from various angles and perspectives to corroborate, elaborate or illuminate the research problem in order to limit bias from the researcher and from methodology. In this study, different forms of data were collected by
various techniques, and field notes are suggested in order to involve non-verbal behaviour and communicational aspects.

The approach of informant verification is to ask informants to verify a written account. In terms of in-depth interviews, besides being well-prepared before the fieldwork (for example, the level of knowledge, the level of information supplied to the interviewee), I also utilised several skills during the interview. These included: confirming my understanding by summarising interviewees’ ideas, and asking interviewees to explain specific terms or ambivalent expressions where necessary (Healey and Rawlinson, 1994).

Relating to reliability in quantitative research, the term ‘dependability’ is suggested to look at consistency and reproducibility of qualitative studies (Decrop, 2004). Dependability acts to ensure correspondence between data collected and what is actually happening. To ensure dependability, a detailed but flexible research plan, prolonged engagement in the field, use of multiple research techniques, and asking for other opinions in data interpretations were methods adopted.

Other than objectivity as a criterion in quantitative studies, confirmability looks at how neutral the findings are. I kept a reflexive journal about my observations, interviews, interpretation, and daily basis as a reference for collected data to ensure the confirmability of this research. In addition, feedback and suggestions from both of my supervisors were also helpful to assess confirmability.

5.10.2 Rich Rigour

Rich rigour was proposed by Tracy (2010) as a criterion of high-quality qualitative research. Rigour, in this case, is about the scale of data, the care and practice of data collection, as well as the interpretation procedure; therefore, I was well-prepared before entering the field. Data was recorded instantly by various means, such as photos, voice memos, digital recorders, and my phone, and further organised at the end of every day. The process of data collection finished when it came
to the stage of data saturation. Explanations of how data was organised and generated into themes were provided earlier to ensure the rigour of this study. All the steps of this study followed a rigorous lens to ensure data was properly collected, translated, and presented in a thorough and coherent manner.

5.10.3 Sincerity

The term sincerity means to ensure the honesty and transparency of the researcher in terms of dealing with research biases, mistakes, goals and foibles. Self-reflexivity, addressed earlier, is significant in relation to achieving sincerity of a study. It is essential for the researcher to position and reflect himself accurately throughout the whole research process. What is required to be addressed here is that we cannot avoid researcher bias, but it is necessary to be aware of those threats to reliability in order to manage and control them (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2011). In this case, as the researcher, I reflected on my own perceptions and behaviour throughout the research process to make sure my behaviour, reactions, and discourse did not impact negatively on the research results. Reflexivity helps to declare the significance of the researcher as a ‘human self’ involved in the study, particularly important in relation to the observation process and the stage of writing ethnography. In addition, in terms of transparency, throughout the data collection and analysis periods, my supervisors kept a record to ensure the research was carried out methodically.

5.11 Conclusion

This chapter clarified the choice of the methodological framework, discussed how the research plan was designed, and summarised how data was collected and analysed. Ethics, trustworthiness, rich rigour, and sincerity were adopted to ensure the quality and the integrity of the collected data. This methodology chapter provides strong linkage between the theories and settings discussed in Chapters Two to Four, and the empirical findings in Chapters Six to Eight. In the present chapter, the literature constructs guidelines and instructions for data collection, so that the empirical
findings can provide adequate and relevant arguments by reference to the extant literature. By combining multi-sited ethnography and netnography, the research method further develops Marcus (1995)’s ‘follow the people’ concept. It also reflects the ubiquity of technologies in daily lives and on holiday. To research tourist experiences, particular tech-savvy Chinese backpackers, their online experience as an essential element that co-create the travel experience cannot be overlooked. Nine themes were generated from data analysis. These nine themes will allocate in the following three finding chapters. I will discuss how these nine themes are organised into three finding chapters at the beginning of the next chapter.
CHAPTER 6 MOBILE SOCIALITY

6.1 The structure of findings chapters

As mentioned in the methodology section of this thesis, an abductive approach was applied to undertake the thematic analysis. In Chapter Five, the three-layer system of culture suggests a scope of the ethnographic fieldwork, and guides the coding as a theoretical reference; on the other hand, an open approach of coding was adopted parallel to the theory-guided coding in order to investigate the dynamic and potential reconceptualisation of the original three-layer system in the mobilities and theoretical constructs discussed in Chapter Three. Nine themes emerged by combining ideas among and beyond the three-layer system. These nine themes are: group orientation: a paradox of risk concern; maintaining the group harmony; interaction outside the travel group; material affordance of mobilities; collective intelligence; connectedness; Chinese backpackers’ interpretation of Western backpacker culture; backpacking as a rite of passage; Chinese outbound backpackers: a conflict between Chinese and Western ideologies.

These nine themes were then clustered into three groups and allocated into three finding chapters by looking at issues of sociality, ideology, and materiality that practised by Chinese backpackers. Although these chapters are organised through the structure of the original three-layer system, each chapter goes beyond the focus of the original approach, and provides empirical supports towards the process of reconceptualisation through the thick description of Chinese backpackers' experiences. Chapter Six discusses themes of group orientation: a paradox of risk concern; maintaining the group harmony; and interaction outside the travel group, to unpack issues about mobile sociality of Chinese backpackers in the trips. Themes of Chinese backpackers' interpretation of Western backpacker culture; backpacking as a rite of passage; Chinese outbound backpackers: a conflict between Chinese and Western ideologies were allocated to Chapter Seven to explore various streams of values that negotiate within Chinese backpackers. In Chapter Eight, themes of
material affordance of mobilities; collective intelligence; and connectedness are included to investigate different roles that non-human actors play in Chinese backpackers’ experiences. Overall, these three finding chapters aim to provide a complex and comprehensive understanding of Chinese backpackers’ experiences by exploring influences and interactions between and among elements of the original three-layer system.

6.2 Introduction

Social elements play a pivotal role in backpacker journeys. Meeting people is one of the key backpacker characteristics (Loker-Murphy, 1997; Welk, Richards and Wilson, 2004) that distinguishes them from other tourists. For Chinese backpackers as social seekers (Chen, Bao and Huang, 2014), stories created in mobile sociality to some extent influence and determine the overall travel experience. In this chapter, I intend to explore how mobile sociality is created and maintained by Chinese backpackers throughout the mobilities. In addition to discussing ‘interactions with others’ as key backpackers’ behaviours, in this chapter I am also going to address issues of group orientation and group dynamics among Chinese backpackers to understand why Chinese backpackers are inclined to travel in groups, and how Chinese values of harmony influence mobile sociality in order to reflect the broader picture of reconceptualisation of the three-layer system of culture. Three themes of mobile sociality will be explored in this chapter (Figure 6-1). In the ‘Group Orientation: a paradox of risk concern’ I will explore the reason for the small group travel phenomenon among Chinese backpackers. Within the theme of ‘maintaining the group harmony’, I will further discuss four sub-themes as shown in Figure 6-1, to see the role of various Chinese values in the mobile travel group. This chapter then will discuss the third theme – ‘interactions outside the travel group’ to investigate how Chinese backpackers bring in new understandings of practising this Western backpacker culture.
6.3 Group Orientation: a paradox of risk concerns

I found it is quite difficult to find friends to travel with me. In China, it is not that easy to ask for annual leave, especially in my age, most of friends cannot ask for enough holiday leave to afford a European trip. In addition, friends around me mostly have a family. Looking for like-minded people in Qyer.com to travel together are much easier (Wayne, 28, interview, Spain–Portugal trip).

To clarify, group orientation of Chinese backpackers is different from mass package tours, which is currently the mainstream of the Chinese outbound market. For Chinese backpackers, their groups are normally around 2-6 people, and they self-guide throughout the journey. According to the literature reviewed in Chapters Two and Four, Chinese backpackers from a collectivistic culture, on one hand, prefer group activities, on the other, looking to practice backpackers’ values of freedom and flexibility. In Chapter Four, I reviewed relevant literature of group orientations of Chinese backpackers by emphasising the sense of community while backpacking, which distinguish themselves from ‘carefree’ Western backpackers (Lim, 2009). There are several “push factors” that
motivate individual Chinese backpackers to find travel companions and form a small group before their trip. Firstly, as discussed in Chapter Two, from Confucius ideology and traditional Chinese society, long distance travel for individual Chinese backpackers is discouraged (Yu, 1994). Acknowledging the fact that Western individualism has been influencing current Chinese values and reshaping the society since the reforming and opening-up in the 1980s (Cai and Wood, 1993; Faure and Fang, 2008), for outbound travel, group travel is still preferable for Chinese people at the current stage, even for backpacking (Wang and Sheldon, 1995; Mok and DeFranco, 2000).

Secondly, from a collectivistic society, some informants showed their resistance towards travelling individually in order to avoid loneliness, even though they have the ability to do so. During an interview in Poland, Jennifer (31) expressed her strong opposition towards travelling alone:

*It is so boring to travel alone, especially when you are having a meal in a restaurant, people around you are all in pairs or groups, and it makes me feel so uncomfortable. Last time I tried to travel alone was in South France. That was the only time I travelled alone, probably would be my last time too – I swore I would never travel alone again. What a waste with such a good view but no one to share with you. I didn’t even want to sit in the restaurant – it was too pathetic to have dinner alone, so most of the time I just grabbed some fast food and sat at a small table, quickly ate and left. In France, there are so many cafés that have seats outside, it is so nice to have a group of friends or couple to sit there and enjoy the sunshine, but when you are travelling alone, you cannot do it (interview Warsaw).*

Besides avoiding loneliness, a high level of risk sensitivity (Quintal, 2010; Wong and Lau, 2001), and its influence on safety concerns in tourist behaviour (Money and Crotts, 2003; Litvin, Crotts and Hefner, 2004) is the main factor that motivates Chinese backpackers to travel in a small group: ‘since I do not have much experience travelling alone, it will be safer for me to find others to travel together’ (Wayne, 28, Toledo). Correspondingly, Jocelyn (45) from the UK trip used the term ‘take care’ to describe the helpfulness of travel companions and the reason she chose to travel in a group. Thus, on one hand, small group travel fulfils the need to avoid high risk; on the other, ‘taking care’
of each other and avoiding loneliness both show the impact of interdependence as a Chinese value (Hsu, 1971; 1972) influencing the group orientation. When recalling our backpacking group, Gigi (from the UK trip) as a first timer looked for travel companions online, again affirming the predominant role of interdependence in group orientation:

*I would say the biggest advantage of travelling in a group is ‘mutual encouragement’. When travelling in the city, you might not be able to tell many differences, but in a remote area, the advantage of being in a group stands out. When I was hiking in New Zealand, sometimes I did not meet any other travellers for nearly four hours, I was alone. At the beginning, I enjoyed exploring the nature by myself, but slowly, I started feeling confused, panicky and scared. In the Lake District, when it started to rain and the temperature dropped, my hands started feeling pins and needles. Kate looked into my eyes and held my hands. From her eyes, I could tell she has the same feeling. This is the advantage of travelling in a group: in a remote environment, we encourage each other to move forward (Gigi, 42, online travel journal).*

Additionally, for backpackers who are more sensitive about budgets, sharing travel expenses is another reason that motivates them to form a group. From hiring cars, renting apartments, to sharing meals, for my informants, sharing travel expenses allows more options for travel. In this sense, backpackers who value budget and freedom at the same time, as discussed in the literature, give away their freedom of flexibility in order to save money. Faure and Fang (2008) suggest that some social codes need to be followed in terms of sharing expenses in different contexts. My informants felt less pressure to share expenses with travel companions than with friends and family. Truly, Chinese people tend to be relatively embarrassed when it comes to the issue of money with people from their own social circles; sharing travel expenses with donkey friends seems a practical solution. Figure 6-2 shows the mundanity of dividing travel experiences from a day in Seville. From tickets to dinner, from laundry to parking, we calculated the detailed expenses and split it between us. This kind of behaviour it is less likely to happen among friends in Chinese culture.
Furthermore, in terms of the nationalities of the backpacking group, Jennifer (31) explained her preference for travelling in culturally homogenous groups: ‘Firstly, I didn't know this kind of platform existed for meeting foreigners. However, the main reason is I can have much more common topics with other Chinese backpackers to discuss and have deeper communications’ (interview, Krakow). This choice to some extent also reflects the interdependence and risk avoidance of a collectivistic society. Similar literature has been discussed in the inclination to their own nationalities of Japanese tourists and Israeli backpackers (Pizam and Sussmann, 1995; Maoz, 2007). Differing from Israeli backpackers’ attitudes of revolting against societal regulations, Chinese backpackers do not have a strong ‘escape’ motive when backpacking to the West. But the motive of practising novelty and freedom of the Western backpacker culture, and the strong collectivism of their home culture, still create two inclinations of Chinese backpackers. Chinese backpackers feel safe and supported in a familiar cultural environment, which in a way creates a homogeneous culture bubble, protecting and preventing backpackers from unfamiliar intercultural encounters.

Figure 6-2 a note of travel expenses calculation, Seville
Although Chinese backpackers prefer travelling in a group, they have rather limited choices in terms of forming the group. In the Confucian ideology, long-distance travel is discouraged (Yu, 1994) as it contradicts one dominating Chinese value – ‘filial piety’. Although in the last four decades, social resistance to long-distance travel has been changing, it is evident to find that the current Chinese society still does not embrace the idea of long-distance travel. Especially for young generations, marriage, career and family are priorities of their lives after graduating from university, and travel is considered as a waste of time and money. Informants between 20-35 in this study mostly have similar experiences: friends’ mobility and holiday plans are restricted by jobs or family-related issues. Young backpackers who enjoy spending time and money travelling are not the mainstream of society and have not yet been fully socially accepted. Chinese backpackers thus are a lonely group: they prefer travelling in an interdependent and cooperative environment, but at the same time find it difficult to find travel companions in their real lives. Qyer.com is a kind of backpacker forum that provides a platform for Chinese backpackers to discuss and share everything about backpacking. Most importantly, it is the place where many backpackers find their travel companions and start their journeys.

Although risk avoidance plays an essential role in group orientation, meeting unknown travel companions in real life and travelling together can be relatively risky. Even so, informants believe backpackers are mostly ‘like-minded’ people, borrowing Jennifer’s (31) assumption: ‘people who are enthusiastic about travel can’t be too bad’ (interview, Warsaw). However, different to what she had expected, Jennifer acted quite differently to her travel companions in the early stage of the trip: she limited my access to her “WeChat Moments” until the second day after we met (Field note, Poland). However, the safety issue is not the main risk concern. For those well-travelled backpackers, risks in this context refer more to the uncertainty of the group dynamic, such as dealing with different personalities, lifestyles and values, which are rather difficult to predict before the corporeal meeting. Most informants were aware of this and applied various methods to avoid
such an issue. In conversations, Wayne (28) disclosed he normally has some chats before making decisions about choosing travel companions. Besides itineraries and budget, Wayne cares more about the level of ‘like-mindedness’. He shared some examples of choosing donkey friends: ‘earlier, I contacted a girl from Sichuan province. She planned to rent a car in Spain. From chatting, I could tell she is a control freak. I could not travel with this kind of person, so I used several excuses to turn her down. I also do not like people who prepare very little and completely rely on me. It will be too challenging to look after another person in a foreign environment’ (interview, Barcelona).

Even though Wayne was relatively selective about his travel companions, the Spain and Portugal experiences still turned out to be negative ones. After this trip, Wayne decided to be more cautious in terms of selecting donkey friends in the future. In the interview at the end of the trip he emphasised: ‘although it could be entirely two different people when chatting online and face-to-face, I would still spend more time chatting to get to know this person before I choose as donkey friend’ (interview, Madrid).

For more experienced backpackers, they tend to be more relaxed about the risk concerns of forming groups. Chinese backpackers like Jocelyn (45) had backup plans for uncertainties surrounding group dynamics. Jocelyn: ‘if the group does not go well, I can just book a ticket and travel alone, there's always another way’ (interview, Cotswolds). Differing from Chinese group package tourists, Chinese backpackers have an ability to travel independently, but choose to travel in a group as they believe it will achieve higher travel experiences. In terms of safety, Gigi (42) was quite confident: ‘to be honest, I haven't thought about this. I am no longer a 20-year-old girl. The nature of my job is dealing with different people. I have been to more than 20 countries, and I don't really think there could be any safety issues. That is the reason I am always open to donkey friends online before we meet. There is nothing to be afraid of’.
Differing from the origin of the backpacker referring to independent budget travellers in the Western context (Loker-Murphy and Pearce, 1995), small group travel is preferable for Chinese backpackers. Looking for travel companions on an online backpacker forum such as Qyer.com became incredibly fashionable in recent years, especially among Chinese backpackers. As discussed earlier, travelling in a culturally homogeneous group as a representation of Chinese collectivistic social culture, successfully buffers culture shocks for Chinese backpackers and provides interdependent community support during the trip. In this case, both collectivistic and individualist cultures play their roles in Chinese backpackers’ small group orientation. The individualist value, aligned with Western backpacker culture, has immensely influenced and changed modern Chinese culture. In the context of travel, more and more Chinese people now practice the Western style of backpacking, seeking authenticity and knowledge by travelling. However, it is noted that some culture values are rather difficult to change and are embedded as a basic pillar of any Chinese society (Yau, 1988). Collectivism and interdependence are Chinese traditional values embedded beyond changes, although can be modified (Bond and Hofstede, 1988). Still, to some degree, they highly influence the way Chinese people behave. Therefore, although the number of Chinese backpackers is booming, they still tend to practice the Eastern pattern with a group format than the West.

However, it is paradoxical that Chinese backpackers, on one hand, seek to reduce risks by forming groups from Qyer.com, on the other hand, those same travellers are required to take other types of risk to travel with people they are not familiar with. This paradox responds to multiple streams of values that negotiate within Chinese backpackers. To some extent, it also responds to the influence of the ideology onto the sociality from the three-layer system. In this case, the traditional Chinese values of interdependence and collectivism have rather strong influences. The desire to have travel companions in their backpacking journey makes Chinese backpackers more likely to put up with the risk of travelling with strangers than being alone. In other words, Chinese
backpackers take risks to travel in a group with people they barely know in real life, in order to overcome the risk of encountering an unfamiliar environment alone. Besides social encounters outside the environment bubble, different dynamics in a group also shape and influence enormously the travel experience. For well-prepared Chinese backpackers, unknown travel companions seem to enhance the inscrutability of their backpacking adventures.

6.4 Maintaining Group Harmony

The Confucian value of Harmony has been regarded as the foundation of Chinese values (Bond, 1986; Ge, Toomey, and Gudykunst; 1996; Fan, 2000; Wei and Li, 2013) in both the traditional Chinese culture and current society, and particularly applies to social interactions (Chen, 2001; Chen and Ma, 2002). Acknowledging culture is always changing; Confucian harmony has been endowed with new meanings in modern society. In 2004, the Harmonious Society Construction movement launched by the PRC government, to encourage Chinese people to attach importance to and practice social harmony to achieve the socio-economic vision (Wei and Li, 2013). Thus, the value of harmony has been coherently passed on and practised by generations as an iconic Chinese characteristic. In Chapter Two, literature about harmony was addressed under the umbrella of the ideological layer. The findings, however, suggest that harmony plays a crucial and interesting role in Chinese backpackers' group dynamics, which relate to the layer of sociality from the original system. This relation indicates the strong interactions and relationships among sociality and ideology. In this section, I will lead a journey from the very first meeting of Chinese backpackers to look into the dynamics and power relations in the group throughout the journey, to see how this group harmony is being practised and to discuss relevant issues.

6.4.1 First Impressions and Overcoming Awkwardness

The journey started with some awkward moments: meeting unknown travel companions for the very first time. Despite chatting for a while online, the first impression to some degree may
determine the group’s dynamics. For the Spain and Portugal trip, both Joey (24) and Wayne (28) sensed the discord in the group from the very first impression: ‘they seem quite serious, maybe it is because we are not in the same profession, I feel I have less common topics with them. I wish they could take off their mask and be themselves’ (Joey, 24, interview, Barcelona). Wayne (28) could not hide his disappointment: ‘to be honest, I do feel disappointed; Joey seems another person compared with how she behaved on the chat. What I expected would be much livelier. Since I am an introvert, I wish my travel companions can be more extraverted’ (interview, Barcelona). And these negative first expressions are being magnified at the end of the trip: ‘I feel Joey is rather difficult to deal with, she is very self-willed and sentimental, and never follows the plan’ Wayne (28, interview, Toledo); whilst in the last interview, Joey (24) commented: ‘actually my first impression was we are not going to get along with each other very well. Now at the end of the trip, I feel my sixth sense is quite accurate, when I first met them, I do not have very strong connections with others, and could tell we will not become friends in the future’, in terms of Wayne, Joey added: ‘I feel he tries to be against me at from the beginning, he makes me feel stupid, but I believe everyone has some good qualities. I will block him immediately when the trip finishes’ (interview, Madrid).

Since first impressions are crucial for group dynamics, Chinese backpackers use various way to warm up the group in order to overcome embarrassment, in other words, to build up group harmony. In Chinese culture, there is a distinctive boundary between the insider and the outsider (Wei and Li, 2013). According to Chen (2014), Chinese people are good at building up the ‘we feeling’ of intra-group connections, whilst being indifferent to issues outside the group (Scollon and Scollon, 1994). In terms of warming up and familiarising travel companions in order to ensure a higher level of travel experience, Chinese backpackers do it in their own way.

*After dropping my bag in the apartment, I went to meet my travel companions for the first time in a Spanish restaurant. They were drinking beer. After a brief greeting and introducing myself, Luke (25) poured a beer for me. We started to propose a toast for various reasons as most Chinese do at the dining table. To show respect, I had to drink every time they toasted. When I*
refused to take any more drinks, Luke said: ‘if you want to do research with us, or get along
well with Chinese circle, you need to drink’. I forced myself to have another sip. Luke looked at
me and said: ‘bottom-up’ (field note).

In China, social drinking, particularly among males, seems a short cut to be acquainted with newly-
made friends or potential business partners (Hao and Young, 2000; Cochrane et al., 2003). It has
been widely used for various social occasions.

Through participant observation, informants from both genders participated in social drinking to
warm up the travel group dynamic. Luke (25) found it particularly useful to make new friends: ‘I
like drinking with people, it is a good way to make friends to get to know the true nature of people’
(interview, Barcelona). The determination of building up connections can be understood as the
emphasis of ‘guanxi’ (interpersonal relationships), which is a fundamental factor in Chinese society
(Fang, 2014). Chinese people believe the establishment of guanxi in the initial stage of group
communication has a vital impact on harmonious interactions. Choosing to travel in a group and
being aware of the significance of group harmony, Chinese backpackers are determined to
familiarise their travel companions in very limited time in order to be an ‘insider’. With a mixed
feeling of longing and doubt, donkey friends re-prepared themselves and started their adventure.

6.4.2 Power Relations among Donkey Friends

As discussed in the literature, respecting authority, handling power and responsibility of the leader,
following and obeying the leader’s decision: these Chinese values are all derived from Chinese
beliefs of hierarchy (Fang, 1999; Fan, 2000). Practising the Chinese value of hierarchy, on the other
hand, is a way to maintain the function of the group harmony. In Chinese backpacker community,
‘head donkey’ (toulü in Mandarin) is a phrase used widely to refer those backpacker leaders who
assemble travel companions, make crucial decisions and take charge of group harmony. At large,
Chinese backpacker groups are relatively hierarchical: head donkeys are inherently assigned with
power and authority, but they are also required to take responsibilities of being the leader. Since most donkey heads are conveners of the trip, they tend to be more senior in terms of travel their experiences. It is noted that similar to other Chinese values, respect for hierarchy has been paradoxically changing. To reduce absolute authority, these head donkeys try to be liberal and democratic. Nevertheless, other donkey friends are inclined to follow a donkey head’s decision and plan. The role and workload distribution in a Chinese backpacker group are naturally allocated by a certain power, which is mostly determined by the level of travel experience.

6.4.2.1 The role of head donkey – Power and Responsibility

Head donkeys, in this case, show their capacity to be leaders. However, beyond abilities, it is more about responsibility and power. When asked why they would voluntarily take such huge responsibilities as the head donkey, Gigi (42) says: ‘I am the person who assembles this group. So I think I need to take the task of coordination to balance everyone's need’ (interview, Cotswolds). Similarly, Jennifer (31) agrees: ‘I went to Qyer.com with an initial plan. That means I can decide who will be my travel companions, but I also need to take more responsibilities’ (interview, Warsaw). Being the head donkey has a greater say in various matters, but also automatically come with duties and responsibilities. Experienced backpackers like Gigi and Jennifer seemingly enjoy being conveners and the leaders of the group. Jennifer (31) points out: ‘I enjoy designing and controlling the itinerary a lot. This is my way: I decide, you follow. I do not like to accommodate other people's plan. Donkey friends who respond to my post and want to be my travel companions should agree my itinerary in the first place’. As the role of the head donkey has been taken by backpackers who are more senior, the power relations and hierarchy are already predetermined before the trip.

Given this predetermined social hierarchy, the power relations and task-allocation have been assigned naturally within the group. Gigi as the head donkey described herself as acting like a
‘commander’, and she said: ‘most of the time, I give a general direction, and the others will work on details such as bookings, checking the transports and stuff like that. In the beginning, I was a bit worried the others will feel I am too intimidating if I keep ask them to do this and that. However, things turned out to be very smooth, you guys normally come to me instead, and ask me what to do, so we plan the details together, it is much easier to do in this way’ (interview, York).

For Gigi (42), being a head donkey to some extent limited her flexibility of being a backpacker: ‘at some point during the journey, I really feel like change the plan and cancel some bookings, but I need to think about other people's feeling too, particular people who also being part of the planning and booking, not only just myself’ (interview, UK trip). Having a flexible itinerary is one essential characteristic that identifies backpackers (Uriely, Yonay, and Simchai, 2002; Sørensen, 2003). However, as head donkey, Gigi travelled differently: ‘when I travelled alone, I rarely plan, but since I am the head donkey, I should take responsibility and have a clue where are we going.’ At the end the trip, Gigi said frankly: ‘It is my first time to backpacking in this way, and the conclusion is I don’t think it really suits me’.

6.4.2.2 The power game between group members and the head donkey: practising keqi and respect for authority

Wayne (28) from the Spain and Portugal trip experienced some challenges when being a head donkey. As the leader, Wayne undertook extensive preparatory work during the planning stage. With an open mind, he also sought opinions when booking accommodation and planning itineraries. However, the travel group seemed reluctant to provide suggestions and ideas. This challenge for Wayne firstly attributes to the Chinese cultural value of ‘keqi’, referring to ‘well-manner politeness’ (Yao, 1983), which is a personal attribute as well as an embodiment of harmony in Chinese communication, to keep a courteous distance with an acquaintance. In the initial stage of communication, although the head donkey holds the power, he/she still practices ‘keqi’ to create
a harmonious communication climate (Xiao, 2004). According to Chen (2014), practising ‘keqi’ in communication is a rule of a power game in Chinese culture. Secondly, the challenge attributes to followers in the group tend to practice ‘keqi’ by respecting the head donkey’s opinions in order to avoid unnecessary disagreements and conflicts. This mutual practice of ‘keqi’ reflects how the group harmony was created by practising ‘li’ and ‘keqi’ in the initial communication, as well as respecting authority in a social group. Nevertheless, to sustain harmonious communication by practising ‘keqi’ can be rather confusing and lead to a negative result. Wayne was overwhelmed by lukewarm responses and ‘you decide’ answers. He said frankly: ‘I feel very stressed that everyone places their hope on me...Personally, I would be quite upset if any group member is not happy with any decision I made’ (interview). As an indecisive leader, Wayne was overwhelmed by his workload; however, in order to maintain the group’s harmony, he never confronted this issue with other backpackers.

Unfortunately, Wayne's worry did not improve. He finally gave up: ‘All answers I received are "whatever" and "you decide", so I decided to turn on my "whatever" attitude'. The ‘striking’ or ‘resignation’ of the head donkey brought functional problems to the group, as donkey friends were so reliant on the head donkey, and all of a sudden there was nobody to suggest what to do and where to go. As a result, we were stuck in Seville for nearly two days, and did not do many activities until Luke (25) decided to take Wayne's role. More experienced than Wayne, Luke says: ‘I will normally be laid back to see if anyone else takes the role. Some people do really enjoy being a head donkey, but if nobody is willing to lead, I will take the role’.

Although the hierarchy of the group is predefined before the backpacking journey, it is not as stable as in the Chinese society, instead rather fluid. Influenced by Chinese values of interpersonal harmony and respect for authority, donkey friends sustain their harmonious relationships and perform their roles allocated by power, which is mostly defined by age, knowledge, travel
experience and desire to control. Differing from strong and dense social links in Chinese communities, Chinese backpackers' social ties are weaker, and the power of authority is no longer unshakable in the mobilities. Since the allocation of group roles is based on volunteering, it is easier to change roles. New hierarchy re-allocates the power relations in the group, and to some extent influences the group's dynamic and consequent travel experience.

Respect and support from followers are a basic necessity in order to sustain the power relations between the head donkey and other donkey friends. ‘Donkey head organised the trip, but on the other hand, we assigned him/her the power to plan and make decisions’. In the interview, Jocelyn (45) talked about her opinion towards the head donkey as a follower in the group: ‘Since he or she takes all responsibilities and do all the work of coordination and planning, most of the time I will just follow the decision and try not to raise extra issues’. Across these three journeys, Chinese backpackers gave their full support to the head donkey most of the time, by agreeing with the decisions he/she made and doing the tasks he/she assigned. At the same time as authorising power to the head donkey, donkey friends also perform their obedient roles as followers by showing no objections and supporting the donkey head’s decisions. Correspondingly, the head donkey has the power in most matters but also undertakes massive responsibilities.

Talking about the power among donkey friends, ICT has its say in this matter. I argue that ICT (Information Communication Technology) has essential influences on power allocation in a backpacking group. In other words, backpackers rely more on those who hold mobile devices with internet connections during the journey. I am going to start my argument by telling a story about my informant Jennifer (31).

Jennifer was quite a dominant head donkey: she was very well prepared using both traditional map and offline map on her phone with marked restaurants and attractions. I felt slightly upset since she took all the responsibilities and refused my assistance. During the trip in Poland, both
of us do not have mobile data. When I offer to help with the offline map on my phone, Jennifer
purposely ignores my assistance, but confidently believed in her own smartphone. Her
dominating role started to change after arriving in Krakow. The host kindly provided a mobile
wireless device so we can connect to the Internet when exploring the city. Having the mobile
wireless device, my smartphone, and a portable battery, Jennifer seemed to rely on me much
more by using my smartphone for directions and decision-making (field note, Krakow).

This radical change is attributed to the introduction of ICT in the mobilities context, and the person
who possesses it. Similar cases happened quite often across these three journeys. Besides the head
donkey holding absolute power in the group, a donkey friend who has more advanced devices,
particularly those that can access the Internet, has a greater say in the group. It was not so much that
group members rely and trust on this donkey friend with mobile devices accessing the Internet as
they rely on the mobile device itself. Differing from the easy accessibility to the Internet at home,
Chinese backpackers encounter the challenge of accessing the Internet with their mobile devices,
weighing the unaffordable expense of roaming charges. Purchasing SIM cards from various
countries could be an alternative option, but considering this is still not cheap, most Chinese
backpackers are inclined to rely on Wi-Fi or a group member who bought a SIM card. Similar to
the old days when backpackers tended to depend on those who had a copy of Lonely Planet, in the
modern backpacker community, power leans to the person who has access to information.
Although the hierarchy in the backpacker group is mostly pre-defined, technology assuredly
changes the power relation in the group by bringing in more credible information as references.

6.4.3 Group Dynamics: how deep is the interaction?

One reason Chinese backpackers enjoy travelling in a culturally homogenous group is that, being
from a collectivistic culture, they believe that among Chinese people they have more common
topics, and possibly can reach deeper interactions. Informants in this study had high expectations
to move from being outsiders to insiders (which was discussed in Chapter Two), in order to achieve
a deeper level of interaction, which contributes to positive travel experiences. ‘I think we are less
likely to have deep conversations with locals. I am not saying it is impossible. I used to have deep conversations with locals, but the thing is the topic is often on one topic, plus, you never know what you’ve been told is true or not. Instead, when we travel in a group, we live together and travel together. We do not have many conflicting interests, just a group of friends who love backpacking. Instead, interaction within the inner group has a higher chance to achieve more comprehensive and deeper interactions, and if lucky enough, we can become very good friends’ (Luke, 25, interview, Barcelona). Correspondingly, Jennifer (31) from the Poland trip believed that travelling with Chinese people can have more emotional resonance; language barriers with other nationals is also another driver.

However, more complicated than Luke’s optimistic expectations, in the group communication among donkey friends, it is relatively difficult to achieve a deep level of interaction. As Chang (2001) argues, Chinese interpersonal interactions, particular with acquaintances, are social performances on a relatively surface level. In the context of backpacking, it is rather difficult to develop a ‘genuine’ harmony from this ‘surface’ harmony, as donkey friends form a group aiming only to travel together, and they are going back to their lives after the trip. Informants of the UK trip are between 40-50 experienced female Chinese backpackers. They tend to deal with this relationship in a relatively rational way. Gigi used ‘a hedge between keeps friendship green’ (君子之交淡如水) this old Chinese saying to describe the relationship among our donkey friends. In the same group, Jocelyn (45) felt it a pity that our relationship did not go further, even though she was already very satisfied with all her travel companions: ‘what is missing is the spark. I feel every single of us in this group is very independent and has unique thoughts. In general, we are a very harmonious group: always back up each other and stay independently to perceive things’ (interview, Cambridge). Similarly, Kate (45) from the same group used ‘partially reserved’ to label our group communication. She explained: ‘we work as a team in this group, every individual was very good at coordinating with each other. However, when it comes to communication, I realise we try not to touch certain
topics, such as private issues, job, and personal life. However, when others touch those topics, I am very willing to share’ (interview Glasgow).

Even though the UK travel group had the best communication among three ethnographic journeys, deep interactions still cannot be achieved. Nevertheless, it is promising to see that, when the journey approached the end, donkey friends in this group had the tendency to move from acquaintances to ‘insiders’. We can speculate that, for a longer backpacker journey, it might, therefore, be possible to achieve deeper communication. (After one year since the fieldwork, Gigi and Jocelyn have teamed up again to backpack in Iran and Morocco). However, most informants in this study held the idea that donkey friends are temporary friends only for this journey, although they were in principle open to further friendship, most of them stopped those relationships when the trip finished. Informants in the group, particular those who find it difficult to have emotional connections, tend to regard the travel group as a team, and the task is to finish the journey as planned. Reflexively, in the Poland trip, Jennifer (31) and I did not have much in common, but our trip went smoothly: ‘I am quite satisfied with this group, we are very effectively to finish our plan, what we planned to see have all covered’ (interview, Krakow).

In worse scenarios, some Chinese backpacker groups tend to avoid conversations and contact during the trip in order to reduce conflict. These conflicts attribute to different preferences, strong disagreements for trip planning, and interest conflicts. Informants from the Spain and Portugal trip between the age of 20-30, had various levels of travel experience and did not get along quite so well. ‘I have nothing in common with Joey; I don’t watch those Taiwanese TV shows, and she has no knowledge about architecture. It is quite difficult for both of us to be in the same conversation’ Wayne (28, interview) stated that different interests between himself and Joey directly lead to the quietness in the group. Donkey friends avoid direct conflicts to sustain harmonious ambience in the group. According to Wei and Li (2013), confrontations that lead to the breakdown of the
harmonious relationship are risky moves. Minimising interactions with other group members is the way Chinese backpackers attempt to maintain surface harmony. In this Spain-Portugal group, we experienced several awkward moments of silence.

After getting the Wi-Fi code, we experienced a very quiet moment on the dining table. Everyone was so quiet and focused on his or her mobile phone. At this moment, I felt myself very distant from them, they are so close to you physically, but they are busily chatting and laughing with friends and relatives far away. I could even feel how noisy and chatty they were in their virtual world compared to this awkward silence (Reflexive notes, Cordoba).

During the trip, when Chinese backpackers find difficulties in the group, they turn to their familiar social network, mediated by ICT. In this case, ‘dining with mobile phone’ becomes rather common in the group’s interactivity. For the Spain and Portugal trip, Wayne (28) found it is a relief to have a mobile phone to reduce the awkwardness in the group: ‘there is no need to force ourselves to chat if we do not have many common topics. It is just like a reunion with primary school classmates, I do not know what to chat, so we sometimes just play with our phones instead’ (interview, Toledo).

In the second part of this journey, the group maintained its silence for most of the time: some members concentrated on their laptop, some watched Mandarin TV shows, some actively followed what was happening in China, some busily uploaded photos onto social media to show how happy they were. None of us tried to make efforts to communicate. Joey gave the reason: ‘I do not think I will meet them for the rest of my life, so I do not think I need to make an effort’ (24, interview, Madrid). This finding responds to the literature discussed in Chapter Three that the easy connection of the virtual world enables backpackers to escape from their real-life scenarios (Bull, 2007; Hannam, Butler and Paris, 2014). Additionally, in the bigger picture, it also implies the significant role that ICT plays in socialities. More discussion related to this issues will be further unpacked in Chapter Eight.
Not always negative, some group dynamics travel in a rather beneficial direction. Although different backgrounds might lead to less common topics, Jocelyn (45) seemed not to agree: ‘everyone has so many rewarding parts for me to learn. For me, learning is an important part of my trip, not only learning from the destination, but learning from travel companions is also an essential part’ (interview, Cambridge). Donkey friends like Jennifer (31), who always believes that it is much more fun to travel in a group, shared her experience of travelling with a student who studied in Spain: ‘Since he can speak Spanish and know Spanish culture, the whole trip turned out to be very authentic. He took me to places tourists would never been and had very delicious local food’ (interview, Warsaw). From her narratives, travel experience can be boosted when travelling with donkey friends with more travel experience or relevant cultural backgrounds.

6.4.4 Group Dynamics: conflicts, complaint and compromise

When travelling in a group, disagreements and conflicts are inevitable. Conflict in the trip commonly occurs when personal interests are infringed, agreements are not achieved, and preferences, tastes, and perceptions are not aligned. This section is going to discuss how group harmony is sustained, by looking at how Chinese backpackers deal with conflicts and disagreement.

To maintain group harmony, most backpackers choose to avoid confrontation when disagreement occurs. Defined as conflict control (Huang, 2006), this interpersonal conflict management in Chinese social interaction suggests to reduce using harmony-threatening messages, such as disagree and frustration to stop conflict emerging. Gigi (42) practised Chinese culture of treasuring harmonious relations: ‘Conflicts and disagreements are unavoidable when travelling together. It is also more challenging for strangers. In my age, my life experience tells me it is very common to have conflicts with others. However, the way I deal with it is not to intensify it, for me, we cannot get anything from it if we intensify the conflict’ (interview, York). Gigi's solution practices the old Chinese saying: ‘I take a step, you take a step, it doesn't hurt’. According to the literature discussed
in Chapter Two, Wei and Li (2013) believe taking this kind of harmonious strategy is the insiders’ way of reducing conflict and tension. For outsiders, they have different ways to interpret harmony. Instead of being aware of the existence of the conflict and taking actions to minimise it, some Chinese backpackers tend to hold their strong disagreement, but maintain a ‘conflict-free’ surface; therefore, not many conflicts could be seen during the participant observation, only in one-to-one interviews, when informants revealed their disagreements and dissatisfaction with others. Huang (2006) argues that this kind of ‘surface harmony’ is widely used as a tool to cover or support ‘hidden conflicts’. Although not optimal, this solution is still preferable to confrontation (Leung and Wu, 1998). One of the most common conflicts arises from trip planning. The following is an example to show how disagreement occurs in trip planning and how harmony leads to a ‘conflict-free’ surface.

**Figure 6-3 Itinerary planning, Valencia**

*For the Spain and Portugal trip, we did not plan much in advance until we arrived at the second destination Valencia. Head donkey Wayne at that time suggested to have a meeting to discuss*
plans for Andalucia. Joey expressed strong interests in seaside destinations in southern Spain, even though she did not plan much; whilst as the head donkey and the driver, Wayne had more concerns about the feasibility and practical issues. During the meeting, they had some fierce arguments, but eventually, Wayne successfully persuaded Joey with a written plan (Figure 6-3). It is interesting that both of them did not confront this issue anymore during the trip, but spoke quite negatively about each other in the one-to-one interview. (Field note, Valencia)

Reflexively, as a backpacker in a group, I have had quite a few disagreements and disappointing moments across all these three journeys, but similar to my informants, as a Chinese person, I tended to control my feelings in order to avoid confrontation. Instead, I auto-ethnographically noted down my feeling as a researcher. These feelings are mostly minor disappointments of changing plans, visiting places I was not expecting, perceiving things differently and disagreeing with companions’ ideas. I wondered how many subtle moments like this happened to my informants during the trip, but that I was unable to observe. To maintain the group harmony, as a group member, we tended to follow what had been suggested and did not show our objections. Ted (35) explained the reason: ‘Chinese people normally are more cautious about other people’s thought, particular to people they do not know that well. If one person has a proposition, although the idea could be not that great, I will still follow, as most people are all doing this. I should cooperate with the majority instead of showing my objection’ (interview, Barcelona). In addition, Kate (45) points out that: ‘Chinese people tend to hide their emotion and don’t tell what they really feel’ (interview, Glasgow). To some extent, it might help to maintain the group harmony, but on the other hand, this surface harmony can only cover the hidden conflict, but is unable to solve the problem fundamentally.

Learning to compromise was a big lesson for Gigi (42) who was a first-timer finding travel companions online: ‘this is the most distinct difference between travelling alone and in a group. It is something new to me. I am interested to see how far I can go.’ (interview, UK trip). Undeniably, travelling in a group normally results in following a fixed itinerary, while individualistic thoughts
are sometimes ‘sacrificed’ to accomplish the conformity of the group. This to some extent conflicts with the values of backpackers, which were discussed in Chapter Four. In addition, according to the review in Chapter Two, a strong community and solid hierarchy is what Chinese society praises. Chinese backpackers regard travel group as one representation of Chinese communities, which advocate collectivistic goals instead of individual opinions. In Chinese culture, mutual compromise to achieve conformity, particularly in a group, is the key to preserving overt harmony (Kirkbride, Tang and Westwood, 1991; Wei and Li, 2013). In this case, compromises are being commonly practised by Chinese group backpackers in order to ensure the smooth and steady running of the trip.

Besides itineraries, balancing budgets also requires compromise. Since backpackers in the same group have different budgets, some of them have to compromise to meet the group's plan. When it comes to money, Chinese people seem more willing to show their opinions. Since budget links directly to an individual's interest, in this case, Chinese backpackers are inclined to discuss this issue, firstly to negotiate the best possibilities close to their own budgets, and secondly, to meet the group's agreement in order to make the trip possible. Most of the time, those who have more affluent budgets are more likely to compromise for those who asked for a lower group budget.

In addition, attention is mostly on the side of those willing to change their own initial plan to adopt the majority or the head donkey's decisions. Those people who sacrifice their own interests to meet the group’s goal seem more genuine. Although not all personal interests can be fulfilled, Chinese backpackers are more likely to take the role of following, compromising and obeying. This particular behaviour can be attributed to the ‘conformity’ of Chinese cultural attributes. In Chinese society, showing distinct opinions is discouraged. For Chinese backpackers, to compromise and to follow seems much easier than to propose and to suggest. Considerations are required for the person who makes the suggestions if they meet everyone's needs. As a follower, Jocelyn (45) really
appreciated decisions the head donkey made, and she purposely prepared less: ‘I knew if I prepare more, I might have a stronger opinion or even objections, I’d rather just leave things to Gigi, she seems happy to make all the arrangements, I just need to follow. It is better to work this way’ (interview, Cotswolds). In this case, it is not difficult to understand why Chinese backpackers are very often saying ‘whatever’ and ‘I am fine’ to any decisions. Consequently, it seems being a leader in a travel group is a relatively challenging role: a head donkey should appreciate other backpackers’ compromises, balancing each other’s interests, as well as ensuring that the decision does not upset any group member. In large, these dramatic emotions or concerns are undetectable on the surface; Chinese backpackers are still making an effort to perform social harmony.

In this section, ‘maintaining group harmony’ as a theme has been explored from building up ‘guanxi’, practicing a fluid hierarchy, using ‘keqi’ to retain the harmony at the early stages, and performing surface harmony to cover potential conflicts. Embedded and influencing Chinese values for centuries, harmony still plays a vital role in social communication in modern China. In this mobilities context, time and space are compressed, social interactions are intensified, harmony, which is paradoxically changing in the current society, shows its influence on mobile Chinese backpacker groups. With less ‘genuine harmony’ relationships and a more dynamic power relations and group hierarchy, Chinese backpackers are influenced by this traditional value, but also practice it differently. Reflecting on the bigger picture, this section provides empirical supports for how the embedded Chinese values influence the way Chinese backpackers interact in the mobilities. It not only provides new interpretations to group harmony by looking into a mobile and intercultural setting, but also emphasises the importance of group dynamics in overall backpacker experiences.

6.5 Interactions outside the group

Meeting and interacting with different people is the meaning of backpacking. My purpose of backpacking is to expand my horizon and exchange ideas with different people. Backpacking
gives me an opportunity to meet people you wouldn't meet in the ordinary life. By interacting with them, the journey will change the frame of mind and help me see the world differently (Kate, 45, interview, UK trip).

Addressed in Chapter Four, informants like Kate, who are looking for interactions in the trip, meet one key criterion of backpackers. However, across these three journeys, intentionally or unintentionally, Chinese backpackers have less social contact with locals and others according to this Western backpacker ideology. Gigi (42), from the UK trip, tried to analyse the reason: ‘people outside the group may find it difficult to approach you when you are in a group; alike, when we are in the group, we pay more attention to interact with group members, so do not really got the chance to interact with locals and other people’ (informal conversational interview, Highland). Similarly, Lydia (24, UK) used ‘an invisible wall’ to describe how small group travel prevents donkey friends from outer group interactions.

In terms of interacting with locals and other nationals, issues of intercultural communication cannot be overlooked. Although Maoz (2007) indicates that backpackers are more likely to develop deeper interactions than mass tourists, Chinese backpackers, however, have very limited interactions with locals, which also reflects the literature (Fu, Lehto and Cai, 2012) for the feeling of caution and distrust. Most contacts occur within the service sector, such as hostel and restaurant staff. These interactions mostly remain at the surface as the nature of the business and the limited time. Revisiting Allport (1979)’s ‘contact hypothesis’ theory in this setting, although superficial, informants in this study mostly find their limited interactions positive in their travel experiences regardless of barriers such as language, gesture, spatial, time and status differences, which potentially create communication problems (Pearce, 1982).

In Cordoba, there are not many fluent English speakers as there are in Barcelona or Madrid. We went to a small local restaurant to have lunch. The owner did not speak any English. Luke (25) laughed: ‘there is no difference speaking Mandarin or English with her’. Eventually, we
end up with communicating by drawing (Figure 6-4). When recalling this experience, all donkey friends found this intercultural experience was very estimable and fun regardless the language barrier (field note, Cordoba).

Figure 6-4 not only shows Chinese backpackers’ approach towards intercultural communication with positive experiences beyond language barriers, but also demonstrates the superficiality and limitation of intercultural contacts between Chinese backpackers and locals. For Chinese backpackers, they tend to backpack in multiple countries for a European journey instead of immersing in one destination. The chance of exploring local cultures by interacting with locals is relatively rare, even though they have strong motives to do so.

**Figure 6-4** Drawing to Communicate with the Restaurant Owner

Besides the busy schedule that reduces interaction, unfamiliar culture and language barriers for donkey friends also prevents Chinese backpackers from interacting with other nationals, especially when language barriers and cultural unfamiliarity coincide. From the Spain and Portugal trip, Joey
(24) is a curious girl and very fascinated about Spanish culture. However, she was not very confident about her English, so she pushed her donkey friends to communicate with locals for her. She admitted: ‘language barrier is the biggest obstacle for me to get to know the local culture. I really want to communicate with more with locals but my English is very bad’ (interview, Madrid).

In unfamiliar cultures, Chinese backpackers tend to be cautious and follow what locals do carefully. ‘There are too many negative reports about rude Chinese outbound tourists out there. I want to draw a line and always demonstrate that Chinese backpackers can be quite polite and respectful’ Jerry (29)’s concern to some extent is influenced by the Chinese face issue (mianzi), as well as indirectly representing the self-hatred attitude of Chinese backpackers. Self-hatred, in this case, refers to the idea that Chinese backpackers are inclined to hold a negative opinion towards mass Chinese tourists. As portrayed by media, Chinese package tourists have a bad reputation. Chinese backpackers tend to keep a distance from package tourists, even though they are from the same country. This can be understood from the Western backpackers' anti-tourist attitude (Welk, Richards and Wilson, 2004). Only in the Chinese context, this attitude adds to a strong 'mianzi' influence, and Chinese backpackers are desperate to draw a line between themselves and Chinese mass group tourists. Gigi told me she could not endure Chinese package tourists: ‘they travel by glancing over basically: getting off the coach, taking photos, then getting on the coach to the next destination, which is not travel at all’ (interview, Cotswolds).

Previous studies of intercultural issues of backpacker studies mainly focus on social contacts between Western backpackers as guests and hosts in less developed countries from a Western lens. Recent studies looking at a paradigm shift to mobilities (Cohen and Cohen, 2015a; Cohen and Cohen, 2015b) suggest a move beyond the Eurocentrism implicit in the modern tourism studies, in order to shed light on the new understanding of long-haul tourists from the emerging world. Chinese backpackers experience a curve of embodied cultural confusion and adaptation throughout the journey. Similar to Western backpackers looking for authenticity in less developed 


countries, Chinese backpackers expect to experience an advanced, modern and free Western world as constructed by their own preconceptions. At large, Chinese backpackers have relatively high expectations of the Western world: ‘Europe in my mind was Luxury, Large and Level up (gao dashang in Mandarin, a new type of Chinese Internet language), I thought it must be very modern, always connected with Wi-Fi’ (Lily, 21, Madrid). The perception of Europe as a ‘high-end’ destination together with language and cultural barriers sometimes is quite intimidating. Jerry (29): ‘the first time I was in Europe, things are all quite civilised, and I did not speak good English, I felt too shy to communicate and a bit frustrated as I fail the approach to communicate’ (interview, Warsaw). After a period of embodied experiences, the perception of the West reduces to a more realistic level: Wayne (28): ‘Europe become more down to earth. Now for me it is just a different group of people with different culture living in another lifestyle’ (interview, Toledo).

6.6 Conclusion

This chapter focused on the social issues of Chinese backpackers when travelling in Europe. Reflecting on the three-layer system of culture, this chapter of mobile sociality emphasised the setting of mobilities that intensify social relations, and reshape the form of social network. Culture, in particular Chinese values, play a significant role in influencing different types of mobile socialities, including both travel group dynamics and interactions with ‘others’ outside the group. In particular, this chapter explored the interesting phenomenon of Chinese backpackers looking for travel companions online and backpacking together. Embedded Chinese notions of harmony, and relevant cultural attributes co-facilitate and influence Chinese backpackers’ inner group behaviours. The search for different levels of harmony and discord avoidance in the group dynamic were also topics discussed in this chapter. Differing from Israeli group backpackers, Chinese backpackers tend to travel in a smaller group and practise the Chinese social code of hierarchy and interpersonal relations. Thus, this finding contributes to the understanding of Chinese notion of harmony in the
setting of group travel. In addition, in terms of travelling in a group and interactions with others, the chapter discussed the paradox of being a Chinese backpacker, which is influenced by both Chinese culture and backpacker culture, originally developed from Western culture. More discussions of this paradox will unfold in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 7 NEGOTIATING IDEOLOGIES

7.1 Introduction

Responding to the ideological layer of the three-layer system of culture, this chapter focuses on how Chinese backpackers interpret, practice, and understand backpacking as a Western term, as well as exploring the nature of Chinese outbound backpackers by looking into their identity construction and various levels of transformation during the trip. In Chapter Three, I used ‘culture flow’ as a metaphor to describe the fluidity of multiple cultures and values within the individual. In this Chapter, this idea will be critically explored from an empirical approach to look at specifically Chinese values and the Western backpacker culture in Chinese backpackers. This chapter is divided into three sections organised by the three themes generated from the thematic analysis in Chapter Five: in the first section, I am going to explore how Chinese backpackers interpret and practice backpacking as a Western ideology. Similarities and differences between how Chinese backpackers practice these values will be discussed and reasons will be explored. In the second section, I am going to investigate the issue of ‘rite-of-passage’ through backpacking. By investigating Chinese backpackers’ perceptions towards transformation at different stages of backpacking, I am going to achieve an understanding of transformative travel patterns of Chinese backpackers. This analysis focuses on Chinese backpackers with different motivations and various backgrounds to unpack the meaning of transformative travel for Chinese backpackers. I will then look at the construction of Chinese outbound backpackers’ identity in the third section by discussing two systems of values, and how they have been paradoxically merged and perceived by Chinese outbound backpackers.

7.2 Donkey friends’ interpretation and practice of the Western backpacker culture
Beibaoke (Backpacker in Mandarin) was introduced as a Western term, and it is culturally accepted in Chinese vocabulary (Beibao as backpack, ke as person or guest). Although Chinese backpackers also adopt the term ‘donkey friend’, ‘beibaoke’ and its Western origin of freedom, independence, and authenticity-seeking motivates and causes fascination for the Chinese young generation. Chinese backpackers are more or less influenced or encouraged by these characteristics when undertaking their own trips. Discussed in Chapter Four, motivations and characteristics such as self-searching, learning, low budget, and off the beaten track previously defined Western backpackers. However, based on the understanding of liquid modernity and the new mobilities paradigm, the fusion and conflict among various streams of values bring insights from the practice of these defining backpacker values beyond their Eurocentric roots. In this section I am going to unpack Chinese backpackers’ perceptions and the practice of these four traditional backpacker values, which initially define backpackers, or are being adopted by backpackers to differentiate themselves from other types of tourists.

7.2.1 Self-searching and learning

For most informants in this study, the purpose for undertaking backpacking journeys in Europe was more than just sightseeing and to have a good time. They perceived these journeys as ‘spiritual exploration’ or ‘return to original simplicity’. In the UK trip, Gigi (42), as a well-travelled backpacker, had her understanding of travel changed during her journeys:

*When we studied in school, we learnt the hierarchy of people's needs. For me, backpacking is no longer satisfied my fundamental needs, but higher level ones. When people talk about backpacking, the first impression is budget travel, for me, it is no longer the case, it is a spiritual experience, nothing to do with the material. I did luxury travel before, but at some point, I just realised the satisfaction of material cannot fill your spiritual emptiness. They are kind of superficial. Maybe I have already entered another stage of my life, I don't think chasing material is that important. My journey should be more about exploring and understanding about myself. I like the feeling of travelling as a backpacker (interview, Cotswolds).*
Similar to Gigi, Jocelyn (45) from the same trip, admitting that she herself had already passed the stage of being concerned about her travel budget, interpreted backpacking beyond a budget: ‘recently people keep mentioning backpacking spirits, my understanding of this spirit is to explore, to go somewhere mass tourists won’t go, and explore myself at the same time through the journey’ (interview, Cambridge).

This way, such as displayed by Jocelyn (45) and Gigi (42): taking backpacking as an opportunity for seeking self-development or searching for internal self, has been one main motivation and characteristic of Western backpackers (Richards and King, 2003; Binder 2004; Cohen, 2010). The idea of travelling to find true self and self-development by backpacking to some extent motivate some Chinese travellers to undertake backpacker journeys; nevertheless, it is not the main drive of Chinese backpackers travelling in Europe. Younger informants in this study found the motivation searching for self or self-development was far too serious: ‘Simply just want to travel and have fun, in terms of how much I learn, leave it to the end of the journey’ (Luke, 25, Barcelona). Comparing with metaphysical ‘searching for self’, Chinese backpackers in this research tend to link their journeys with learning and gaining inspiration from the external world rather than from themselves.

In addition to exploring self, Jocelyn (45) addressed the importance of learning through backpacking: ‘Chinese package tour is just like “look at flowers while passing on the horseback (走马观花)”, backpacking is different, as I can really take my time to digest and really get to learn things’ (interview, Cambridge). There is an old Chinese saying: ‘you can learn more by travelling a thousand miles than by reading a thousand books (读万卷书, 不如行万里路)’ that encourages Chinese people to learn through travel. This motive of learning through travel corresponds with the Western backpacker ideology of learning (Pearce, 2007), which inherits the idea that gaining knowledge and broadening worldviews, from the Grand Tour in the 17th Century. In addition, Fu, Cai and Lehto (2015) also address the spiritual level in the form of learning and gaining inspiration
in their study of Chinese travellers’ motivations from the Confucian perspective. Compared with Western backpackers, informants in this study particularly underlined the importance of learning in their backpacking journey. For Chinese backpackers, especially first-timers, backpacking in an exotic environment that is being regarded as an effective approach to broaden their horizons. Learning is their main motivation for those journeys.

Before the unknown backpacking journey in Spain and Portugal, ‘I am travelling with an open mind, willing to learn local language and customs, get to know more about the destination by talking with locals’ (Wayne, 28, interview, online chat). As an architect having a career gap, Wayne (28) considered his trip similar to the Grand Tour – experiencing Western arts and architecture through his own eyes. The purpose of this trip influenced massively on the decision making regarding an itinerary and any activities.

Correspondingly, Jocelyn (45) – who is a big fan of English literature and British drama – was tracing images and myths created by media and literature for Great Britain during her backpacking journey. In addition, Chinese backpackers travelling in groups also practice the Confucius value of learning from each other throughout the journey: ‘In a group of three people, there is always something I can learn (三人行，必有我师焉)’. From the UK journey, Kate (45) learnt quite a few practical skills from her travel companions on their journey:

At the dinner table, Kate started a deep conversation with Gigi about her job in banking, how to evaluate customers risk. After dinner, Kate asked me to teach her how to make bookings on Airbnb and from visitScotland webpage. She was very curious about things and willing to learn. At the same time, she also asked me how to use Google map and played around the new feature of WeChat to send ‘sight’ to all of us. (field note, lake district)

For Kate (45), backpacking with people from different backgrounds assisted her learning and gaining new skills. In the last interview in Glasgow, she said: ‘the meaning of travel is to learn.
Backpacking opens up many challenges and opportunities for me to learn. I like to learn things through chatting and exchanging ideas. In terms of new skills, I am always curious, but more than that, I would love to transfer it to my own skills, so you can see I always learn something from you guys. It is a great opportunity’ (interview, Glasgow).

As discussed in the previous chapter, travelling in a diverse group could potentially lead to conflicts among donkey friends. For the Spain and Portugal trip, Joey (24) acknowledged the values of learning from her travel companions, although she experienced a challenging time with the head donkey Wayne (28): ‘from this trip, I realised it is a disaster that strangers have different values or background travelling together, but if just purely chatting and exchange ideas, it is quite beneficial, we can learn more things from people with different values’ (interview, Madrid).

It is noticeable that Chinese backpackers in this study practised the backpacker culture of ‘exploring self’ (O’Reilly 2006) and ‘learning’ (Pearce and Foster, 2007) unequally: they were inclined to find backpacking a more learning-based journey than a self-seeking one. This could trace to differences between Chinese and Western ‘self’s. Aligned with Chinese collectivistic and interdependent culture, the Chinese ‘self” tends to be integrated into the group. The sense of the ‘self’ in the Chinese context tends to link firmly within the community and society; on the other hand, the search for ‘self’ of backpacker ideology in the Western context reflects the individualism and personal merit of Western values which encourage self-achievement, equality, and debate (Sanchez-Runde, Nardon and Steers, 2011; Jin and Wang, 2015). Therefore, it is not difficult to understand that, comparably, Chinese backpackers practice less self-searching than Western backpackers. In terms of learning, the relations between learning and travel in the Chinese context have been widely explored in the literature (Fan, 1992; Zhang, 1992; Maoz, 2007; Pearce, Wu and Osmond, 2013), and informants in this study made the most of their trips to learn in various ways. Gigi (42) explained the learning pattern continues several months after the trip: ‘I like to organise my trip in
the blog format and share with others, it normally takes me quite a while to complete, as I revisit some relevant information or books of the sites or places I visited. I have to admit it is a huge project, but I enjoy doing it, it is the essential part of learning for me’ (interview, York).

7.2.2 Budget

Compared with Western backpackers, Chinese backpackers tend to have a larger diversity in terms of budget. This also attributes to a wider range in terms of age groups of Chinese backpackers. For students such as Joey (24) and Lydia (25) from different trips during my fieldwork, they were relatively budget sensitive, and both addressed budgets as their priority when talking about their understandings of backpackers. Lydia (25) said: ‘the idea of backpacking for me is to travel in a cheap way, such as eating street food, sharing a room with others in the hostel, etc. Thanks to this, I got more chance to interact with others. I am still young, I don't mind to travel in this way, to be honest with you, I am not sure if I would travel in a luxury way or not when I start earning money’ (interview, UK). For Joey (24) from the Spain-Portugal trip, budget concerns predominated her travel style throughout the whole backpacking journey. This included looking for free entrance to attractions, negotiating to stay in cheaper places, looking for wireless connection instead of purchasing a SIM card, and buying food and drinks from the local superstore instead of restaurants.

We were quite thirsty when arrived on the top of the hill. I spotted a bar with a great view, from there can see the whole of Barcelona. Joey (24) struggled with the price of drinks. However, eventually, she suggested to get a bottle of water and sit down, while people around us mostly order alcohol. We brought those two bottles of water and moved from one seat to the other (from city side and sea side) to see the city from different angles (Field note, Barcelona).

On the other hand, other informants who have more affluence did not interpret backpacking (One popular Chinese translation as ‘poor travel’) as travelling on a limited budget. They either moved a step further to interpret it as the idea of being free and independent as backpacker, or had no clue why it was named like that: ‘I think Qyer.com (directly translated as poor travel) named this way is
just wanting to be distinctive and funny. I don't put myself in the category of budget traveller, I understand “poor travel” as a way to travel more flexibly, and through the platform of Qyer.com, which provides opportunities to meet many great backpackers to travel together’ (Jennifer, 31, interview, Poland trip).

Backpacker groups in China have wider age diversity demographically (Zhu, 2007), which leads to various levels of sensitivity and understanding of budgets, as well as its relationship with backpacking. For those Chinese backpackers with limited budgets, particularly students, and the ‘young budget traveller’ (Loker-Murphy and Pearce, 1995) the concept of traditional Western backpackers has been adapted and practised. The biggest Chinese backpacker online forum Qyer.com (qiongyouwang) was started as a business idea from a Chinese student in Hanover, Germany. It shows Chinese young generations’ perceptions of backpacking from the website's literal translation, ‘poor travel’. For these Chinese backpackers, they embrace the Western idea of backpacking and strongly link it towards the budget. Backpacker culture, in this case, is also generated from the limited choice of accommodation – hostels. The initial purpose of backpackers staying in a hostel is for budget concerns, but the shared nature of hostels gradually develops into a hub for information and experience exchange, and has become one essential part of backpacker culture. However, perceiving this culture from an Eastern lens and with the mainstreaming of backpackers (O’Reilly, 2006), a wider age group and more affluent travellers identify themselves as backpackers. For them, travelling with a limited budget is no longer a criterion for a backpacker. These backpackers focus more closely on spiritual and authentic experiences of backpacker culture than the limitation of budgets. Not being part of the Western backpacker cultural development, Chinese backpackers with a wider demographic group hold various degrees of understanding and interpretation of the relationship between backpackers and budgets.

7.2.3 Off the Beaten Track
Furthermore, informants in this study demonstrated their identity as backpackers by practising ‘off the beaten track’ and being anti-tourist. These distinguishing behaviours are believed to be key ingredients in constructing backpacker identity in the literature (Welk, Richards and Wilson, 2004; O’Reilly, 2005).

I prefer to dress like a local. I don’t want to look like or act like a tourist. If locals don’t treat you as a tourist, it will help to get closer to them, and there are more chances to communicate. On the other hand, when I considered myself as a tourist, I would be very rushed sightseeing, have a to-do-list and many attractions to visit. I want to slow down: today I am in the mood of visiting, then I would do more, if I don’t have the mood, I can do something else, just like a local. The way travel in a rush is not really my style (Gigi, 42, interview, York).

In addition, some Chinese backpackers particularly distinguish themselves from Chinese mass tourists. According to noted observations, informants during the trip purposely avoided Chinese tour groups, felt superior when visiting places Chinese tours do not go, and felt ashamed when surrounded by noisy Chinese group tourists: ‘Once I was queuing to get in St. Peter Basilica in Vatican City. There is a group organised Chinese tourists. They were laughing and chatting so loud, taking photos with all different ways, completely ignore the feelings of others when queuing. At that particular moment, I do really feel ashamed’ (Jerry, 29, interview, Warsaw).

Although trying to distinguish themselves from mass Chinese tourists, Chinese backpackers still follow the same beaten track as mass tourists do. This behaviour responds to the argument of Welk, Richards and Wilson (2004) that backpackers show an anti-tourist attitude to construct their identities, even though they are visiting the same attractions and following similar ‘beaten tracks’ to mainstream backpackers (O’Reilly, 2006). Particularly for Chinese backpackers travelling to Europe for the first time, their itinerary of sight-seeing covers most of the same famous attractions that mass group tourists visit. Instead of fighting for their ‘backpacker corner’, Chinese backpackers tend to avoid mass tourists: When walking passed the square, we saw a group of Chinese tourists
just got off the bus, Jennifer (31) and I speeded up our pace in order to avoid them. We laughed
for this tacit agreement (field note, Krakow).

This section discussed how Chinese backpackers interpret and practice ‘backpacking’, this Western
term. Ideas of the independence, flexibility and freedom of backpacker culture fascinate Chinese
people. However, it is worth noting that Chinese backpackers perceive Western backpacker
ideology rather differently in practice. Learning as a motivator of backpacking has been emphasised
in the Chinese context more than self-searching has. In Chinese society, long-haul travel is usually
not encouraged, which is influenced by various social and cultural factors, such as filial piety (孝)
and the former one-child policy. Travelling through learning helped to establish the positive image
of travel, and is being accepted and practiced widely by Chinese backpackers. In addition,
backpackers have no longer been simply understood as budget travellers in the Chinese context.
With wider demographic groups joining backpackers, Chinese backpackers give wider
interpretations of backpacking culture rather than just budget concerns, which was used to define
Western backpackers initially. Furthermore, other than Western backpackers distinguishing
themselves from mainstreamers by travelling off the beaten track, most Chinese backpackers still
visit main attractions but draw a clear line with mainstreamers, particularly Chinese mass group
tourists.

7.3 Backpacking: a rite-of-passage?

In Western societies, backpacking is related closely to life-transition from late adolescence to early
adulthood (Cohen, 2003), which applies the rite-of-passage model (Gennep, 1960; Turner, 1973).
Introduced together with the Western backpacker culture, the idea of rite-of-passage is interpreted
and practised differently by Chinese backpackers (Chen and Huang, 2017). However, Chinese
backpackers’ attitudes towards backpacking as a rite-of-passage vary; instead, imperceptible
transformation (潜移默化) was widely mentioned among informants when asked about how the trip influenced or changed their lives. Chinese backpackers believe a backpacking journey is more than sight-seeing and having fun, because of the influential effects of learning-driven travel. This learning-motivated travel style, in theory, is like the concept of self-imposed rites of passage (Sørensen, 2003; Noy and Chen, 2005), transformative (Bruner, 1991; Lean, 2012), and self-changing journeys (Noy, 2004) of backpacking; however, this is being practiced differently by Chinese and Western backpackers.

It is noticeable that Chinese backpackers have distinguishing opinions and motivations regarding their understanding of backpacking as a rite-of-passage. For less experienced Chinese backpackers, especially those who are first-timers, the motive of transformation by undertaking their first ever backpacker journey is relatively strong. According to Lily (21), a female backpacker I met in Madrid, this first European backpacking journey was a big event in her life. Before approaching the end of the journey, she summarised: ‘I felt this trip change me a lot. I have learnt how to use another perspective to see and think. Since I travelled alone, I had plenty of opportunities to talk with different people, such as in the hostel or with locals. This experience really opened my horizon and made me think differently’. However, when I asked for further details of changes and examples of different ways of thinking, Lily could not find a way to answer. Similarly, when Jerry (29) recalled his experiences at the time he had just started backpacking, he addressed: ‘I am keen to learn things and hold the belief that I am going to become another person after that trip. But I am no longer that utilitarian, now I just want to travel, to see the world, just that simple’ (interview, Warsaw).

Akin to Jerry, most experienced informants in this study did not connect strongly their backpacking journeys to rites-of-passage, at least not a perceived transformation during the trip. ‘I travelled too often, so "change life through backpacking" this kind of slogan does not actually work on me, maybe it will be different for those less experienced backpackers, I don’t know’ (Jennifer, 31,
Luke (25), who regards backpacking as his lifestyle, believed that the motive of backpacking should not be too intentional ‘there are certain things in the world that you cannot pursue if you are too utilitarian. Some people believe going somewhere can find the meaning of their lives, or hiking in Tibet can achieve spiritual upgrade the second day you wake up. I don't believe in this’ (interview, Madrid). Similarly, even though Gigi (42) stated that backpacking for her is a spiritual journey, she still treated it with peace of mind: ‘I am not expecting to gain certain status or become another person after this trip. In terms of what can I get from it, just let it happen’ (interview, York).

Experienced Chinese backpackers in this study did not have a strong motivation for transformation, or they could not notice such an impact of the journey. They admitted however that their past backpacking journeys did indeed change and influence their lives, perspectives, and ways of thinking.

Actually I cannot recall when it (the transformation) happened, I believe it is a slow and imperceptible process. When I started backpacking, I was very timid, and the way to perceive the world was quite simplistic. However, with the more I travelled, more people and events I encountered and experienced. Now when you asked me how backpacking has changed me, I can say it has completely changed my worldview and values, including my personality. I never regret to choose this lifestyle (Jerry, 29, interview, Warsaw).

Lucy (33) also applied this ‘imperceptible transformation’ term to his backpacking: ‘the change is so imperceptible, I normally won't notice unless I encountered certain events in real life, and at that moment, I would suddenly realise how backpacking has changed me. It can be new ways of dealing things and unique angle of interpretations’ (interview, Granada). Kate (45) explained why backpacking makes these subtle changes to her life: ‘backpacking makes me come out of my ordinary life routine and experience different culture and lifestyles. At the same time experiencing these differences, it also makes me compare what I have been through in my daily life. It really
brings me some new thoughts of life when travelling in a strange environment (interview, Glasgow). This narrative reflects the literature, which states that cross-cultural understanding develops through international travel (Adler, 1975; Ward and Kennedy, 2001) and distance from home leads to the promotion of transformations in individuals' self-construal (Kim 2000). Interestingly, when asked if the trip has changed their lives (and, if so, why), most of my informants experienced difficulty in summarising it. However, when asked about their previous journeys, they were able to talk about those, and highlighted how these trips influenced or changed their lives. It can be understood that the idea of rite-of-passage through backpacking is a slow and imperceptible process, which can be attributed to various reasons. Firstly, differing from backpackers in other contexts, journeys of Chinese backpackers are characterised as travelling in a shorter period of time and with superficial levels of intercultural contacts. As a result, Chinese backpackers have less social and cultural encounters in terms of the length of time and the level of interactions. This superficiality could help to understand how, at the end of the journey, most donkey friends were unable to summarise their trip's abstract relation to the value-changing process. The literature also supports this argument by suggesting that, the shorter duration of the trip, the less embedded the self can become (Hottola, 2004; Hayes, 2007). Secondly, the level of perceiving transformation is to some degree influenced by expectations and motivations (Muzaini, 2006; Brown, 2009). As addressed earlier, those less experienced Chinese backpackers who were driven by the concept of rites-of-passage and transformation through backpacking, more or less perceived and emphasised the conception by practicing and reflexively summarising than those experienced Chinese backpackers who travel with no such expectations. Thirdly, although Chinese backpackers attach importance to learning during the backpacking journey, life-changing or rites of passage by backpacking is a concept that is still new to Chinese society. In other words, it takes time for Chinese backpackers to digest and accept this concept, by practicing it. Fourthly, it is challenging for transformations from the trip to be detected during daily lives. In current Chinese society, there
still exists a clear gap between leisure and everyday life. Therefore, although transformation has been made during the journey, it can only be perceived when certain skills or ways of thinking are applied throughout daily practice.

Building up arguments of Lean (2012) about the complex social phenomenon of transformative travel from a mobilities lens, it is essential to acknowledge the transformation process, which involves changing environments, ideas and culture exchanges, as well as intensive physical movements, is embedded in the journey of movement. In terms of the process of transformation, Martin and Harrell (2004) suggest that the absence from mundane life leads to potential revisions of individuals’ domestic and professional roles. In addition, Lean (2012) suggests everyone is transformed to some degree throughout the journey. However, the perceived level of transformation is rather complex and personal (Kim, 2000) in this case, which is crucial to assess the role of ‘rite-of-passage’ in backpackers' lives. It takes account of various cultural backgrounds and identification (Sussman, 2002), different levels of motivations towards transformation, and where the transformation take place.

In the case of Chinese backpackers, the perception of travel is paradoxically influenced by both learning-driven motivations of travel, as well as historical negative attitudes towards leisure activities. This perception of travel is rather different in the Western context, stemming from the Grand Tour to current gap years, the concept of youth travel and backpacking links firmly with the motivation of self-changing and educational purposes. Thus, when Chinese backpackers intend to practice the rite-of-passage concept, although transformation has already taken place, it generally takes longer for Chinese backpackers to perceive and recognise this change.

In addition, with the trend of globalisation and the value of work-life balance, travel has become part of daily life (Uriely, 2005; Urry, 2007). In terms of transformation, it could be challenging for Chinese backpackers to distinguish transformation of a backpacking journey from other life events.
In this case, understanding the transformation of backpacking should not be viewed as separate and investigated in the mobilities context on its own, but must be considered in terms of its long-term impacts in unison other life events.

Discussed in Chapter Two, I linked backpacker culture with behaviourism, which consists of a collection of beliefs, ideas, habits, and traditions that are perceived, shared and practised by backpackers. However, with the trend of globalisation, backpacker culture’s Eurocentric roots have been strongly influenced by the phenomenon of mobilities and intercultural encounters, as well as the perceptions and practices of backpackers in various cultural contexts. In this case, behaviourism as a shared value has been challenged by embedded Chinese values, which I linked with functionalism in Chapter Two. In the previous two sections, it showed the predominating role of functionalism in terms of reshaping and comprehending behaviourism, in this case, backpacker culture, in a wider context. In Chapter Two, I also introduced cognitive anthropology to emphasise the differences between individuals that perceive and negotiate different streams of values. This approach focuses on the aspect of individuals, and how they perceive and understand various values, instead of the impact of culture and values on people's behaviour and practice. In the next section, I am going to look into the approach of cognitive anthropology on Chinese outbound backpackers to understand how they perceive Chinese and Western ideologies during backpacking, in order to unpack the issue of paradoxical identity construction.

7.4 Chinese outbound backpackers: a conflict between Chinese and Western ideologies

As behaviourism, the backpacker culture, initially a Western term, represents some core values of Western ideology, such as freedom, adventure, independence, and flexibility. On the other hand, Chinese culture – influenced by values of Confucianism that advocates and practices harmony, group orientation, and social hierarchy – as functionalism, is embedded in Chinese daily behaviour.
These two systems of values conflict, paradoxically merge, and critically co-construct the Chinese backpacker's identity. During fieldwork, informants throughout three studies across different age groups and travel experience levels showed the conflict of the Chinese culture's stickiness and the drive of the Western backpacker's ideologies. Mobilities, in this case, facilitate the negotiation and the merger of these two schools of ideologies. Furthermore, these two streams of ideologies construct Chinese backpackers this critical account throughout backpackers' corporeal journey. Aligning with the lens of liquid modernity discussed in Chapter Three, the approach of cognitive anthropology concentrates on differences between individuals, and enables us to investigate how Chinese backpackers perceive these different streams of values in the mobilities. In this section, I am going to discuss three sets of conflicts from these two systems of ideologies that perceived and interpreted by Chinese backpackers at the same time, in order to tease out the paradoxical identity construction.

### 7.4.1 Flexibility and risk avoidance

The first conflict between these two ideologies addressed here is the contradiction between the flexibility from the Western values and the high-risk concern of the Chinese. Backpackers from the Western perspective normally travel with an open agenda without much preparation (Cohen, 2003; Richards and Wilson, 2004). In opposite, in order to overcome the anxiety of uncertain environments, take full control of their trips, and maximise their experience of learning by backpacking, Chinese backpackers, in general, are well prepared before their journeys. The paradox exists whilst some Chinese backpackers believe in the value of flexibility of the Western backpacker values; in terms of practice, they still do plenty of 'homework' before departure. Combining different research techniques in this study, mobile methods enable multiple angles to see the conflicts between informants' replies through interviews, contradicting with their behaviour as noted by participant observations.
My idea of backpacking is self-organised, and I do not plan much, I don't like the idea that travelling with a comprehensive itinerary, even detailed into what to do in a certain time slot. I normally travel without a checklist, what I do for preparation is just decide the destination (Wayne, 28, interview, Toledo).

Although Wayne summarised that backpacking should be flexible, he was still well-prepared, in detail, for this trip – contradicting his interview. As an architect, the main purpose of his backpacking trip was to visit great art around Europe. When speaking on WeChat before the journey, he said: ‘recently I read several books about Renaissance, I cannot wait for our trip’. Learning-driven motivation encouraged Wayne to spend extra time doing ‘homework’ into the historical and cultural background of the visiting destination. In addition, as the head donkey, he also took responsibilities planning the details of the trip. Similarly, Experienced backpackers like Gigi (42) did not like the idea of thorough preparation for the trip, but still felt ‘forced’ to do so. She admitted: ‘it is quite different from when I am travelling alone’; before the trip, she already needed to consider everyone's budget, car rental, accommodation bookings, and came out with an itinerary to satisfy most travel companions’ needs. I asked her why she made notes on Lonely Planet, seemingly by highlighting and folding particular pages. She replied: ‘I wouldn't do this when I travelled on my own, I bought this Lonely Planet only because of this trip, and I need to take responsibility’ (interview, Cotswolds). Relatively, travel companions in the same group relying on the decision of the head donkey, spent much less time doing ‘homework’. Kate (45): ‘I don't need to worry about the planning, as Gigi already planned everything, and that is perfect for me. Before I read some travel blogs and had some ideas where I would love to go. Places Gigi suggested cover all, that is great’ (interview, Glasgow). Although some travel companions do not need to worry about trip planning and preparation, the format of backpacking in a group already predefines the nature of travelling in a fixed itinerary and less flexibility. Differing from solo travellers, who can make decisions on their own. Travelling in a group requires an agreed itinerary to guide the
movement and activity as a whole group in order to ensure the conformity discussed in Chapter Six.

In addition, when backpacking in a foreign environment, doing ‘homework’ during the journey to some degree helps reduce worries and anxieties of Chinese backpackers. One of the most common ways is to read others' travel journals shared on Qyer.com. Reading, practising similar routes, and even coming back to share after the event with this virtual community. Informants across the three studies more or less portrayed their perceptions and images of certain destinations by reading other backpackers' travel experiences and referring to their itineraries. In other words, the travel experiences posted on backpacker forums impact largely on the decision-making and perceptions of Chinese backpackers who prepare for their journey by reading them. For some backpackers, such as my informant Jennifer (31) who wants to ensure the quality of her travel experience, they are usually well-prepared and do so by reading and integrating different sources of information and making clear plans for activities.

I cannot travel without planning. At least I should have a general idea how many days I should plan in one destination, if I don't refer to other backpackers' blogs or travel guidebook, I would never know. Some information is necessary to gain in advance, such as attraction opening time, how to get there by public transports etc. I don't want to waste my time in finding routes or visit at a wrong time. Normally I will spend some spare time before the journey to collect some information, on my way to the destination, I will read entirely more details and come out with a plan (Jennifer, 31, interview, Krakow).

Motivations of experienced backpackers such as Jennifer, who planned her trip in detail, are more focused on maximising and securing their travel experience, rather than reducing uncertainty and cultural shocks. For some flashpackers, who have rather limited time on the trip, getting the best value for every second is essential, and good planning is possibly the key to this.
Jennifer was well prepared when I first met her, after dropping the backpack, she already suggested to visit the Palace of Culture and Science. While talking, she got out a folder with printed mini travel guide and lonely planet. She neatly went to the page marked with highlighter, checked again, and smiled: ‘it will be closing in 90 minutes, we should leave now’ (field note, Warsaw).

Furthermore, more than risk-avoidance and high demand of quality experience with the restricted time of Chinese backpackers that limit their flexibility, the complicated visa application procedure also prevents many Chinese backpackers from travelling more. Chinese citizens are required to obtain visas when visiting European countries. Both Schengen and the UK visas require applications to provide return flights tickets, accommodation bookings throughout the journey, transport bookings between countries in the Schengen area, as well as a detailed itinerary. These requirements limit Chinese backpackers’ flexibility. In other words, all these pre-paid bookings already predefine the itinerary of the trip; therefore, most Chinese backpackers are not flexible in their trip. A more experienced backpacker, Luke (25), shared with me his experience of how to be flexible under this strict visa application regulation:

*I always create fake itineraries and bookings for visa applications. I don’t like to plan so many details in advance. You see, flights bookings on Expedia can be cancelled without charging any fees within an hour after the booking is made, and before cancellation, you can print out the booking confirmation with the flight ticket number. As for accommodation booking, I always choose those hotels with no cancellation fees. Normally I would just choose one city when I make up my fake itinerary; it is much easier, and no need to worry about booking multiple hotels as well as transports booking between cities (Luke, 25, conversational interview, Barcelona).*

Many experienced Chinese backpackers like Luke (25) found this loophole in visa regulations. What is actually being undertaken in the trip is quite different from what was submitted for the applications. On some Chinese backpacker forums, such as eueueu.com, a detailed tutorial is provided to guide Chinese backpackers to prepare materials and documents without booking anything in advance for visa applications. Eueueu.com also works with an OTA to provide free
cancellation of air ticket bookings. This trend, on the other hand, shows experienced Chinese backpackers’ demands for flexible itineraries and open agenda from strict visa regulation. ‘Sometimes, when I really like some places, I would just decide to stay a bit longer, I rarely book accommodation in advance, I believe I can always find some place to stay, the worst scenario, I still got my sleeping bag. Bookings in advance really limit my freedom of movement’ (Luke, 25, interview, Barcelona).

With the influence and restriction of traditional culture, current social regulations and policies, backpacking in a ‘Western backpacker way’ is rather challenging to achieve. Although some behaviours are highly culturally-rooted, the idea of the freedom and individualism of Western backpackers is still perceived, practised, and – for some – embedded during their journeys.

7.4.2 Explore The unknown or stick with familiarity – culinary experience as an example

Food is one major topic for Chinese backpackers during their trips. Informants consider eating local cuisine as a way to experience local culture. From their eating preferences and the curve of decision changes throughout the journey, it also sheds lights on the conflict and negotiation between Chinese backpackers’ willingness to explore unfamiliar cultures and sticking to their own.

The first night with Jennifer in Warsaw, she kept mentioning Polish dumplings. Before departure, she already noted several ‘potential candidates’, we went ‘interview’ (Jennifer’s term) with these restaurants, and finally chose one serving traditional Polish cuisine, plus it had a high ranking on TripAdvisor. Besides Polish dumplings, we also ordered some local Polish tea. The tea tasted strange to me, and Jennifer teased my facial expressions. After a bite of dumplings, she complained: ‘seriously, they are completely different from what I expected. Maybe I had too high expectations, I prefer our Chinese dumplings much more’. She stopped eating, whilst I swallow the rest, I didn’t enjoy them either, but do not waste money. We end up with a Japanese restaurant to have some familiar Asian cuisine. (Field note, Warsaw).
Since then, we had not tried any traditional Polish cuisine. We made fun of our ‘dumpling experience’ time to time. For Jennifer’s philosophy, eating is crucial for her cultural experience when travelling: ‘I am a foodie, when travelling in a new destination, I would like to try what the destination offers. But it also depends on if the food suits my taste. I don’t want my stomach to suffer, but at least I can say I have tried’ (conversational interview, Warsaw).

Some informants believe eating as locals is essential to demonstrate the status of a backpacker (Mazani, 2006). For Gigi (42), she was proud of continuously not eating one single Chinese meal until the end of the journey, for her British backpacking trip:

> I feel eating local food is my way to experience and practice locals’ lifestyle. The local food developed in this region must be the best for people living in this environment. For example, European people are used to drinking cold water. I was quite resistant at the first place. But now I try my best to adjust myself to accept it, as I believe this is the right way to immerse and understand the local culture. If you drink hot tea and eat rice all the time, what is the point travelling abroad? (Gigi, 42, interview, York).

Having good meals in local places functions a vital role in Chinese backpackers’ perception of the destination, and contributes significantly to their overall travel experience. When comparing with group tourists, Jennifer (31) stated proudly: ‘comparing what kind of restaurants they (mass tourists) go to, what kind of restaurant we are in, that makes a big difference for organising your own trip’ (interview, Krakow). Eating locally also provides an approach for interactions and understanding the local culture. In Seville, Joey and I went into a local restaurant around lunchtime. It was a local place with nice decorations. There was no menu; instead, dishes of the day were written on the blackboard in Spanish. It was quite a low-profile restaurant, with a feeling of authenticity. Staff were extremely friendly, but spoke poor English. Joey suggested to avoid an accident by randomly ordering, so we asked the owner to help us choose four tapas dishes for us to share. We were so happy with the food, the service, and the atmosphere that was created. Joey kept saying we found
the hidden gem of Seville (field note, Seville). This finding is aligned with Chang, Kivela and Mak (2010)'s argument that Chinese tourists link firmly the idea of food with culture and this intellectual aspect of visiting a destination. Eating local food becomes a direct way to experience authenticity.

More than food and staff, as part of the experience, the servicescape of the restaurant and the interactions with locals co-create Chinese backpackers’ travel experience through eating.

*Sometimes from the decoration of the restaurant, you can tell the taste of the owner, remember the one in the Northern Scotland? From the use of the colour with combinations of sapphire and gold, and the layout of the furniture, to details such as the colour of the bin and the napkin both fit the theme of the dining room, they all together create the feeling of British standard of hospitality, and we can tell the host comes from a big family, which is very detail oriented (Gigi, 42, interview, Thurso).*

Local restaurants not designed purely to attract tourists are enjoyed fairly well by Chinese backpackers. Based on backpacker characteristics of avoiding over commercialised places and standard services, informants sometimes felt excited to experience that service staff did not speak, or spoke poor English, as a sign of authenticity. However, when the staff do not speak English, or the restaurant does not offer an English menu, Chinese backpackers are more likely to experience misunderstandings, and end up with what Wayne (28) called an ‘accident’ in food:

*It was not lunchtime yet, but we decided to grab some lunch before leaving Granada. Places we ‘starred’ on google map hadn't opened yet for lunch, so we ended up with having lunch at a local restaurant on our way to the train station. The staff of the restaurant did not speak English, and the menu was in Spanish too. We randomly ordered first three dishes shown on the menu, and the food served was completely different from our expectation – extremely salty! We couldn't finish the food, in order to show our respect, we decided to ask for take away. For the rest of the trip, we still mentioned this lunch time to time. Luke said: ‘I feel I was poisoned by the salt’ (Field note, Granada).*
Eating what locals eat is one of the quickest ways to be immersed in their daily lives. Especially for Chinese backpackers, relatively superficial interactions were discussed in the previous chapter. Eating local food to some degree remedies the limitation, and fulfils Chinese backpackers’ desire to interact with locals in certain ways. For the Spanish trip, we experienced some culture shocks in terms of the time at which dinner was eaten. We had difficulties figuring out the restaurants’ opening times, and end up with eating in some international chains instead. It took us nearly a week to adjust to the Spanish dinner time, and we made fun of this from time to time. For the UK journey, when staying in Thurso, through conversation we found out that the host of the bed and breakfast was a vegetarian. Gigi (42) even decided to follow the host’s eating habits and chose to have a vegetarian breakfast. By eating local food, as well as following locals’ eating habits and routine, Chinese backpackers to some degree show their strong motivations to explore local cultures, within the limited opportunities of interaction.

Slow cook lamb legs, Haggis, these traditional Scottish dishes are extremely welcome by us foodies. This was the first time I came across Haggis. It contains sheep’s organs, mixed with herbs and spices. Cooked on a slow fire, and the shape looks like a steak meat, but tastes much more smooth with a strong sheep flavour. I don’t think many people can accept that. But since the way it is cooked, the special sheep smells became a taste of sweetness in the mouth with multiple layers. Remembering once we were buying fish and chips in Isle of Skye, we also ordered some Haggis, the owner warned us if we have tried Haggis before. From his eyes, I can tell he is not used to having a foreign customers order Haggis this kind of traditional food (Gigi, 42, online travel journal).

Food plays a crucial part of creating the destination’s image. Similar to the dumplings in Poland – discussed earlier; Fish and Chips in Britain; tapas, Sangria and Paella in Spain; as well as custard tart in Portugal are all the foods that represent the destination’s image from a Chinese perspective. In this case, these representative traditional dishes or drinks become the priority of Chinese backpackers’ selection when they are travelling, especially when they have prepared well before their departures. The last night on the UK trip, Jocelyn suggested to find a nice British pub to have
fish and chips as a happy way to finish the journey (field note, UK trip). Eating these dishes fulfils Chinese backpackers’ expectations of the destination.

Whilst trying local food offers a channel for Chinese backpackers to interact with locals and perceive authenticity, on the other hand, Chinese culinary habits, which are quite different from the West, raise a challenge for them to consume Western food consistently. China has a strong traditional culture that makes Chinese put food as one of the priorities in their lives (民以食为天). This culinary culture with solid influence that to some extent deeply embedded even in the hypermobile context. For some informants in this study, their dependency on Chinese food in some ways show their culture stickiness during journeys. On one hand, I discussed that Chinese backpackers are willing to eat local food as a way to explore local culture, on the other, they might not be used to the foreign food and go back to their daily eating habits. In Poland, Jennifer (31) brought Chinese instant noodles with her for the trip, and had Chinese noodle soup for breakfast. She said: ‘as a Chinese, I still get used to having something hot for breakfast, continental breakfast does not really suit me’ (conversational interview, Krakow). In Spain, when he arrived Cordoba, Luke (25) spotted a local Chinese store, and bought several packs of instant noodles, he said: ‘it is the best food in the earth’ (field note). Whilst for the UK trip, although having Western soup with bread in a local restaurant, Jocelyn (45) still admitted she chose the food that closest to the Chinese cuisine: ‘Chinese people get used to having something hot at this time of the day. Stomachs of Chinese people is the most challenging part to make cultural adaptation’ (Conversational interview, Lake District). Similar to the pattern of culture shocks and adaptation patterns, across these three journeys most informants went through a curve of food experiences. From excitement and willingness to try new food, to slowly moving back to their eating habits or adapting locals’ eating routines and food, some informants adjusted and combined their eating habits with the local cuisine.
Furthermore, Chinese collectivistic culture also influences Chinese eating habits: sharing multiple dishes at a round table is the most common way of Chinese eating. The idea of sharing of Spanish tapas is similar to Chinese eating habits and so is favoured by Chinese backpackers. Through observations, sharing food at the dining table is a common practice; therefore, informants normally purposely order different dishes, and tried from each other’s. By doing this, Chinese backpackers are able to taste different dishes at the same time, staying within a small budget.

From its cultural influence, Chinese backpackers place more importance than other nationals in terms of eating experiences. The relationship between food and travel of experiences of Chinese tourists has been widely investigated (Sheth, Newman and Gross, 1991; Sweeney and Soutar, 2001; Chang, Kivela and Mak, 2010; Fu, Lehto and Cai, 2012). Several studies including Sweeney and Soutar (2001) and Fu, Lehto and Cai (2012) address the social value of Chinese tourists' dining experiences during the trip. Reflectively, in this study, posts with pictures of the food stand for a big proportion of informants' experience sharing. By doing this, Chinese backpackers successfully enhance their social status. Although food as a way to confirm social status has been changing with the social and economic growth of China, as a symbolic dimension, it still acts its role as influencing tourists' behaviour, including backpackers. When travelling in Western countries, the role of food as a symbolic dimension has been maximised to demonstrate the difference.

It has been shown that both Chinese culture and Western backpacker culture play their roles in constructing the Chinese backpacker identity through eating practices. With no doubt, having local food is a direct way for Chinese backpackers to immerse in and explore local culture by perceiving authenticity of interacting with local staff and trying local cuisine, especially when Chinese backpackers have relatively superficial interactions with locals and other backpackers. Restaurants are a social place for Chinese backpackers to interact, explore, and practice their Western backpacker ideology. On the other hand, coming from a nation proud of their own food, some
Chinese backpackers show resistance to unfamiliar food, and return to their comfort zones during the journey. In addition, the influence of Chinese values is also shown through their cultural stickiness and practice of daily habits.

7.4.3 Meeting others or sticking to the group

The paradox of Chinese backpackers can also be found in their attitudes towards interaction with external social environments. In the previous chapter, I discussed how Chinese backpackers prefer to travel in a culturally homogenous group, which prevents them from interacting with locals and other backpackers. On the other hand, coming out of the environmental bubble and contacting socially with locals and other backpackers is one key characteristic of backpackers taken from the literature (Sørensen, 2003). During the trip, although informants implied a willingness to interact, and expected to make new friends while on the road, as illustrated by other backpackers, in practice they are still relatively reluctant to interact with people outside their environmental bubble. Fu, Cai and Lehto (2015) identify that culturally Chinese tourists draw a distinctive boundary between the travel group and the social environment outside their social group. This behaviour, distinguishing insider and outsider, attributes to strong Chinese value of collectivism, group orientation, and guanxi, which naturally excludes ‘outsiders’ (Scollon and Scollon, 1994; Wei and Li, 2013). Mainstream tourists, travelling in an environmental bubble, to some extent have similar travel patterns as Chinese tourists. However, Chinese tourists have more embedded cultural influences than just avoiding uncertainty.

The fundamentally different attitudes and perceptions towards risks and uncertainties between the core values of Eastern and Western ideologies are the critical elements here that paradoxically construct Chinese backpackers' identity. Seeking to go off the beaten track and exploring individually through backpacking shows the core value of the Western backpacker ideologies; willing to take risks, whilst Chinese tourists are regarded as more risk averse, especially in an
unfamiliar environment (Wong and Lau, 2001). Chinese backpackers’ high-risk concerns are practised through being overcautious. This is present not only in their destination choices, group orientation, and activity decision making, but informants were also overcautious when being approached by a welcoming host.

In Porto, we were checking the map in the middle of the street to figure out the direction to the bay. One old lady approached us and spoke some Portuguese. Both Luke and Wayne were quite cautious and tried to ignore her. Later the lady seized a young couple to translate for her, and we realised actually she was trying to help us. They felt about ashamed afterwards, and highly spoke the warm hospitality of Portuguese (Field note, Spain and Portugal trip).

7.4.4 Paradoxical identity construction of Chinese backpackers

It is worth noting that Chinese culture and backpacker culture – these two systems of values – although opposite on various levels, do not conflict in terms of constructing Chinese backpackers’ identity. For Chinese backpackers, the Confucius values are embedded in Chinese backpackers’ beliefs, ways of thinking, and behaviours, whilst Western backpacker culture influences their travel preferences and motivates them to pursue an ideal lifestyle. Thus Western backpacker culture, as an outcome or representative of a Western system of values, does not function on the same level in opposite to Chinese values, in terms of the identity constructions of Chinese backpackers. In order to understand the construction of Chinese backpackers’ identity, it is crucial to investigate from a Chinese backpacker’s perspective how an individual embraces, balances, and practises these two systems of ideologies.

Firstly, the nature of Chinese backpacking trips in Europe can be understood as short-term intercultural encounters: Chinese backpackers travel outside their familiar cultural environments, and practice Western backpacker culture in the cultural environment that it was generated. Although globalisation brings a certain degree of Western impact, Chinese values are still predominant in current Chinese society. The values of harmony, collectivism, and group
orientation - that stem from Confucius thousands of years ago - still, influence Chinese individuals by various means. Secondly, although backpacking has a deeper level of immersion than other means of travel, it is still a relatively short-term cross-cultural experience compared with immigration and longer-term international study. Therefore, the embedded Chinese values are often used as references when they are digesting and perceiving Western culture or new encounters. Thirdly, the traditional backpacker culture developed from a Eurocentric perspective that Western backpackers practicing Western backpacker culture in less developed countries (Westerners practice Western culture in the East). In the case of Chinese backpackers, the practice of this backpacker culture is not only out of its original context, but a converse one (Easterners practicing the Western backpacker culture in the West). Thus, Chinese backpackers need to go through two stages of ideological negotiation: first, to perceive Western backpacker culture from an Eastern lens, and second, to perceive Western values when backpacking.

7.5 Conclusion

This chapter investigated Chinese backpackers’ identity construction, cultural influence, perceptions and practice. It examined how donkey friends perceive and practice characteristics of Western backpacker culture. Some backpacker values are favoured and performed by Chinese backpackers, while some are interpreted differently due to the demographic group, as well as their embedded cultural influences and dominant social trends. The second section of this chapter investigated how Chinese backpackers perceive backpacking as a transformative journey. Comparably, it takes longer for them to perceived or recognise changes – ‘imperceptible transformation’. The differences between how Western backpackers and Chinese backpackers interpret and perceive this ‘rite-of-passage’ idea can mainly be attributed to different streams of developments of Western and Eastern attitudes towards leisure and learning. The different modern lifestyles between West and East also leads to these differences. More discussions about the conflict
and paradox between Western and Eastern system of values were unfolded by analysing how the donkey friend's identity been constructed. Three pairs of opposing values between East and West were discussed in order to provide insights into the cultural complexity of Chinese backpackers.

The Chinese backpacker thus was paradoxically and unevenly constructed by embedded Chinese values and traditional western backpacker culture. Compared with Western backpackers, their Eastern counterparts Chinese backpackers are more cautious about safety issues and interactions with their external environment. Group orientation at the same time helped to solve the safety concerns, while acting in opposite to Western backpacker ideologies of flexibility, exploration, and interaction with others. As relatively superficial interactions might lead to the lack of travel information and less local experiences, Chinese backpackers make up for it by being highly active in their online enclaves and prioritising their local dining experiences.

This chapter understood Chinese backpackers’ travel experiences by unpacking their internal perceptions, identity constructions, and transformations. In addition, as a chapter that responds to the layer of ideology from within the three-layer system, it showed that ideology has no longer acted as an abstract and authoritative layer at the top of the pyramid. The negotiating feature of this chapter shows the fluidity of various streams of values and ideologies within one’s perception in the mobile and intercultural setting. The discussion of this chapter contributes to the bigger picture of revisiting the three-layer system by further exploring the strong relations between social actors and cultural values vertically and, horizontally, the conflicts and fusions among different cultural values bring more insights into reconceptualisation from an empirical lens. More discussion will be undertaken in Chapter Nine.
CHAPTER 8 AFFORDING MATERIALITY

8.1 Introduction

To reconceptualise the three-layer system of culture, this chapter responds to the bottom layer of the original system and provide insights into technologies and materials in the mobilities. This chapter is going to investigate the various roles of materiality in Chinese backpackers’ travel experiences in Europe. In this study, materiality refers to non-human actors including equipment and facilities that enable and support backpackers’ mobilities, as well as ICTs that mediate distanced communication and imaginative travel. In this chapter I will discuss different affording roles of these non-human actors in mobile sociality, as well as how different systems of values or concepts influence or indicate the usage of these materials and technologies. The discussion comprises four main parts. In the first section of the material affordance, I will discuss fundamental and symbolic materials that support and facilitate backpackers’ movement, at the same time, playing the role to assist identity constructions and intercultural interpretations. In the second part of this chapter, I will look at how collective intelligence, ranging from travel guidebooks to online forums, generates, gathers, and transports knowledge and information. How backpackers perceive and practice the information will be discussed. The third part of this chapter is virtual sociality. As a significant part of mobile sociality I will discuss how mediated communication technologies mobilise social interactions. Finally, the other side of materiality will be examined, to discover its limitations, restrictions and control on backpackers' mobilities and travel experiences.

8.2 Material Affordance of Mobilities

Infrastructure, facilities and tools are fundamental supports of human beings’ daily lives and are assigned new roles in backpacking. For backpackers, certain types of accommodation, transport, and equipment have symbolic meanings, and they assist backpackers to perform and construct
their identities. Furthermore, in an intercultural context, materials provide an alternative way to perceive Western culture. In this section, I am going to look at fundamental material in backpacking such as accommodation, backpacks, transport, and travel support technologies to analyse issues of material affordance (Haldrup and Larsen, 2006) in the case of Chinese backpackers, how they represent their identities, afford their mobilities, and build up potential intercultural interpretations.

### 8.2.1 Accommodation

Differing from the literature in Chapter Two suggesting that the hostel acts the most symbolic part of the backpacker culture in the Western context (O'Regan, 2010), the findings here suggests that Chinese backpackers tend to be more flexible in terms of accommodation choices. Across three fieldwork trips, informants chose a variety of accommodation, including backpacker hostels, budget hotels, guest houses, self-catering apartments, and ‘couch surfing’. The size of the party profoundly determined the accommodation choice. For solo Chinese backpackers, they were inclined to stay in hostels for social reasons: ‘it is too lonely to stay in a hotel on my own. Instead, I can talk to people and make friends in the shared dorm’ (Lily, 21, interview, Madrid). However, strongly influenced by group orientation and collectivism, Chinese backpackers travelling in a group tend to keep the interaction intra the group. As a result, for small Chinese backpacker groups, self-catering properties are their first choice. Jocelyn (45) was amazed by the good value of self-catering, especially the cottage we stayed in, in the Lake District. She said: ‘before this, I only stayed in hotels, sometimes in camps or hostels, never tried self-catering. I really enjoy doing this, especially when we cook and have dinner together, just feel like we are a family’ (interview, Lake District). Features of spacious common areas and kitchens which facilitate intra-group communication of self-catering properties are one essential element that Chinese backpackers choose to stay: ‘after dinner and great chat, everyone found their corner in the living room, edited photos and posted on WeChat moment, sometimes we shared interesting moments of the day to each other’ (Gigi, 42, online travel journal).
As a budget-sensitive backpacker, Joey (24) carefully compared prices between staying in the hostel and apartment found on Airbnb: ‘the flat shared by four of us is even cheaper than staying in the hostel! We can also buy some ingredients from the market and cook in the apartment, let us try to cook paella’ (online chatting history). For Chinese backpackers travelling in small groups, apartment sharing can be cheaper and more comfortable than a hostel. With similar prices, informants in this study preferred to stay in local places than standardised hotels in order to have more opportunities to immerse with locals, given the fact that Chinese backpackers have rather few opportunities for interacting with others when travelling in a culturally homogeneous group.

On the other hand, the environmental bubble created by trained services and standard servicescape of a hotel is less appealing to Chinese backpackers: ‘the hotel we stayed in Granada is the worst accommodation we stayed during the trip. It is just too "hotel": the space is very limited for four of us, and I don’t really enjoy the feeling being isolated from locals’ (Wayne, 28, interview, Spain-Portugal trip). Alternatively, private apartment rentals provided a platform to enable deep interaction between Chinese backpackers and locals. At the end of the journey, when I asked informants about interesting moments during the trip, most of them recalled their interactions with accommodation hosts. ‘What impressed me most (in terms of intercultural contacts) is our host in Lisbon, Pedro, I think he is the only new friend I made during the trip. I love chatting to people with an interesting background, and he certainly is, the way he spoke, and his dress-style, we were very clicked. Although my English is not good, I still tried my best to talk’ (Joey, 24, Spain-Portugal trip). This kind of hospitality and conversations with locals provides positive contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954) for Chinese backpackers, who have relatively limited outer group interactions.

Responding to the literature in Chapter Two, staying in hostels used to be a key characteristic that identified backpackers (Pearce, 1990), but has no longer played a strong constructive actor in shaping Chinese backpackers’ identities. This can attribute to the trend of mainstream backpackers
(O’Reilly, 2006) and more affluent Chinese travellers identify themselves as backpackers (Zhu, 2007). In addition, the role of information hubs that backpacker hostel lounges used to play (Murphy, 2001), has been replaced by online forums. Acknowledging the popularity of hostels among backpackers, this finding, on one hand, reflects the mainstreaming of backpackers and typologies of tourists, while on the other it also reflects the influence of collectivism on accommodation choice among donkey friends.

8.2.2 Transport

Similar to accommodation, transport functions as a fundamental role that enable and afford backpackers’ mobilities by linking backpackers among multiple destinations as well as inside one. In addition, among various choices available, the preference of public transports than tour bus in the city to some extent indicates the identity practice among Chinese backpackers (Hampton, 1998). ‘Local double-decker bus with a good view is an excellent way to travel around in London. You can have a great view on the rooftop, and the price is much lower than a tour bus. They can take you everywhere in London, and just simply use Oyster Card’ (Gigi, 42, online travel journal). Travelling the way local people commute daily is regarded as a way for Chinese backpackers to act as local (Muzaini, 2006).

Whilst for intercity transports, car rental was preferred than Eurail pass, which is rather popular among backpackers for touring in Europe. In Chapter Two, advantages of flexibilities, adventurousness and privacy were addressed (Featherstone, 2004; Urry, 2004; Butler and Hannam, 2013). Discussed in Chapter Seven, Chinese backpackers are inclined to have less flexibilities in terms of itineraries, but in this case, their choice of car rental in some degree help them practicing ‘flexibility’ this backpacker characteristic (Ross, 1997): ‘rent a car for our trip makes our trip quite flexible, if we like some places we can stay longer and do not need to worry about the time to catch the train’ (Luke, 25, interview, Madrid). Similarly, for our trip in Scotland, ‘a three hours’ journey
took us eight hours to finish. To stop at anywhere we want is actually the main point to do the road trip’ (Gigi, 42, conversational interview, Scotland). Specifically, for Chinese backpackers, from a national culture that emphasises group orientation and interpersonal relations (Hofstede, 1983), the private and controlled space (Pesses, 2010) enables and facilitates a potential deeper level of interaction. Based on the understanding of Chinese values influence, it makes sense that car rental provides a mobile social space for Chinese backpackers to strengthen their inner group social links: ‘without Wi-Fi, site-seeing or other interferences, decent conversations are more likely to take place in the car. For this road trip, we got plenty of time to do so on the road (reflexive field note)’. Transports, in particular, automobilities, in this case, provide a sense of mobile mooring that provides Chinese backpackers with private and intimate space for their conversations, debates and interactions.

8.2.3 Backpack

The physical backpack, as the etymology of the word backpacker, fundamentally defines the image of backpackers. Addressed in Chapter Two, the function of a backpack is as much weight as the meaning making it brings to backpackers (Walsh and Tucker, 2009). Although Zhu (2007) suggests Chinese backpackers to some extent are similar to flashpackers, as was noticeable in this study, some informants still maintain strong identity connections with backpacks to remind or demonstrate their backpacker status.

Responding to Zhu (2007), Chinese backpackers in this study did not limit themselves using either suitcases or backpacks. Preferences of a backpack to a suitcase is largely due to budget and mobilities, practical reasons: ‘it helped save money for taking budget airlines’ (Jennifer, 31, interview, Warsaw) and ‘easier to move around’ (Joey, 24, interview, Barcelona). Chinese backpackers prioritise these practical issues regardless of travel experiences. Therefore, backpacker hierarchy based on the material condition of the backpack, to distinguish experienced and
inexperienced backpackers suggested by Walsh and Tucker (2009), does not function among Chinese backpackers. Technically, there are not many differences between backpacks and suitcases in terms of packing. Chinese backpackers prioritise ICT and digital equipment in their packing: ‘I packed my phone, two cameras, iPad, Kindle, charger, mobile charger, and my mum also asked me to take my laptop, so it ended up with packing a lot of digital stuff’ (Wayne, 28, interview, Barcelona). This packing prioritisation also responds to the technological and virtual sensitiveness characteristics of Chinese backpackers (Lim, 2009; Zhu, 2009; Ong and du Cros, 2011). The wide use of suitcases and travelling with many digital devices shows the similarity of Chinese backpackers and the characteristics of flashpacker (Paris, 2012). Considerations of size, items to pack, whether it is easy to move around: the backpack acts as an essential role of backpackers’ embodiment. This close relationship of material culture and backpackers’ embodied performance has also been highlighted by Warnier (2001).

However, besides embodied performance, the backpack as a collective consciousness also plays a crucial role for Chinese backpackers to perform their identity as backpackers.

*When we were leaving the hostel in Bath, Gigi asked a backpacker sitting in the yard to take a group photograph for us. After the first photograph, she borrowed my backpack (she brought a suitcase) and put it on her back and asked for another photo (Figure 8-1). Eventually, she posted the second photo with my backpack on her back on the WeChat moment (Field note, UK trip).*

Reflexively, as a backpacker, I subconsciously tend to admire or respect more to those who travel with backpacks than suitcases. In Barcelona, on the way to meet other informants, Wayne (28) told me he met Joey last night: ‘she just came here with a backpack, whilst me and Luke had two large suitcases’. All of a sudden, I had a stronger connection with Joey, although I have not met her yet. I added: ‘Wow, she sounds cool’ (field note, Barcelona).
8.2.4 Travel supporting technologies

The introduction of technologies in travel notably changes the way of travel (Wang and Fesenmaier, 2013). The strong relationships between backpackers and ICTs have been identified in Chapter Three. For backpackers planning travels themselves, the role of these supporting technologies in influencing overall travel experiences cannot be overlooked. For Chinese backpackers, although they are considered a digital generation (Lim, 2009), they still face some challenges using these technologies when travelling abroad. For example, in the case of Google Maps and Google Translate (these two applications are widely adopted in global travel), they are censored in mainland China, whilst the substituted applications such as Baidu Map do not function as well overseas as they do in China. Informants were eager to learn how to use these applications and quickly practice them for guiding directions:

These few days, Jocelyn started to figure out how to use Google Map, from signing up an account on Google, to learned how to star favourite locations and navigate. Today, she said: 'let me do the navigations, I want to learn how to do it properly', she referred to the lonely
The use of these technologies assists Chinese backpackers’ travel, at the same time, encouraging them to become experienced travellers through learning and practising new skills, which fit in the idea of backpacking as a university of learning (Pearce and Foster, 2007). Navigation systems and translation applications such as Google Maps and digital translation app instead of traditional maps and dictionaries have become significant supporting devices for Chinese backpackers when travelling abroad. By learning the skills to use these devices, these technologies are quickly embedded in backpackers’ daily practice, and become an indispensable part of their travel experiences. In this case, the support from these technologies enables Chinese backpackers to travel around confidently. For older Chinese backpackers like Kate (45), learning the skill of using these technological tools shows their capability of being a backpacker; whilst for Lydia (25), using these technologies sometimes can avoid some unnecessary trouble: ‘I think holding an actual map sometimes is too identical as a tourist, it might attract attentions of thefts, or people might charge you more. It is the same holding a travel guidebook; however, using apps on your phone is less visible, and can hide your status of a traveller’ (interview, UK).

8.2.5 Material and intercultural perception

These facilities and equipment not only act as affording roles that enable and facilitate mobilities, in the intercultural context, they also provide direct contacts and perceptions of the foreign environment as alternative social interactions (Roth, 2001).

*Driving on the left in the UK more or less had some challenges for Jocelyn and Gigi. After 2 weeks of road trip, when fastening the seat belt, they still unconsciously tried to fetch the seat belt from the other side. When they realised it was the wrong size, they cannot stop laughing. Gigi and Jocelyn also showed their confusion why there are so many roundabouts in the UK, when we leading by GPS, we always made mistake of getting off the wrong ones (field note, UK trip).*
Another issue is different payment methods between China and the West. China has developed a whole different system of payment methods, from Unionpay as a bank card to Alipay for online banking. This gap between Chinese and Western payment system makes money withdrawal and online ticket payment more challenging. It was confusing for several informants and brought them some inconvenience throughout the trip (reflexive journal).

This kind of contact with materials to some extent leads to cultural confusion (Hottola, 2004), and for field work in the UK, this confusion created nerves for the driver and intense communications between donkey friends. However, Chinese backpackers tend to be appreciation than confusion in terms of new materials they encounter. For informants, before visiting Europe, they perceived the Western world as ‘high-end and classy (高端大气上档次)’ (Lily, 21, interview). Although after weeks of backpacking, some informants had new understandings of Europe, most of them praised the advanced and convenience of infrastructures in the West: ‘In China, travelling by train seems like a massive event, you have to arrive early, go through the security, stay in the waiting room, but here you can just arrive in time and jump on the train, if you miss this one, you still have next one coming soon to catch’ (Jennifer, 31, interview, Warsaw). The convenience of trains in Europe was also amazed by Jocelyn (45), she spoke highly of Western infrastructure compared with China when we were in the countryside of the Lake District: ‘the concept of countryside here and countryside in China is completely different. You see our cottage is quite isolated, but gas, electricity and water are all fully supplied, which is no different to the city. No wonder why people prefer to live in the countryside in England’ (conversational interview, Lake District).

This helps to understand the intercultural perception from the approach of material affordance. In this case, materials such as advanced facilities and technologies afford Chinese backpackers to create or confirm the positive perception or image of the West. This understanding offers an
alternative approach to comprehend how technology plays the role of affordance in the wider context of cultural perception in intercultural travel, as well as the co-creation of experiences.

This section focuses on various affording roles that materials play in enabling and facilitating backpackers’ journey. Noticeably, Chinese backpackers in this study chose a wider range of accommodation and transport, which corresponds with the characteristics that Chinese backpackers tend to be fitting into the category of flashpackers (Zhu, 2007). This finding also corresponds with the mainstreaming of backpackers (O’Reily, 2006) and the blurrier boundaries between tourist types. Different levels of material engagement of backpackers’ movement and experience creation have been discussed. Facilities such as accommodation and transport, although mainly acting as the foundation of mobilities, also facilitate the social interaction purpose among backpackers. Both accommodation and physical backpacks show different levels of collective consciousness of the backpacker culture, where backpackers strengthen their identities through consuming these materials. In addition to identity construction, carry-on technologies bring convenience for travel supports, at the same time also encourage backpackers to fulfil ‘learning’ this backpacker characteristic. This section also sheds lights on the role of material culture in intercultural contacts through looking at backpackers’ cultural appreciations and confusions by simply using and adjusting materials in different culture contexts.

8.3 Collective intelligence – Travel Guidebooks and online community

Information-intensive – one key backpacker characteristic – shows how experiences are shared, gathered, and generated among backpackers. They are then systematically developed into presentable formats such as travel guidebooks and online travel journals, or informal ways, such as conversations in the hostel common room as well as ‘Q&As’ on online backpacker forums. With the development of technology, the backpacker’s collective intelligence shifts from a corporeal era
with hard copy travel guidebooks and experience exchanges in hostels, to the digital era with mobile communication, Word of Mouth, and experience-sharing online. In this section, I will discuss how Chinese backpackers perceive travel guidebooks and online communities, two forms of collective intelligence, in order to understand the different roles that they play in shaping identities and travel experiences.

8.3.1 Travel Guidebooks

Mini backpacker guides and *Lonely Planet* are two types of travel guidebooks which were predominant among informants in this study. Mini backpacker guides are categorised by destinations and travel type (for example, museums in London, shopping in Paris) and were introduced by Qyer.com, with a digital version which is rather popular among Chinese backpackers. Authors of these mini travel guides are not professional, but experienced backpackers who know the destination well. These digital mini guides are easy to access and download through mobile apps, desktops, and some of them support GPS offline map functions, which provides alternative support for navigation. Backpacker forums such as Mafengwo or eueueu.com also launched similar mini guidebooks, and competition is fierce. They successfully target Chinese backpackers by providing recommendations suited to Chinese tastes, such as location for taking photos:

*After arriving Granada, we decided to chill out in the room as it was too hot outside. I started checking what we can do on Qyer mini guide. Knowing Luke (25) likes to take photographs, I saw on the mini guide that recommends a platform, which is the best spot to take photos to view the sunset. Wayne (28) was slightly doubting about the accuracy of this information as he couldn't find the information on Lonely Planet. We checked again with the Internet, which proved the information was correct (field note, Granada).*

Compared with these mini-guides, traditional travel guidebooks such as *Lonely Planet* are still popular among Chinese backpackers for providing detailed, professional, and comprehensive information and cultural backgrounds. ‘I am really surprised and admire those writers who work
for *Lonely Planet* and can provide such detailed information. It must be very hard work! But backpackers really benefit from this collection of great minds’ (Jocelyn, 45, interview, Cambridge).

One key feature that differentiates travel guidebooks and online mini guides is that travel guidebooks provide more background knowledge than travel tips for a visiting destination. Differing from the argument of Nishimura, Waryszak and King (2006), that the use of travel guidebooks mainly takes place before the trip, informants in this study used travel guidebooks before, during, and even after the trip, as well as showing different attitudes towards them. Some preferred gaining some background knowledge before visiting, whilst some preferred no preparation and read the guide after visiting. For those who read before visiting: ‘I normally just gain some knowledge for the destination instead of reading into detail where to go, I prefer to reserve some surprises’ (Wayne, 28, interview, Toledo). On the other hand, informants like Jocelyn (45) did not do much preparation in advance, but read details from travel guidebooks after visiting: ‘Since I have visited, reading this information makes much more sense, and it also helps me to strengthen the travel experience and memory’ (informal conversational interview, Cotswolds).

Acting in the roles of constructing a destination’s image and forming backpackers’ expectations (McGregor, 2000; Lew, 1991), guidebooks help some backpackers to create the destination’s image in order to reduce fear of the unknown; for some to use during the trip for last minute information searches or cultural background briefings; whilst some backpackers purposely read them after the trip to prevent their perceptions and experiences from being limited.

Known as the ‘backpacker Bible’, *Lonely Planet* is also perceived by Chinese backpackers as an essential part of identity construction, with the popularisation of its Chinese editions. With the trend that guidebooks have become digital in order to keep themselves information-intensive (Richards and Wilson, 2004), some informants still carry a hard copy as a way to strengthen their backpacker identity. When asked if it was too heavy to carry three copies of the brick-like *Lonely
Planet, Wayne smiled with a spark in his eyes: ‘not at all, I feel like I am a real backpacker when I am having them’ (informal conversational interview, Seville). From another journey in the UK, Gigi (42) also carried a hard copy of Lonely Planet. Quite a lot of our activities were designed by looking into what Lonely Planet suggested exclusively, but had been overlooked by other guidebooks in order to aid backpacking on the off-beaten track. Throughout the journey, the Lonely Planet was noted, folded, being read out before visiting some attractions, placed in the front of the car, on the dining table, besides the bed, embodied being part of our experiences (reflexive note, UK trip). As an identifiable symbol of backpackers, ownership of lonely planet act as a part of the collective consciousness that offers backpackers ontological proof, which assists constructing and strengthening the backpacker identity (Walsh and Tucker, 2009; Welk, Hannam and Atelievic, 2007).

8.3.2 Online Community Sociality

Differing from two types of travel guides: written by professionals or experienced backpackers, online forums are a community-oriented medium, and encourage active contributors while providing an interactive and informative platform for information exchange. Online community sociality in this context refers to direct and indirect social contact among Chinese backpackers on online backpacker forums, such as Qyer.com. Direct social contacts include chats, finding travel companions, as well as exchange travel tips in the Question and Answer (‘Q&A’) section. On the other hand, indirect social contacts stand for backpackers sharing travel experiences in the format of travel journals, where other backpackers read, imagine and prepare their own trips. One distinctive Chinese backpacker characteristic suggested by Lim (2009) and Ong and du Cros (2011) is that they are highly active socialisers in online enclaves. As a many-to-many communication platform, information travels quickly and is rapidly exchanged within the backpacker community. As a community-oriented group, Chinese backpackers see significant benefits from this kind of online enclaves. ‘Chinese forum is quite powerful’, says Wayne (28) confidently: ‘donkey friends
are very generous to share their travel experiences; they are very valuable and beneficial’ (Online chat). This feature of exchanging information and providing immediate feedback on the travel experience (Chow-white, 2006) offers a platform for backpackers to act out various roles in this virtual community. The information contributed by backpackers include substantial advice and illustrations that not only help Chinese backpackers to prepare for their journey, but also provide a first impression of the destination. According to Zhang and Watts (2008), online communities such as online backpacker forums are communities of practices, which accommodate experience exchanging and problem-solving. Backpacker culture is being practised and maintained online coherently through travel tips and experience sharing.

Many donkey friends who find travel companions on Qyer.com also spend a considerable amount of time reading and noting other backpackers’ travel journals, which are well categorised and often recommended by the administrator of the same website. The stage of imaginative travel (Urry, 2002) through reading other backpackers’ travel journal has become an inseparable part of Chinese backpackers’ experiences. More than just providing a general perception of the destination through the context of photos and text, it plays a more decisive role in terms of designing routes and destination choices than travel guidebooks do. ‘The first stage was going to Qyer.com. By reading others’ travel journal and seeing how they plan their trips, I kind of made up of my mind that I wanted to go to London, Cotswolds and Lake District.’ (Kate, 45, interview, UK trip). Reading others’ travel journal became an essential part of Wayne (28)’s pre-trip planning, too. Based on reading several travel journals on Qyer.com about Spain and Portugal: ‘most of them are taking this trip either clockwise or anticlockwise starting and finishing in Madrid, we can do clockwise and extend our trip to Portugal and end in Madrid’ (online group chat). Moreover, Wayne also attributed the smooth-running of the trip to these travel journals: ‘thanks to detailed information from these posts, we can take this trip that confidently and smoothly’ (interview, Madrid). In this case, by participating in this imaginative travel by browsing others’ travel journals, Chinese
backpackers’ perspectives of the destination are influenced. Young and Hanley (2011) support this argument by emphasising the significant impact of this community network on travellers’ behaviour. Given the nature of their high-level risk sensitivity and activity in the digital world (Zhu, 2007; Lim, 2009), the ‘doing homework’ behaviour of Chinese backpackers before the trip also shows the impact of these collective intelligent materials on travel experience shaping.

Across three journeys, donkey friends to different degrees followed other backpackers’ advice that they found on Qyer.com. With suggestions and recommendations, donkey friends are then more confident to make decisions. However, being repeatedly recommended and practised by donkey friends, some attractions and restaurants are consequently becoming Chinese backpacker enclaves. ‘More than once, we encountered other Chinese backpackers following the same blog’s recommendations’ (field note), whilst donkey friends were hesitant about some destinations because they were not yet recommended on Qyer.com or other analogous backpacker forums. This type of enclave exists and is maintained due to the repeated practices of Chinese backpackers. On one hand, they are going to the restaurants suggested by collective intelligent materials but, on the other, some write more reviews or recommendations on the Chinese backpacker forums to strengthen the status of these Chinese backpacker enclaves. Thus, a continuous loop is created between the collective intelligent platform and backpacker enclaves linked by practices of Chinese backpackers.

Not only obtaining information and tips, backpackers also contribute their experiences and knowledge to this community by answering questions in Q&A sections on forums as well as writing travel journals. For Chinese backpackers, writing travel journals on the forum is a huge project that not all of them are willing to undertake. However, Lily (21) finds it important keep the online backpacker community functioning by obtaining and contributing advice and tips: ‘I planned the whole journey by reading what other donkey friends’ were sharing, I feel it is obligatory to write a
blog to contribute my part to help others’ (interview, Madrid). Gigi (42) found that, besides sharing with others, writing blogs on Qyer.com is her way of learning: ‘normally I spend three months after the trip to digest my trip and put it in words. For me backpacking is a comprehensive way to understand the local culture, so I will try to read relevant books and understand the story behind. Unlike most tourists who just appreciate the beauty, I want to go a step further to figure out why it is beautiful, especially those cultural destinations’ (interview, Cotswolds). Although Gigi writes about her travel experiences on Qyer.com, her travel journals are not information-driven, but more focused on her personal digestion of the culture, history, and what she experienced. However, the blogs with detailed tips and recommendations are in fact those which are more popular among donkey friends.

As well as sharing travel experiences through travel journals, other types of interactive experience sharing are also very popular in China. After going back to China, Gigi (42), as her status of an experienced backpacker, was invited on WeChat to share her travel experiences through a ‘chat group’. The event was organised by an online travel platform aiming to bring together backpacker travel groups. Within one night, the group already reached its maximum number of participants (500) and Gigi’s experience-sharing session lasted for two hours, with direct Q&A and following discussions. Differing from her travel journal, which is more personal, Gigi’s WeChat sharing session tended to be more practical, where she shared some useful tips and routes along with some photos she took, and notes about her interesting experiences.

8.3.3 Informative Chinese backpackers

The exchange of travel information is a crucial element of the backpacker culture, within the ‘imagined community’ (Anderson, 1983; O’Reilly, 2006). In both the physical hostel lounge and the virtual online backpacker forum, information, ideas, and experiences are shared. In addition, the networks of like-minded backpackers are built in these backpacker enclaves to enlarge and
reinforce a sense of community (Paris, 2009). Although the mobile community is expected as an intersecting one: linking physical and online practices (Mascheroni, 2007), Chinese backpackers prioritise interactions and experience-sharing in digital enclaves rather than physical ones. As discussed in Chapter Six, Chinese backpackers travelling in small groups tend to interact within the group than with others outside it. In addition, as digital natives (Vodanovich, Sundaram and Myers, 2010), Chinese backpackers are characterised as relatively digitally active (Zhu, 2009; Ong and du Cros, 2011; Xiang, 2013) and they apply multiple online or mobile tools at different stages of the trip, particularly when decision-making. This, to some extent, is attributed to a Chinese tendency to have higher risk concerns when travelling (Reisinger and Mavondo, 2006). As Jennifer (31) remarked: ‘I always check the ranking and comments of the restaurant on TripAdvisor or Google before getting in. I want to make sure all my experiences are good. I don’t want to take a risk’ (interview, Krakow). This behaviour of Chinese backpackers responds to the literature discussed in Chapter Three, noting that high level of trust is generated from ‘weak ties’ between strangers on the Internet (Hannam, Butler and Paris, 2014). Interestingly, this practice shows a different landscape of risk-taking and novelty to Western backpackers (Elsrud, 2001). Informative Chinese backpackers adopt new digital enclaves quickly during the trip. As Google is censored in China, most informants in this study only started using Google Maps and TripAdvisor when they entered Europe, but picked up their respective functions quickly. Depending on the accuracy and informative nature of each online site, information shifts from one to another to gather useful information. A shift was noticeable according to observation from Qyer.com, a Chinese website, to a wider range of international sites. Although most informants find it fascinating to adopt a new channel for the purpose of their information gathering, Luke (25) preferred Chinese websites and forums: ‘recommendations by Chinese people suit my taste more’ (interview, Barcelona).

Chinese backpackers on one hand practice Western backpacker ideology of information-sensitiveness (Welk, Richards and Wilson, 2004) by obtaining and utilising multiple sources of
information; on the other, they gather information and have discussions on Chinese backpacker forums, where they to some degree relieve the anxieties and pressure of unknown environments. In addition, active engagement in virtual enclaves makes up for the missing information in superficial physical encounters outside the travel group. Word of Mouth and the exchange of information in the context of Chinese backpackers shows a shift of practices from the physical to the digital world.

8.4 Connectedness

In addition to the active movement and information exchanges discussed in the previous section, the virtual sociality considered by this study is also focused on the connectedness and togetherness of Chinese backpackers and their daily social networks, through Information Communication Technologies (ICT). Backpacker sociality is a networking sociality (Castells, 1996), which is created through intersecting movements between physical and virtual space. Interweaved with physical sociality, Chinese backpackers are highly active in their virtual worlds (Zhu, 2007; Lim, 2009). In response to the network sociality discussed in Chapter Three, this section is going to investigate further the role of ICT in network sociality (Germann Molz, 2012) by looking at how Chinese backpackers maintain connections with their social networks. I will explore the cultural influences behind these behaviours. As a concept of understanding the distribution between physical and virtual sociality, a concept of ‘sociality distribution’ will be suggested to investigate the interweaving nature of Chinese backpacker socialities in the context of mobilities. WeChat, which successfully combines the functions of social networking sites with an instant messenger, is currently the most popular tool among Chinese people to maintain their networks. This section will explore WeChat as a means of practising connectedness in the mobilities by Chinese backpackers.

8.4.1 Sharing travel experiences and updating safety
Constantly posting on WeChat during a trip is a preferred way for Chinese backpackers to keep informed family members and loved ones who worry about their safety. At the same time, frequent updates allow Chinese backpackers instantly share their travel experiences with pictures and text. From a collectivistic culture, the relationship between generations is comparatively close; furthermore, in the past thirty years, the Chinese one-child policy of the last three decades has had enormous social impacts, such that the new generation has become the core of the family. As a result, ‘excessive attention’ from parents (Zhu, 2005) leads to concern for their safety when their only children undertake a long-haul journey.

One main reason that motivates Chinese backpackers to post on ‘WeChat Moment’ (WeChat Social media function) is to inform their parents or partners that they are safe. Experienced backpacker Gigi (42) was still expected to keep her Mother updated: ‘It is human nature, no matter how old I am, in her eyes, I am always a little girl.’ She remarked on what motivated her posting on WeChat Moment (social media page): ‘to be honest, initially, my purpose of posting on WeChat moment was not to share with my friends, but to my families. For me it only makes sense when they see it, so they know I am safe’ (interview, Cotswolds). The issue of surveillance through ICTs in the mobilities (Germann Molz, 2006; Bennett and Regan, 2002) has been signified in the context of Chinese outbound backpackers. Chinese backpackers are expected to have a constant virtual presence to appease their families’ worries. Chinese family values give Chinese backpacker pressure to keep in mind updating their safety status to their families. ‘There are several times I forgot to update or message my parents, they made phone calls straight away’, Lily (21) smiled: ‘They love me too much’ (interview). Instead of feeling oppressed (Cooper, 2002), Chinese backpackers feel obligated to maintain connectedness with their families. Beyond simply updating safety statuses, Chinese backpackers prefer to apply the ‘social glue’ feature of ICT (Vertovec, 2004) to mediate and connect space and place in order to maintain this hybrid sociality. In addition, the Chinese value of *guanxi* also expects backpackers to maintain connectedness with their everyday social
networks. Differing from some travellers suggesting disconnected or unplugged (Dickinson, 2016), Chinese backpackers are more active online than their daily lives. For them, sharing travel experiences on social media platforms acts as a multi-functional role to maintain connectedness. ‘Comparing with making phone calls, posting on WeChat not only can let them know I am safe, but also can share my feeling combining with text and image’ (Jocelyn, 45, interview, Cotswolds). Jerry (29): ‘I feel less stressed to do it this way, and they can see more and interact with my experience by commenting on my post’ (interview, Warsaw). Sharing travel experiences on social media as a way of communication instead of direct contact has predominated Chinese backpackers’ virtual activities while on the move.

Differing from writing travel journals after the trip, posting on WeChat Moment has the advantage of sharing travel experiences instantly. ‘When I post on WeChat, I simply just felt those pictures are nice and wanted to note down my feeling. But when my friends started commenting on it, I realised this is a very interesting way to keep in touch and communicate my feelings of the trip with them’ (Kate, 45, interview, Cotswolds). Like Kate, Chinese backpackers’ behaviour on WeChat during the journey to some extent is determined by the demands of their WeChat audience. Both Gigi and Jocelyn agreed that friends’ comments and ‘likes’ on their posts encouraged them to post more. For Gigi, she took her post more and more serious during the second half of the journey, editing photos professionally with beautiful sentences telling her feelings (field note).

After dinner, Gigi was busy editing photos, Jocelyn kept checking names of destinations we visited today and read some related information from her iPad in order to help with her post, Kate was learning how to use the new function of WeChat to make a mini video. Everyone seems so focus, just like in an office. (Field note, lake district)

By posting travel experiences on their social media platforms, Chinese backpackers invite audiences from their social circles to attend the imaginative trip virtually. However, to maintain guanxi by sharing travel experiences on WeChat, informants took detailed consideration of the frequency and
the content of their posts. ‘I don’t like to post too many in a day. Standing on my friends’ perspective, they would get annoyed to see so many posts of you having fun while they are still working in the office. It is pointless to upset them, instead, I’d rather pick up some good quality photos at the end of the trip and note down what I really feel about the destination’ (Jennifer, 31, interview, Warsaw). As a window to show travel experiences to their friendship circles, Chinese backpackers in this study did formalise their posts. They made sure their wording was accurate, the background of the destinations was correct, and the pictures were unique and interesting. ‘I try not to share pictures of the destination landmark, anyone can find thousands of this kind of pictures taken by professionals’ Luke (25), as is a shutterbug, someone who takes many photos, always looked for unique angles to take photos and posted them on WeChat Moment. As an interactive medium of their social networks, posting on WeChat for Chinese backpackers is no longer simply sharing travel experiences, but comes with multiple purposes and meanings. Combining the obligation of updating their safety status arising from Chinese cultural influences; enabling imaginative travel for distanced friends and family; posts during the trip also undertake the task of maintaining guanxi.

However, Chinese backpackers’ online activities during backpacking journeys are not limited to updating safety statuses and sharing travel experiences. Maintaining connectedness also enables Chinese backpackers to regain access to their mundane lives. In other words, with access to the Internet, Chinese backpackers are sometimes expected to show a virtual presence for their work, social, and study lives, which are not relevant to backpacking. Through observation, informants across three studies to different degrees engaged in their mundane lives through ICTs. Although most informants expected to escape their daily lives when backpacking, they faced challenges to this escapism when the Internet was connected.

Jennifer was already working on her laptop when I woke up. She put on a helpless smile and told me she had some email to reply to. She was quite occupied and kept checked her phone on
our way to the bus stop. She also complained to me about the communication problem about her work. After replying the last email, she decided to switch off her internet. She murmured: ‘as long as I stay connected, I will keep going back to it. I need to get out of it’ (field note, Krakow).

ICT facilitates the expansion of social networks in the mobilities. As Hannam, Sheller and Urry (2006, p.4) address, with the support of ICT, face-to-face contact is mobilised in ‘a new kind of mobility nexus’. Backpacking is no longer a way of escaping everyday lives. Instead, it brings these mundane activities to their journeys, virtually. In this case, Chinese backpackers, on one hand, enjoy the benefits of ICT as it allows them to report safety easily and to share travel experiences; on the other hand, Chinese backpackers are required to show presence in their daily social networks. This also reflects that, by practising ICT, the boundary between home and away is blurring (White and White, 2007), and the distinction between everyday life and travel experience is weakening (Uriely, 2005; Urry, 2007). The Internet and mediated communication enable the expansion of social relations from a compact and community-based format to a wide-spread and networked one.

Some informants in this study enjoyed presence in their daily social networks by commenting on their friends' statuses, sharing posts of their own interests and professions, following hot topics on Chinese media (field notes). Correspondingly, friends and families from backpackers' social circles undertook a virtual journey through backpackers' cooperative travel, by looking at their experience sharing, commenting, and interacting under the posts. This bi-directional engagement creates an interweaving network that links social actors between home and away by actively presenting and engaging in each other's online activities.

8.4.2 Networked sociality distribution

Building upon the discussion about technologies as separation (Bull, 2007) in Chapter Three, in this section I am going to further explore how technologies function a role that distributes backpackers’ sociality between online and corporeal. Mascheroni (2007) suggests that applying new
media on the move has become one of the most distinctive features of current backpackers. Chinese backpackers apply ICTs in various ways throughout the journey. Current ICTs with powerful functions that ease maintenance of the social network regardless of whether the user is at home or travelling. Compared with writing postcards or letters to keep connectedness, as before, technologies now allow instant and multisensory communications. From observations, backpacking does not lessen Chinese backpackers' use of ICT in order to practice the ‘escape’ ideology of backpacker culture, in contrast, they are eager to share travel experiences, update their safety statuses, and ‘escape’ from intense group interactions. Discussed in Chapter Three, the ubiquitous use of technologies on holiday on one hand enhances backpackers’ travel experiences, on the other it provides possibilities for backpackers to escape from their physical encounters, turning to engage with their online sociality instead. This means Chinese backpacker end up being more present in their online activities.

In the network sociality, there is a limited social quota distributed unevenly across face-to-face and virtual socialities. For instance, during a trip, if one person is more active in their corporeal encounters, he or she will be less active in their online activities, and vice versa. As briefly discussed earlier, Chinese backpackers who have difficulties getting along with their group members turn to immersing themselves in their virtual worlds instead. In this case, a mobile Internet connection plays a crucial role in facilitating the function of this network sociality distribution. Holding mobile devices in their hands, Chinese backpackers frequently adopt mediated communications in their trips. At the same time as maintaining connections with their network, backpackers to some extent miss out on some embodied experiences. Resisting to this tendency, Kate (45) complained: ‘those people (always active on their mobile devices) can just stay at home, it is such a waste travelling such a distance and always on their phones' (interview, Glasgow).
There are certain periods when Chinese backpackers are more active in connecting with their online social networks than others. For instance, when the half-year backpacking journey was approaching its end, Luke (25) spent more time on WeChat than before, talking with friends and a potential business partner: ‘I am going straight to work when I arrive’, when asked about the increasing activities on his social network, Luke smiled bitterly: ‘you know Chinese culture, I need to “warm-up” some old connections, and there are some catch-ups and meetings that need to be arranged before then’ (interview, Madrid). Correspondingly, Joey was also quite absent minded and checked her email time to time at the end of the trip: ‘I feel very tired and not quite motivated, such a headache only thinking of dozens of things to do when I go back’ (interview). For relatively long-distance travel, backpackers commonly show their exhaustion from physical tiredness and aesthetic fatigue at the end of their trip. In this period, informants tended to be less excited about their embodied experiences, and instead killed time by immersing themselves in their virtual worlds as a transit for returning home.

In Chapter Three, the literature on mobile network sociality suggests that mediated communications enable co-presence of travellers between virtual travel and corporeal travel (Urry, 2002; Sheller and Urry, 2006; Mascheroni, 2007). The distanced overlapping and intersecting with corporeal encounters, according to Germann Molz (2006) as ‘interactive travel’, are supposed to widen backpackers' sociality by enabling travel with the Internet. However, by looking at backpackers themselves, the available of mobile network sociality does not mean that ‘co-presence’ can technically function by ensuring backpackers engage in social activities virtually and corporeally at the same time. Acknowledging the interweaving of virtual and physical mobilities in this network sociality (Sheller and Urry, 2006), I argue that backpackers’ experience of the network sociality is distributed among digitally connecting with the social network, works, and corporeally interacting with locals and other travellers. Given certain amounts of network capital, the broadening of
mobile sociality facilitated by ICT, although enables co-presence, could potentially lead to the absence of experiences due to the sociality distribution.

8.5 Dependence and Restrictions of Materiality

Facilities, equipment, technologies, and the Internet enable and facilitate movement, as well as assisting and connecting communication. This chapter has so far looked at the various affording roles that materiality plays in cultural influences and socialities, to support and construct backpackers’ experience, identities, and togetherness. However, affordances also come with dependence and restrictions by limiting backpackers’ mobilities, and controlling their overall travel experiences.

Visa issues are always one of the hottest topics of pre-trip conversations among Chinese outbound backpackers. Particularly for those less experienced Chinese backpackers: ‘What troubles me the most is the visa application, especially when I read those experience sharing on Qyer.com, those cases that got rejected really frighten me. I always worried my application will be get rejected although I did follow the instructions to provide documents’ (Harry, 24, interview, Skype). Both Schengen and UK visa applications require many supporting documents, complicating some Chinese backpackers. In Wayne (28)'s case: ‘especially when I need to ask my boss for the statement of employment. It could be quite awkward to ask for this in China. It really depends on how you getting along with your boss’ (interview, Barcelona). In China, due to a higher level of power distance (Hofstede, 2001), the relationship between employer and employee in an organisation follows the social hierarchy, which to some degree affects the efficiency of document preparation for visa applications. ‘Quite a few of my friends want to go abroad, they also have money, but considering about need to get all the bookings done and ask for the boss for these documents, they just give up the idea’ (Lily, 21, informal conversational interview, Madrid). In addition, Chinese backpacker forums, although providing detailed information, also widely circulate some unverified
information such as noting that a bank account requires at least 100,000 RMB (£10,000) for visa applications, some embassies are more likely to obtain longer visa than others in the Schengen area, and for those first-timers, the unemployed, or graduates it is difficult to obtain a visa. These rumours to some degree affect Chinese backpackers’ confidence, especially for those less experienced backpackers or young generations taking a gap year.

Differing from visa regulations perishing the thought of outbound travel, mobile technologies, the Internet, and Information Communication Technologies mediate distanced communications, provide efficient and accurate information, and assist backpackers throughout the journey. However, the convenience of these technologies, which are quickly adopted by backpackers, leads to increasing dependence on technologies. Backpackers’ behaviour, travel experiences, and mobilities to some extent are controlled and limited by these technologies. Some informants sensed this restriction:

*We are in the era of making decisions based on others’ opinions. During the whole trip we relied massively on different social medias and technologies. They always decided where we are going to have a meal. To be honest, I don't really like being so dependent. Why is it the authority? Why I have to live in or follow others’ opinions. I prefer to let my instinct to make decisions, and that suits me most (Gigi, 42, travel journal).*

Guidebooks, travel journals and Word of Mouth applications have largely determined Chinese backpackers' decision making. They successfully act in the role of ‘trip adviser’, which helped reduce cultural confusion among Chinese backpackers in a foreign environment, as well as securing a high level of experience. This over-dependence on collective intelligence to some extent limits backpackers’ experience and withdraws the opportunity to explore the destination. Chinese backpackers who are inclined to be more risk sensitive and informative: ‘The first time I did backpacking in Hangzhou, I read others’ travel journals and follow their tips. It turned up to be great! Since then, I always read others’ travel journals before my trip' (Jennifer, 31, interview,
Warsaw). It ends up with a circle where, by reading others’ travel journals and guidebooks, Chinese backpackers follow suggested routes, visit recommended restaurants, and go to recommended sites. Some of them go back and share their experiences online by sharing similar routes and these are in turn followed by others. Through observations, suggested routes shared by different backpackers on Qyer.com are mostly similar. Chinese backpackers repeatedly practice these routes, to some degree showing that their flexibilities are being limited by the convenience of these informative materials.

*It seems that following the recommendation on Qyer.com step by step is a very Chinese behaviour. Backpackers from other countries seem don't do that. They can just arrive here, explore the city themselves, find a local bar and go to see an exhibition. That is very casual and relaxing; I would love to do that in the future (Joey, 24, interview, Madrid).*

This leads to a paradox between the learning and flexible nature of backpacking, and the owning and controlling relationship between backpackers and technologies. As a ‘university of learning’ (Pearce and Foster, 2007), backpacking has been regarded as a process of learning regarding skill, knowledge, and self-exploration. However, the involvement of these technologies to some extent takes away the opportunities of backpackers to learn and solve problems by encountering others. With the support of ICTs, backpackers might save more time and receive more cultural background when visiting, but at the same time, are unable to reach the same level of learning after the journey. In terms of flexibilities, as discussed earlier, it seems an unwritten rule that Chinese backpackers practice the beaten track as recommended by other backpackers. With these experienced or professional references, Chinese backpackers’ views and thoughts have been influenced, and they end up with limited experiences.

In addition to the dependence of information and word of mouth, Chinese backpackers show high reliance on travel assistant technologies. In this study, informants’ movements were decidedly
determined by navigation systems for directions. On some occasions, this high reliance resulted in backpackers’ inability to use alternative ways of leading directions:

*On our way to Rosslyn Chapel, the navigator suddenly stopped functioning, the driver, Gigi, quickly asked us to turn on Google map to guide the route instead. Unluckily, there was no mobile data at that moment. We then tried to figure out the map on Lonely Planet, but failed. After struggling for 20 minutes, the Navigator finally worked again; Gigi laughed: ‘we really need to worship the navigator tonight’ (field note, Scotland).*

Furthermore, the support of mobile technologies by providing helpful assistance to a certain degree prevents backpackers from interacting with locals and other backpackers. As for directions, cultural background, recommendations and professional opinions are easier to access from digital collective intelligence, the necessity to interact with locals for these purposes has been decreased dramatically. These technologies build up a network of togetherness that compresses time and space, at the same time isolating backpackers from social interactions, and removing backpacker experience from its original nature.

### 8.6 Conclusion

This chapter focused on the technological layer of the three-layer system of culture, to analyse how this fundamental layer at the bottom of the hierarchy re-defines and re-constructs its role in the mobilities. In this chapter, various roles of affordances were explored through Chinese backpackers’ experiences. Discussion of materials and technologies in this chapter moved from physical materials, such as accommodation and backpacks, to the virtual world of social media and backpacker forums that enable two types of socialities. Beyond the bottom layer of the original system, this chapter shows the complexity of materiality in the cultural system by discussing the various roles it plays, not only towards backpackers’ experience making, but also to sociality and ideology. Thus, materiality in the mobilities is no longer only at the bottom of the hierarchy, but
also highly engaged in mediated communication, and it plays an active role in facilitating togetherness and connectedness in social networks, beyond merely distance. An intersecting network sociality interweaving between digital and corporeal worlds was emphasised in this chapter to showcase strong linkage between material culture and sociality. Sociality distribution in between these two worlds was further suggested based on the understanding of Chinese backpackers’ practices during the trip. This chapter also sheds lights on relationships of materiality and ideology, which have been overlooked in previous studies. In this study, attention was paid to how Chinese values as well as backpacker culture influence Chinese backpackers’ consumption of materials, and how materials help to construct their identities. In addition, this chapter looked at the other side of material that controls, limits, and sets boundaries on backpackers’ travel experiences. Based on these empirical findings from Chapters Six to Eight, I am going to refer to the theoretical constructs from Chapter Three, and reconceptualise the original system into a new one through an abductive approach in order to explain complex and dynamic travel experiences in the mobilities.
9.1 Introduction

This reconceptualisation chapter aims to propose the ‘Fluid Networked System of Culture’ as a new way to understand the three-layer system of culture in the mobilities and the contemporary world. To undertake this process, this chapter will start from revisiting the system to review its meanings and applications. This is then followed by an abductive approach of critique and reconceptualisation (Figure 9-1). Theoretically, general critiques of the traditional system are undertaken through the theoretical lens of the liquid modernity and new mobilities paradigms. This chapter will then undertake specific critiques and a reconceptualisation process for each layer of the original system, emerging from the empirical data in Chapter Six to Eight. Based on these two approaches, this chapter will introduce the reconceptualised ‘Fluid Networked System of Culture’ by revealing its structure and dynamics. For the last part of this chapter I will discuss the application and potential contributions of the Fluid Networked System of Culture in order to understand how it provides a new angle to understand travel experiences beyond just Chinese backpackers.

9.2 Recap The three-layer system of culture

Introduced in Chapter Two, the three-layer system of culture, which was conceptualised by American social anthropologist Leslie White (1949a; 1949b), in this study provided a framework to review relevant theories for backpacker experiences, and offered a guideline to instruct ethnographic fieldwork. For White (1949b), three horizontal layers in the system are hierarchical and solid: the technological layer at the bottom, the ideological layer on the top, and the social layer in between. White (1949a) and Paris (2009) use a ‘three-layer cake’ to describe the structure of this system of culture, whilst a pyramid structure of this system is suggested by Freitas (1979) to...
understand civilisation. White (1949a) argued that this hierarchical structure of cultural system reflects the culture process. Given its hierarchical structure and clear categorisation, the development of the three-layer system of culture stems from the idea of structuralism and modernity that epistemologically organises theories and knowledge into categories and typologies. This holistic approach to understanding culture has been widely adopted at various levels ranging from leadership and organisation, to human evolution and social changes (Katz and Kahn, 1978; Richerson and Boyd, 2008; Hackman and Johnson, 2013; Harper and Leicht, 2015). However, in tourism, the three-layer system of culture has only been applied to unpack and classify key elements and factors that construct backpacker culture (Anderskov, 2002; Paris, 2009). For this study, finding chapters although was organised responding to these three layers, they show the complexity of travel experiences, and interactions among elements in the mobilities, as well as the potential of reconceptualisation.

**Figure 9-1** an Abductive Approach of Reconceptualising Three-layer System of Culture
9.3 General critique of the three-layer system of culture

The globalisation resulting in the enormous social, technological and cultural changes of the world have been largely reshaped human beings’ behaviour, and their social relations, as well as their relationship and perception towards materials and culture. However, the design of the traditional three-layer system of culture did not take into account of these tremendous changes. Building upon literature review in Chapter Three, in this section, I am going to critique the solid and hierarchical traditional three-layer system of culture from the theoretical lens of the liquid modernity and the new mobilities paradigm. Furthermore, implications of these theoretical critiques will be given for the reconceptualisation in the next stage.

9.3.1 Critiques from Liquid Modernity

Discussed in Chapter Three, Zygmunt Bauman’s (2000) liquid modernity conceptualises the characterisation of contemporary globalised society, as well as the tendency of the consumerisation and the information revolution. Understood as a profound transformation from the solid modernity, the metaphor of ‘liquid’ suggests the ephemeral and transient characteristics of the current society. From the solid to the liquid modernity, the disintegration replaces the social cohesion, dense communications transform into loosely fluid networks, and the individualisation takes place of the constitutional solidarity (Vogel and Oschmann, 2013). This transition challenges some classic theories developed from the controllable and predictable modernity, including the traditional three-layer system of culture.

From the lens of liquid modernity, the restlessness of the global capital, the detachment of the time/space, and modern relationships provide a comprehensive sphere and guideline to critique the traditional three-layer system of culture. Based on this theoretical lens, the traditional three-layer system of culture has been regarded as too solid, too hierarchical, too static, and too structured. Alternatively, the liquid modernity implies a fluid, dynamic and disordered system of culture:
Bauman (2007, p.58) argues that the weakening of ‘dense networks of social bonds’ in the process of liquidising modernity. This shift reflects the formation and strengthen of the sociality on the cyber space, resulting in time-space compression and detachment (Harvey, 1999; Bauman, 2000). In addition, the focus of the individualism and consumerism of the liquid modernity guides through another shift from the mass production and the collective dense society into ‘consumer-related capacities and conduct’ (Bauman, 2005, p.82). This shift challenges the feasibility of the hierarchical and structured three-layer system of culture in the contemporary world, where the sociality and consumption-production relationship has been largely reshaped. Additionally, the focus of individuals, and the social pattern shaped by them provide a relatively fluid perspective to understanding the cultural system.

In addition to critiques, liquid modernity also provides guidelines for reconceptualisation. Differing from the postmodernity positioning itself in opposite to the modernity, Bauman’s (2000) idea of liquid modernity offers an alternative view that proposing a chaotic continuation of modernity. The idea of postmodernity although proposes diversity and individuality, and suggests the deconstruction of the power structure within the modernity (Lee, 2005), its anti-foundational nature fails to explain the social changes and developments of established theories. In this critique, although a fluid and dynamic system is proposed by the liquid modernity to replace the static, hierarchical, structured, and solid three-layer system, main elements and some fundamental structures (i.e. the platform and foundation role of materiality) still remain, which can be understood as an extension of modernity rather than postmodernity.

9.3.2 Critiques from the New Mobilities Paradigm

The transition from solid to liquid modernity is partially affected by the phenomenon of globalisation, technology developments and the mobilities. By physical movements, ideas are exchanged, social relations are extended, and new technologies are developed to facilitate these
demands. In order to understanding issues of mobile objects – Chinese backpackers, the contemporary mobilities theories and turns (Sheller and Urry, 2006; Urry, 2007; Adey, 2009; Cresswell, 2010) are introduced to offer a new perspective to investigate social interactions and daily experiences. Three characteristics of the new mobilities paradigm have been addressed in this section to provide critiques of the original layer system through the mobilities lens.

Firstly, aligning with liquid modernity (Bauman, 2000), the new mobilities paradigm argues that the static structure and logic of modernity can no longer explains issues of movements, mobile relationships and the social process on the move. The new mobilities paradigm shifting from the focus of structure to the focus on process that redirect away from the static structure of the modern world, and addresses the importance of studies of images, communications, and social relations on the move (Urry, 2007). In this case, the new mobilities paradigm has been regarded as the key critique of the solid three-layer hierarchy.

Secondly, the new mobilities paradigm suggests networks of connections that stretching beyond places. This theoretical proposition critiques the layers’ structure of the three-layer system of culture. Differing from the liquid modernity suggesting detachment or ‘deterritorialisation’ (Bauman, 2000), the new mobilities paradigm emphasises the immobile system and the infrastructure that supporting and facilitating mobilities. According to Sheller and Urry (2006), one theoretical contribution that the new mobilities paradigm suggests is to mobilise the ‘spatial turn’ in the social science. Ahmed (2013) argues that space forms and reforms itself as people, capital and things move through various levels of attachments, detachments, slippages and stickiness. Thus, the dynamic network consisting humans and materials suggested in Chapter Three as the theoretical framework of this study provides a different landscape of the system comparing with the traditional three-layer system of culture. Moreover, this network stretches into the virtual world connecting multiple distant spaces and make things closer in this networked relationship. This
network, as the result of the time-space compression, provides critiques that the traditional three-layer system of culture can neither provide sufficient explanations by its hierarchical and static structure, nor articulate the co-presence and mediated communication between the virtual and corporeal worlds of this networked sociality.

Thirdly, the new mobilities paradigm emphasises individuals as an effective vehicle to construct emotional geographies. This emphasis not only shifts the focus onto individuals, but also calls for attention to experiences, performances and affordances, which the traditional three-layer system of culture from a solid modern theoretical construct fails to provide an adequate framework to unpack these issues.

The new mobilities paradigm seeks an academic toolkit consisting of alternative theoretical and methodological approaches to recast social science (Hannam, 2009; Sheller and Urry, 2016). By looking into the mobile social relations, it not only focuses on the mobile objectives and issues, but also investigates immobilities, home, and moorings (Germann Molz, 2012). As liquid modernity suggesting break the dichotomy of modernity, the social relations through the lens of the new mobilities paradigm brings a togetherness connecting home and away, work and leisure, as well as the physical and the virtual worlds. This networked connectedness provides a comprehensive theoretical critique of the structure and adequacy of the three-layer system of culture in terms of explaining current mobile world. The theoretical critique of the new mobilities paradigm implies the alternative stretched network across physical and virtual world facilitated by ICTs, which is one key argument of the new mobilities paradigm (Sheller and Urry, 2006; Cresswell, 2010). This implication from critique suggests a complex and fluid system, with the focus of backpackers themselves, in a time-space compression world, to understand the intercultural travel experience.

Both liquid modernity and the new mobilities paradigm provide theoretical critiques of the static three layers’ structure and solid hierarchy of White’s (1949a) system of culture. Fundamentally, the
traditional three-layer system of culture is theoretically constructed in solid modernity, which emphasises on the mass production, institutional power and hierarchical orders. This traditional system is redundant to look into mobile and individual experiences. Based on theoretical critiques, the liquid modernity suggests a transforming process as well as a fluid and individual lens of the contemporary social system. Aligning with the concept of liquid modernity, the new mobilities paradigm implies a focus of stretching networked sociality under the condition of time-space compression, emphasising the role of mediated communication, as well as the complex ‘hybrid geographies’ (Whatmore, 2002) that connect humans and immobile infrastructures in the mobilities issues. Both critiques from these two theoretical lens suggest a fluid and dynamic network that connecting social actors and materials and stretching across various regions both virtually and corporeally.

9.3.3 Revisiting the Theoretical framework

The conceptual framework proposed in Section 3.5 was constructed in light of the theoretical lens of liquid modernity and the new mobilities paradigm. This theoretical lens not only provides critiques of the original system, but also offers instructions and ideas of the conceptual reconceptualisation. Regarding liquid modernity, firstly, the idea of liquid modernity as a chaotic continuation of the modernity suggests remaining key elements of the three-layer system of culture, but proposes a format of dynamic and liquid network instead of a well-organised and solid three-layer cake. Secondly, the focus of the individuals and their liquid modern relationships, aligning with indications from the new mobilities paradigms to propose a networked and fluid form of the system. On the other hand, the new mobilities paradigm, influenced by time-space compression suggests this networked format consisting of human actors and mediated by non-human actor stretching across time and space. In addition, the theory of the network capital (Larsen, Axhausen and Urry, 2006) from the new mobilities paradigm supports this network sociality in the contemporary system of culture. Therefore, as shown in Figure 3-1, I suggested that a network
consists social actors across space and mediated by ICTs was constructed transforming from the social and the technological layer of the original system. In addition to the mediating role, the technological layer still plays the role of fundamental supports in this transformed system. As for the ideology layer on the top of the hierarchy, I proposed that it is transformed into a more liquid format – ‘culture flow’, which immerses in the dynamic network reconstructing from the technological and social layer of the three-layer system of culture. This proposition is based on understandings of the liquid modernity and cognitive anthropology that individuals follow nomadic traits that change values and ideas in a relatively fluid manner. The ‘culture flow’ plays a twofold role in the new proposed network – on one hand, actively influence and direct backpackers’ perception and behaviour, on the other, shaped and structured by the performance of backpackers’ social activities. The idea of using ‘flow’ as a metaphor of ideology in this new model is to stress the liquid and intangible change of share values through encounters of backpackers. This purely theoretically constructed framework, on one hand, provides an overview of changes and dynamics of travel experiences in light of the mobilities and liquid modernity, and guide through the data collection and analysis so far in this study. On the other, in this abductive study, this framework is awaiting for further developments and comprehensions through empirical approach, which will be discussed in the next section.

9.4 Layer-by-layer: specific critique and reconceptualisation of three layers – an empirical approach

This study applies an abductive approach to critique and reconceptualise the original system by looking from both the theoretical and the empirical approach (Figure 9-1). In the previous section, theoretical critiques were given to argue that the traditional three-layer system of culture with a solid and hierarchical structure fails to provide an adequate explanation for travel experiences. Departing from the theoretical critique of the original system’s structure, the empirical approach of this study is going to further critique and comprehend specifically onto the ideological, social
and technological layer respectively by exploring their changing perceptions, complicated social relations, as well as material affordances and consumptions, in order to develop this dynamic system from interpretations of mobile ethnographic study.

9.4.1 Reconceptualisation of the Technological layer

From the theoretical approach, I proposed in Section 3.5 that the technological layer transforms from the foundation of the three-layer system into two forms – firstly, similar to the original system, acting as a foundation that support and afford movements and experience creations; and secondly, transforms into multiple active mediators that assist the formation of the networked mobile sociality. The empirical findings from Chapter Eight provides a thick description to support both transformed formats from this theoretical proposition. In addition to supporting the theoretical proposition from the empirical lens, the findings revealed a more complex picture that non-human elements play in this mobile system. The findings suggest there are blurrier boundaries between sociality and technology, and further emphasise the inseparability and complexity of intersecting relations of social actors and technologies (Urry, 2002; Mascheroni, 2007).

Not only supporting the theoretical proposition, the empirical material also raised some controversial views suggested by the theoretical approach in Section 3.5. For instance, the idea of multiplying social experiences at once (Moores, 2004) by the co-presence between the virtual and the physical world through the interactive travel (Germann Molz, 2006) was challenged by the empirical findings. Instead of multiplying social experiences, the empirical material suggests that ICT plays a ‘distributing role’ between corporeal and virtual socialities: by maintaining connectedness on the move, Chinese backpackers frequently check work-related emails, use instant messengers to report safety, and share travel experiences on social media. This active behaviour on the virtual world to some extent lessens the activeness of the physical sociality, which reflects in superficial interactions with locals and travel companions. Furthermore, for those Chinese
backpackers experiencing culture shock or having difficulties getting along with their travel companions, online sociality provides an alternative for them to escape from awkward corporeal situations (Bull, 2007). Thus, although mediating technologies enable a broadening of the network by co-presenting and multiplying identities, social experience cannot be multiplied, and has to be distributed among these identities that co-presence at the same time.

In addition to expanding and facilitating the existing sociality suggested by the theoretical approach, the findings also suggest that technologies and materials create new sociality. A distinct example is the hostel, which offers an abundant space for backpackers to build up new social relations. This study tends to focus more on the virtual enclaves of online forums, where the group sociality is formed (Chinese backpackers find travel companions from online forums), travel experiences are shared, and new virtual sociality is built. Departing from studies of travel forums in backpackers’ experience shaping and decision making (Wearing, Stevenson and Young, 2000; Jansson, 2007), the findings of this study further explore two types of socialities that the backpacker forum generates. For the first type, the mobile sociality develops from the virtual world and extends to the physical sociality. For instance, Chinese backpackers form their travel groups online, then travel together corporeally. For the second, the sociality is purely virtual. In this case, the virtual sociality functions as a form of collective intelligence by backpackers who do not know each other in real lives commenting under each other’s travel journals, sharing travel experiences, and answering each other’s questions. The role of ICT here is fundamentally different from the mediating role discussed earlier. For the mediating role, ICTs transfer into non-human actors that co-create the mobile sociality with human actors. Whilst for the online forum, it offers a platform of creation that generates these two types of socialities.

Furthermore, the empirical data also critique the role of sociality functioning as the ‘middle layer’ that mediates the technological layer in the bottom and the ideological layer on the top: the
empirical findings suggest strong and direct relationships between ideologies and materials. The findings reveal how Chinese backpackers reinforce and construct their identities by consuming certain materials such as symbolic backpacks and the lonely planet; whilst the changing backpacker culture also significantly influences backpackers’ material consumption patterns over time, especially in the Chinese context. In addition, consuming new materials in a new environment also acts as an alternative intercultural communication for Chinese backpackers to perceive Western culture. For instance, by comparing infrastructure such as transport and accommodation between West and East, Chinese backpackers obtain and digest cultural differences by consuming unfamiliar materials. It is noticeable that on the premise of the mobilities, the perception of the West has been changing over time through the consumption of materials.

Besides the creating and facilitating role of materials and technologies discussed earlier, the findings also suggest that, as part of affordances, materiality also controls and limits backpackers’ experiences. The dependence on the materiality as an aspect of human nature was emphasised in the findings. With easier access to the Internet and information, Chinese backpackers in this study show an over-dependence on collective intelligence in terms of decision-making. It shows an interesting relationship between human beings and technology in the making of travel experiences. Travel-related materials were invented and intended to serve travellers; however, it is relatively common, from the findings, that Chinese backpackers’ travel experiences are to some degree being limited by using these technologies. Not only controlling travel experience, the findings also suggest that the consumption of materiality to some extent restricts the degree of mobilities. I argue that some travel-related materials such as visas and travel passes control backpackers’ travel pattern and flexibilities of free movements in different ways. Looking at this reconceptualisation process within the bigger picture, mobilities seem to play a preconditioning role; however, this finding indicates a bidirectional relationship between mobilities and materiality - they are interplaying and restraining mutually in the process of reconceptualisation.
In the reconceptualisation of this technological layer, the approach from the empirical data provides a comprehensive and more complex interpretation in comparison to the role of technology in the theoretical framework (Section 3.5). In addition to enforcing the supporting and facilitating role of the technology and material from the theoretical framework, the finding also brings in more perspectives to look at how the materiality performs towards ideologies and sociality, as well as the connection and interactions among these three layers. With more roles of the materiality in the system than has been suggested in the mobilities, this intersecting and dynamic network is revealing its complex and messy nature.

9.4.2 Reconceptualisation of the social layer

In the previous section, the complex relationship between technologies and socialities was explored. This section is going to investigate the relationship between the ideology and sociality in order to critique and reconceptualise the social layer in the new system from another aspect. In Chapter Two, I discussed how shared values lead people’s behaviour within the community from functionalism and behaviourism. In addition, based on the fluidity and complexity through the theoretical lens addressed in Chapter Three, I suggested that the culture and identity being shaped and performed by backpackers’ practice and change through mobilities. Emerging from the data, findings suggest a clearer picture of the relationship between socialities and ideologies.

Firstly, the discussion of the Chinese notion of harmony in group dynamics helps to explain the role of functionalism in social behaviour, in the case of Chinese backpackers. The finding suggests that the cultural value endows unique characteristics onto mobile sociality of Chinese backpackers by shaping particular pattern of their social behaviours. Departing from studies of interrelationships of Chinese cultural values such as keqi, guanxi, hierarchy, and their relationships with the dominating cultural value of harmony in tourism (Mok and Defranco, 2000; Kwek and Lee, 2010), the findings allow us to further explore the impacts and functions of these cultural
attributes in group dynamics (for example, looking for travel companions online, power relations between the ‘head donkey’ and followers). These findings effectively help to explain and shape the scope and pattern of Chinese backpackers’ mobile sociality. Social behaviours such as Chinese backpackers looking for travel companions online, consistently maintaining connectedness with friends and families, and power games playing among head donkey and followers, to some extent attribute to embedded values of Chinese culture. Chinese values functioning as the functionalism in this case has predominating power to control and organise social patterns.

Secondly, as the behaviourism in this study, backpacker culture functions differently comparing to Chinese culture in the mobile sociality. Compared with Chinese values that are deeply rooted and embedded in Chinese backpackers’ behaviours in the sociality, the backpacker culture as a way of being, is continuously interpreted and practiced by ‘imagined community’ (Aderson, 1991). Originally developed from the West, the backpacker values are shared within this imagined community. With the growth of the emerging market, this Western origin culture now is open for updates and contributions from different interpretations and cultural contexts. The backpacker culture links firmly with the mobilities. On one hand, the existence of backpacking culture is under the precondition of mobilities, on the other, the backpacker culture encourages backpackers to travel flexibly and interact broadly. In certain ways, it actively accelerates the global phenomenon of the mobilities.

Socialities are formed and expanded by practicing functions of backpacker culture such as exploring individually and meeting others. This sociality leads to a more complex and unpredictable pattern of mobile sociality. Compared with Section 3.5 the conceptual framework, the empirical data explain how different types of ideologies function in various roles in Chinese backpackers’ socialities. Thus, strong influences of ideologies onto socialities in this case have been identified and emphasised through the empirical findings. As mentioned earlier, embedded Chinese values in
this case play a rather one-way predominating role in controlling Chinese backpackers’ social behaviours. Regarding the backpacker culture, on one hand, it guides through the expansion of the social network by encouraging backpackers meeting ‘others’; on the other hand, it also changes its content by practicing in different cultural contexts. In addition to these influences from various values and cultures, technologies also enable the performance of this networked sociality that are spread widely across multiple locations.

9.4.3 Reconceptualisation of the ideological layer

So far, a complex format of mobile networked sociality and how it is influenced by ideologies, as well as assisted, created and restricted by the technology has been proposed. In this section, I am going to look into the transformation of the ideological layer, to analyse what emerges from findings of ideological elements compared with the ‘culture flow’ suggested from the theoretical framework in Chapter Three. In Chapter Seven, I discussed how Chinese backpackers as individuals perceive Western culture throughout the journey, how they understand and practice backpacking as a process of transformation (Lean, 2012), as well as how Chinese culture and backpacker ideologies paradoxically construct Chinese backpackers’ identities. In this section, I am going to look into and beyond the three main findings of Chapter Seven to critique the ideological layer specifically, and to reconceptualise the ideological elements of the new system.

According to the findings, how Chinese backpackers perceive backpacker culture is rather different from how they practice it. Perceived as novel and different, Chinese backpackers practice Western backpacker culture with Chinese characteristics. The findings suggest that embedded Chinese values influence and control the practice of the backpacker culture by prioritising some backpacker features such as learning through travel, but overlooking some others (for example, self-seeking, being flexible). This mainly attributes to the fundamental difference between the Western
individualism and the Eastern collectivism. Chinese people tend to value more of ‘self’ inside the group, whilst individual self-searching is discouraged in the East.

In addition, in terms of identity construction, I argue that Chinese values and Western backpacker culture, although to some degree are fundamentally contradictory, still actively shape Chinese backpackers’ identity, paradoxically. This paradoxical identity construction process also contributes the diversity and richness of the backpacker culture in a global context, which responds to the beyond-Eurocentric proposition of mobilities study. It is crucial to understand that the perception and influence of these two schools of values are functioning in different dimensions. The fluidity and dynamic of these two streams of values in one identity construction critique the superior and solidity of the abstract ideological layer, which is at the top of the pyramid from the original system. It also provides implications for the reconceptualisation of the ideological layer from the traditional system. In the transformed system, Chinese values and backpacker culture position themselves differently in terms of interacting with and influencing Chinese backpackers. Chinese values are in a predominating position that embeds in social actors and guide their behaviours throughout the trip. In comparison with Chinese culture infiltrating at various levels, and acting a more one-way controlling role with social actors, backpacker culture is more interactive with backpackers’ practice. Backpacker culture not only guides donkey friends’ practices to shape their backpackers’ identities, it is also constructed by Chinese backpackers’ practice in a wider context. Thus, in terms of identity construction, Chinese values and backpacker culture transform into different forms and function differently towards Chinese backpackers. As functionalism, Chinese values tend to be more bureaucratic, powerfully structured and socially centralised, which is under the umbrella of ‘heavy’ or ‘solid’ modernity (Bauman, 2000). From the perspective of liquid modernity and new mobilities paradigm, this ‘solid’ functionalism, although engaged in the process of transformation, is fundamentally different from the relatively fluid engagement of the behaviourism that represents by the backpacker culture in this context.
Furthermore, by looking at the ‘rite of passage’ for Chinese backpackers, it reveals another perspective of Chinese values and backpacker culture in the reconceptualisation of ideology. Rite of passage as one key backpacking culture has been encouraging many young people to undertake backpacking journeys. Looking from the aspect of Chinese backpackers, this finding suggests an ‘imperceptible transformation’ process for them in their journeys in Europe. The transformation process goes through the procedure of comparing with, and critically evaluating their own beliefs with new values that these encounters bring. With encounters of various streams of culture, the transformation process is highly determined by individuals’ dependences and beliefs of their own cultural value. In the intercultural travel, when encountering new culture and ideas, people who have stronger beliefs of their national ideology tend to resist to accept and adapt themselves towards these new values. From the perspective of ‘imperceptible transformation’ of Chinese backpackers, the empirical data supports the embedding and immersing features of the Chinese culture in this transformation process.

It is worth noting that the discussion of Chinese values and backpacker culture are undertaken both from the reconceptualisation of the social layer and the ideological layer. It alternatively shows the intersecting relations of these elements by looking from different angles. From the aspect of sociality, it looks at how the formation of sociality is influenced by these two streams of values, whilst from the aspect of the ideology, it concentrates on the functions of these two in the process of Chinese backpackers’ identity construction and the transformation.

From the perspective of solid modernity, the ideology of the traditional system of culture represents stable authority, power and shared values that govern and control social behaviours and material usages. However, in the context of mobilities and the current global world, ideology in the system of culture steps into an unprecedented stage of fluidity. In the era of liquid modernity, fusions, exchanges and conflicts between values have replaced the unchangeable value on top of
the original system. From the aspect of negotiating ideologies addressed in Chapter Two, that individuals perceive new values and are being transformed by different streams of values in the mobilities had been demonstrated by the findings discussed earlier. By reconceptualising the ideological layer, a new perspective of fluid culture in identity construction, new cultural perceptions and acceptance is provided to understand the culture changes in the current world.

9.5 Conceptualising the Fluid Networked System of Culture

Based on general critiques from the theoretical approach and specific critiques from the empirical approach, this section is going to piece together the implications of the previous two approaches. As an outcome of this systematic combination, a ‘Fluid Network System of Culture’ will be conceptualised. This section is going to develop this new system within the bigger picture by unpacking its configuration and dynamic as the alternative system of the traditional three-layer system of culture in the mobilities.

9.5.1 The configuration

Network sociality, consisting of spread social actors and mediated technologies, forms the main configuration of this Fluid Networked System of Culture. Figure 9.2 shows that sociality is formed from the perspective of one social actor (orange dot A), in this context, a Chinese outbound backpacker. From the figure, ICTs (dot D), the online (collective intelligent) platform, and supporting materials (all labelled in blue) are three main forms that transformed from the technological layer of the original system. The figure is divided into the virtual world and the physical world. Part B and Part C in the figure illustrate two types of physical socialities, which were discussed in Chapter Six: Part B represents the inner group sociality between social actor A and B (Chinese backpackers). They form the group through an online platform, and travel corporeally as a group; part C of the figure shows besides sociality within the travel group, the social contact between social actor A (Chinese backpacker) and social actor C (locals or other
backpackers meet on the road) is established. These are two main physical socialities discussed in Chapter Six (‘Mobile Sociality’). These two types of socialities are afforded, supported and regulated by materials (the blue base), this transformation from the technological layer remains the similar ‘foundation function’ of the technological layer in the bottom layer of the original system of culture (illustrated as Part D in the figure). Discussed in Chapter Eight, the base or foundation of this study plays the role of material affordance (Gibson, 1977; Germann Molz, 2012) that consists of material such as mobile technologies, hostels, backpacks, public transport, and travel guidebooks that support and afford the movement of backpackers, as well as enable the functioning of this system in the mobilities. Besides enabling and supporting the function of sociality, this foundation also plays a restricting role that limits certain patterns of sociality, as discussed earlier in this chapter.

Furthermore, also discussed in Chapter Eight, there are two types of long distance socialities facilitated by ICTs (dot D) and created by using online (collective intelligent) platforms from the virtual world. Part E of the figure shows that social actor A maintain contacts with friends or families (dot E) back home, assisted by dot D (social media or instant messenger). Part F adds the virtual sociality created by the collective intelligent platform. In this sociality, netizen F provides information about travel, restaurant recommendations, or answers to questions through online travel forums, to social actor dot A. As shown in Figure 9-2, the online (collective intelligent) platform such as Qyer.com in this study is aligned with and beyond the network sociality. It assists grouping social actors, and empowers certain movements and dynamics of this network. Three different roles of the technology assist the construction of the basic configuration of the new system of culture. It is worth noting that the ‘foundation’ and the ‘online platform’, from two aspects reflects the nature of affording materialities that controlling and restricting at the same time onto the travel experiences. Visually, a network format consisting of human actors and Information Communication Technological actors is built and stretching across various locations, and bridging
between home and backpacker locations. In addition, technological actors facilitate and strengthen the maintenance of links between social actors.

Based on the ‘culture flow’ suggested by the theoretical framework in Chapter Three, in terms of the transformation of the ideological layer from the original layer system, I propose that this Fluid Networked System of Culture is functioning within an ‘ideological surrounding’ that is perceived by individuals differently through the understanding of the cognitive anthropology. Discussed earlier about the negotiating relationship between behaviourism and functionalism, Figure 9-3 shows a visual of the relationship between two types of ‘ideological surroundings’ and social actors by addressing the function of Chinese values and backpacker culture with the established networked sociality.

This ideological surrounding in this case consists of two systems of values: the Chinese culture (the red globe in Figure 9-3) and backpacker culture (the orange cloud). These two forms of ideological surroundings hold the predominant position in terms of determining the dynamic and the pattern of the system. Part A of Figure 9-3 shows Chinese values as functionalism in this case penetrate into the network, and embedded as the main guideline for the behaviour of social actors. As discussed earlier, Chinese values tend to act as one-way predominant role in the relationship with Chinese backpackers. The impacts include material consumption, patterns of social relations, and behaviour during the trip. The level of immersion and influence of the network sociality is relatively high. The network is functioning with Chinese characteristics. On the other hand, Part B of Figure 9-3 shows the position of backpacker culture added into this system. Backpacker culture as behaviourism tends to be more interactive with human actors than Chinese values. As a shared value practiced by thousands of backpackers in different parts of the world, backpacker culture also welcomes new aspects of understanding and interpretation from new cultural contexts. It is worth noting that not only Chinese values and the backpacker culture functioning towards Chinese
backpackers (Figure 9-3), during their trips, they also went through a cultural surroundings of Western values, where they paradoxically construct their backpacker identities and travel experiences. This figure acknowledges other cultural surroundings; however, it cannot fully represent them all.

Figure 9-2 The sociality of the Fluid Networked System of Culture – Aspect from one social actor
Figure 9-3 Ideological Surroundings in the Fluid Networked System of Culture
9.5.2 The dynamic

It is worth noting that the new mobilities paradigm and liquid modernity not only reconstructs the three-layer system of culture from a solid ‘three-layer cake’ into a networked format, but also transforms it into a complex and dynamic one, where components and actors are shaping into new patterns at different stages of the trip. As a network focused on individuals, the dynamic of the Fluid Networked System of Culture is highly determined by the circumstances that the social actor encounters. In this section, I am going to show three scenarios where Chinese backpackers meet new people and maintain social connections during the trip.

Firstly, inspired by backpacker culture, some Chinese backpackers make friends with locals and with other backpackers. In this circumstance, new social links are built. Platforms such as hostel lounges, pubs, or online forums accommodate this construction of new relationships, while supporting technologies such as translation applications assist in the strengthening of this network. Although stretched networked sociality still remains through ICTs, according to the social distribution suggested in Chapter Six, other networks such as distanced social ties otherwise maintained by ICT have been weakening when backpackers are busy building new social ties.

Secondly, when Chinese backpackers find it difficult to build new social ties because of cultural differences and their strong need to avoid uncertainty, Chinese values take control of their behaviour. Instead of building new social links, Chinese backpackers tend to build stronger intra-group connections. As group members are travel companions assembled from an online forum, the Chinese value of harmony plays a crucial role in balancing the group dynamic. Thirdly, for those who fail or have difficulties building up new social ties corporeally, their long distance sociality is strengthened virtually, facilitated by ICTs. Chinese values also determine the frequency and content of this virtual sociality. This example showed three different scenarios of what the system reshapes when Chinese backpackers encounter people differently. The system adapts into various shapes and formats according to the circumstances that are constructed in a particular time.
and space. In some contexts, several elements of the system are relatively active, while others are moving forward to play a predominant part. The unpredictability of mobilities makes the system rather fluid, varied and messy. There is no universal format applicable to each backpacker - each person’s encounters and their own backgrounds make the system rather unique.

The Fluid Networked System of Culture also differs at various stages of the trip. For instance, at the preparation stage, the collective intellectual platform plays a more important role than during the trip: backpackers gather information and travel group members are assembled through this platform; whilst backpacker culture – although inspiring and motivating backpackers to travel – does not function fully before the actual practice. Compared with the relatively static status pre-trip, during the trip the mobilities boost changes inside the cultural system. In the trip, backpackers’ values go through a process of negotiation by experiencing various patterns of socialities, whilst materiality consistently changes into different forms to accommodate these patterns.

9.5.3 The Fluid Networked System of Culture and the Three-Layer System of Culture

The purpose of proposing a Fluid Networked System of Culture was to reconceptualise the traditional three-layer system of culture in the current phenomenon of globalisation and relatively liquid and networked social relations. Set with a different conceptual lens and theoretical constructs, the new system does not mean to reject or invalidate the original three-layer system, but develops continuously by further reconsidering the forms and positions of three of its fundamental elements, and develop an adjusted form which takes into account global circumstances.

Comparing the traditional and new systems of culture, they provide comprehensive understandings of two different social worlds respectively. Rooted in solid modernity, the three-layer system of culture offers a direct, integrated and simplified ‘three-layer cake’ model for clear classification and categorisation. On the other hand, developed from liquid modernity, the Fluid Networked System
of Culture is comparably rather more dynamic and fluid. It is difficult to provide a single figure to illustrate the new system, for its complexity and fluidity. The focus of these two models also differs: the traditional system concentrated on integrated organisation, institutions and states for its modernity origin (White, 1949a; Freitas, 1979). It provided a solid explanation of collective power, social order and production. Alternatively, the Fluid Networked System of Culture focuses on individuals, and the whole system looks for the perspective of the movements, perceptions, consumption, and interactions of individuals. Set in the globalised and relatively mobile world, it shows an intersected, flowing and networked format instead of a three-layer cake. As an updated version of the three-layer system of culture, the Fluid Networked System of Culture helps to explain current social and cultural phenomena from a more nuanced angle, as informed by the most relevant theories.

9.6 Conclusion

This chapter went through a process of reconceptualisation from the traditional solid three-layer system of culture to a liquid and new ‘Fluid Networked System of Culture’. This was achieved by applying an abductive approach that reflected on the conceptual framework and looked at issues that emerged from the three findings chapters. It provides an alternative insight into culture, looking through the conceptual lens of mobilities and liquid modernity, and develops a new system by which to understand the complex travel experience. This Fluid Networked System of Culture shows the complexity of the travel experience, and the intricate relationship within this system also provides new aspects for further research.

This chapter first critiqued the traditional three-layer system of culture from both a theoretical and an empirical angle. Theoretically, the liquid modernity and new mobilities paradigms actively shifted the focus from a solid and hierarchical system into a liquid and dynamic one, and implied an alternative format for the new system. Empirically, critique and reconceptualisation of each layer
was undertaken by reflecting on the relationships among ideologies, socialities, and technologies. Combining the logical guidelines of the theoretical framework and empirical findings, a networked format that strongly connects various actors with characteristics of complexity and fluidity was developed. This arose from three aspects of ideology, sociality and technology.

The chapter then looked beyond these aspects and conceptualised a new Fluid Networked System of Culture by illustrating its configuration and dynamics. Although giving some examples and possible formats of the system, it is open to interpretation and is flexible to change in different contexts. More applications of this new system were discussed for other utilizations to understand international mobile relations and travel experiences. To conclude this thesis, I am going to discuss in the final chapter how the aim and objectives have been achieved, as well as the contributions and limitations of this work.
CHAPTER 10 CONCLUSION

10.1 Introduction

This study has explored the research aim: to reconceptualise the three-layer system of culture in light of the mobilities, by exploring Chinese backpackers’ travel experience in Europe. Linked to this research aim, three objectives of this study have been addressed. These comprised: (1) to apply the three-layer system and mobile ethnography to investigate Chinese backpackers’ travel experience in Europe, (2) to develop a conceptual framework to revisit the three-layer system of culture through the theoretical lens of liquid modernity and the new mobilities paradigm, and (3) to reconceptualise the three-layer system of culture through an abductive approach. Set within the context of Chinese backpackers travelling in Europe, three mobile ethnographic studies were undertaken in Spain, Portugal, the United Kingdom, and Poland corporeally and online from June through November 2014. Chapters Six, Seven and Eight presented empirical findings that emerged from the thematic analysis. Chapter Nine reconceptualised the three-layer system of culture based on an abductive approach.

The intention of the present chapter is to summarise how the aim and objectives have been met and to draw out implications for practice, as well as any contributions to broader literature. As such, this chapter starts by discussing how the aim and objectives have been achieved, followed by the contributions to knowledge and implications for practice. The limitations, reflections and future research directions will be then detailed before concluding with a final remark.

10.2 Meeting the research aim and objectives

Three objectives were identified in this thesis in order to meet the research aim. This section is going to discuss how each objective has been met.
1) To apply the three-layer system and mobile ethnography to investigate Chinese backpackers’ travel experience in Europe.

In Chapter Two, I introduced the original three-layer system of culture and discussed its crucial role in understanding and categorising various theories of culture. In this thesis, Chapter Four provided a comprehensive literature review and identified the literature gap of Chinese outbound backpackers in Europe. Based on the theoretical guideline and the contextual understanding, I investigated Chinese backpackers’ experience through an ethnographic approach. Findings Chapters Six, Seven and Eight responded to each layer from the original system of culture respectively to provide three different approaches in order to understand Chinese outbound backpackers’ travel experiences in Europe. Additionally, these three approaches provided sufficient empirical data to comprehend and respond to the theoretical network, which was proposed in Objective 2.

In order to do so, one key approach of mobile ethnography - ‘follow the people’ (Marcus 1995), was adopted. As Chinese backpackers are highly active online, I followed them not only from site to site corporeally, but also studied their online behaviour. In this case, the boundaries between the corporeal and virtual worlds become blurry, and usage between the netnography and multi-sited ethnography was determined by where Chinese backpackers are active. Additionally, reflexivity played a crucial part in the study to bring out interactions with Chinese backpackers in order to gain greater insight from the ethnography.

In these three findings chapters, I explored several issues of Chinese outbound backpackers’ experiences in Europe, including mobile sociality (Chapter Six), negotiating ideologies (Chapter Seven), as well as affording materiality and technology usage (Chapter Eight). In Chapter Six, I focused on investigating Chinese backpackers’ group orientation, group dynamics, and social contacts with others during the trip. Chapter Six looked at the backpacker experience from the
aspect of various sociality constructions. In particular, I explored the growing phenomenon that Chinese backpackers find travel companions online and travel in small groups. I investigated the underlying and embedded cultural influences as well as how the group dynamic affects the overall travel experience. In Chapter Eight, I switched the focus from interpersonal relations and sociality to internal identity, transformation, and perception. In this chapter, I explored backpackers' experience from the perspectives of negotiating ideologies among embedded Chinese values, constantly changing backpacker culture, as well as the potential for Western culture to be exciting but also confusing. My discussions about perceptions of the West, backpacker identity-construction and transformation were undertaken by considerations of these various flows of values. In Chapter Eight, I explored Chinese outbound backpackers' usage of materials, technologies and the virtual world in order to provide insights into how these non-human actors shape Chinese backpackers' travel experiences. Material affordances and restrictions, mediating technologies facilitating connectedness, as well as the virtual world creating new socialities were explored by looking at the practices of Chinese backpackers.

2) **To develop a conceptual framework to revisit the three-layer system of culture through the theoretical lens of liquid modernity and the new mobilities paradigm.**

In opposition to the ‘bottom up’ approach of Objective 1, to meet Objective 2, I applied a ‘top down’ approach to develop the theoretical framework of this study. This objective constructed a theoretical ‘arm’ as part of the abductive approach of the reconceptualisation process. In Chapter Two, besides using the three-layer system as a structure to review various theories on culture for Objective 1, I specifically explored the intersecting relations between shared values, interpersonal relations as well as material culture to provide a picture of these three complex layers. In addition, I also explored intercultural issues, social contact and cultural confusion in order to assist understandings of the theoretical lens and the setting of mobilities.
In Chapter Three, I provided the theoretical constructs of the new mobilities paradigms and the liquid modernity of this study to provide an alternative approach to understand the complex travel experience of backpackers, as well as providing a theoretical critique of the traditional three-layer system of culture. In this chapter, I emphasised the significance of ‘network’ by exploring concepts of network capital (Putnam, 2000), network sociality (Larsen, Axhausen and Urry, 2006), and moorings (Hannam, Sheller and Urry, 2006) in order to theorise networks on the move. I also undertook a comprehensive review about the influence of the mobilities and the engagement of materiality with the stretched network sociality to further indicate the intersected nature of ICTs and the supporting role of infrastructure in this network.

Through this theoretical lens and the emphasis on the mobilities context, I proposed a conceptual framework (Section 3.5) to reconceptualise the three-layer system theoretically. In this conceptual framework, I suggested a liquid and dynamic system to replace the original three-layer system of culture. The layer-by-layer hierarchy transformed into a networked format by linking social actors and non-human actors; whilst the ideological layer transformed into a ‘cultural flow’ which suggests the fluidity of various cultures in the process of intercultural backpacking.

3) **To reconceptualise the three-layer system of culture through an abductive approach.**

To meet Objective 3, I adopted an abductive approach, integrating the theoretical framework and empirical data to reconceptualise the three-layer system and to develop the new ‘Fluid Networked System of Culture’. Building on the preceding objectives, in Chapter Nine I met the third objective by starting with critiques of the original system of culture through the theoretical lenses of the new mobilities paradigm and liquid modernity. I then undertook critiques and reconceptualised each layer by discussing empirical materials emerging from Chinese backpackers’ experiences. Based on the empirical data, I further comprehended the proposed theoretical system and emphasised the complex, relatively fluid, and dynamic nature of this new system. The reconceptualisation process
was undertaken by theoretical critiques of the original system’s structure and empirical insights into the configurations and dynamics of the new system.

By meeting these three objectives, the aim of this thesis, to reconceptualise the three-layer system of culture in light of the mobilities by exploring Chinese backpackers’ travel experience in Europe, was successfully achieved.

10.3 Contribution to knowledge

This study contributes to academic knowledge from aspects of theory, context, and methodology. The greatest contribution of this thesis to academic knowledge is the theoretical contribution that reconceptualises the three-layer system of culture into the Fluid Networked System of Culture. In addition, this thesis also contributed to the dearth of research on Chinese outbound backpackers, as well as combined multi-sited and digital ethnography as one mobile method in a reconceptualising study.

Theoretically, and most importantly, this thesis contributes to academic knowledge by critiquing White (1949a)’s original three-layer cultural system, showing how it cannot provide adequate explanations of the modern world, and conceptualising the Fluid Networked System of Culture. The first theoretical contribution of this thesis is to adopt an abductive approach by combining both theoretical lenses of liquid modernity and the new mobilities paradigm, as well as the empirical materials of ethnographic data to reconceptualise the original cultural system. It not only contributes to the literature of abduction reasoning (Dubois and Gadde, 2002) as a concept development approach to undertake a reconceptualisation process, but also further strengthens the connections between the new mobilities paradigm and liquid modernity (Sheller and Urry, 2006; Hannam, 2009). Secondly, as conceptual research (Xin, Tribe and Chambers, 2013), conceptualising Fluid Networked System of Culture can be regarded as a theoretical update of
understanding culture. It responds to the theoretical shifts from solid modernity to liquid modernity (Bauman, 2013) and increasing mobilities (Urry, 2007). Additionally, this reconceptualisation also responds to a now highly globalised world and its technological revolutions. It creates a constellation of theories of culture, operating in a complex arrangement, and suggests a fluid and dynamic way of understanding this scheme.

There are three potential theoretical contributions of the Fluid Networked System of Culture. First, as a reconceptualised system, it provides a new interpretation of the original three-layer cultural system in mobilities. It theoretically contributes to understanding cultural system in contemporary turns of mobilities and liquid modern perspective, which emphasise the role of human actors in the construction of the mobile networked system. Second, it suggests a mobile and dynamic network system to comprehend travel experiences. It contributes to the understanding of travel experiences by re-constructing the original static three-layer system into a rather fluid and dynamic one. This network emphasises the interrelationships among elements of this system of culture; while the dynamic shows in different stages and encounters, the network positions in various patterns and structures (Section 9.5.2). Third, it provides a direct and comprehensive view of how travel experiences are created. The network is set in a longitudinal context, which allows us to trace the different stages of a journey and to explain how experience is developed by observing the changes and dynamics within the system during a given timeframe.

Contextually, this study explores Chinese outbound backpackers from an interpretive approach. Drawing upon recent studies (Zhu, 2007; Ong and du Cros, 2011; Chen, Bao and Huang, 2014; Luo, Huang and Brown, 2015), this study contributes to the overlooked literature of Chinese backpackers travelling to Western countries. Not just addressing a literature gap, this thesis also responds to the call for a paradigm shift to the mobilities (Cohen and Cohen, 2015b), beyond the Eurocentric backpacker origin. In opposition to most early backpacker studies that focus on
Western backpackers travelling to the East (Hampton, 1998; Sørensen, 2003; Muzaini, 2006), this study looks at the East flowing to the West in order not only to address the cutting edge issue of an emerging Chinese outbound market, but also to create a new approach to investigate the negotiation of values of East meets West through Chinese backpackers’ practices.

Addressing group orientations identified in previous studies of Chinese backpackers (Zhu, 2007; Lim, 2009; Shepherd, 2009), this study further unpacked and explored the group dynamic of Chinese outbound backpackers. Chinese backpackers' characteristics: looking for travel companions online, active engagement on digital enclaves and social media, as well as paradoxical co-creation of identity and perception by Chinese values and the Western backpacker culture, were explored in this thesis. Some findings further supported and developed the existing literature (Zhu, 2007; Lim, 2009; Wu and Pearce, 2014) from a new perspective, whilst some fill other literature gaps with new ideas, such as ethnographic insights of Chinese outbound backpackers in Europe. Additionally, given the group orientation of Chinese outbound backpackers, the influence of the notion ‘harmony’ in travel group dynamics provides an academic contribution to the harmony literature by looking at how group harmony assembles and links with other Chinese cultural attributes that function with various levels of Chinese backpacker group dynamics. It also contributes to the overlooked literature of the influence of self-organised small travel group dynamics on travel experiences.

In Chapter Seven, this study explored values influences on the construction of Chinese backpackers’ identities, transformations, and perceptions of the West. This chapter considered the different streams of cultures and values that Chinese backpackers encountered during their backpacking trips. This chapter contributes to the backpacker identity literature (Welk, Richards and Wilson, 2004; O’Reilly, 2005), backpacker transformation (Noy, 2004; Lean, 2012), and perceptions of the West (Li et al., 2011) by considering the negotiating dynamics among Chinese
values, Western values and the Western origin of backpacker culture. It contributes to the literature by investigating the complex negotiation of the ideological process of cross-cultural travel. In the setting of East meets West, these two fundamentally conflicting systems of values are bridged by backpacker culture, which originally developed from the Western ideology but is practised by Chinese backpackers. Additionally, this thesis contributes to the knowledge of how individuals negotiate ideologies (Lam and Yeoh, 2004) in the context of intercultural tourism mobilities.

Based on Chinese backpackers’ characteristics as active users of the virtual world and being dependent on technology (Zhu, 2007; Lim, 2009), the exploration of connectedness mediated by ICTs and online enclaves of Chinese backpackers during trip contributes to the mobilities (Sheller and Urry, 2006) and travel connections (Germann Molz, 2012) literature. In particular, findings of how Chinese backpackers actively build up and maintain network sociality with embedded cultural influences contributes to knowledge by understanding the influence of embedded values in mobilities, as well as applying the new mobilities paradigm to a new context.

Methodologically, the combination of multi-sited ethnography, virtual ethnography, as well as autoethnographical reflexivity directly contributes to the mobile methods literature in tourism, in particular ‘follow the people’ (Marcus, 1995) this technique. This method successfully recorded Chinese backpackers’ behaviours both online and offline, and creates a full picture of intersecting practices among online forums, social media and corporeal travel. Thus, researchers conducting ethnographic study into mobile bodies should be aware of the togetherness of their multiple identities in various spaces. In addition, the methodology of this thesis also places high value on the role of the reflexive ‘self’ throughout the period of conceiving the project, data collection and writing up. Regarding using ‘follow the people’ this technique, multiple research methods and techniques should combine and collaborate according to the moving patterns of the researched body, as well as the research questions.
10.4 Implications for Practice

Understanding tourists’ experience is crucial for the travel industry. The first practical implication of this thesis is that the Fluid Networked System of Culture helps to understand the travel experience. According to Franklin (2003), travel experience is a part of a mobile and flexible social order, in which human actors construct their own ways about it. Thus, the role of human actors is emphasised when interpreting this system. Travel experience is complex and personal: two people can never practice the same cultural system. Additionally, one person cannot have the same pattern of the cultural system at different times, even when returning to the same destination. The dynamic and liquidity of the Fluid Networked System of Culture provide a broad and comprehensive framework to understand such complicated and unpredictable travel experiences.

There are four reasons that the Fluid Networked System of Culture is useful in understanding the travel experience. Firstly, it was transformed from the three-layer system of culture, and reconceptualised in the setting of mobilities. Hence, the new system is suitable to understand the travel experience, which is fundamentally based on a mobile phenomenon. Secondly, the Fluid Networked System focuses on social actors (individuals), as well as relationships between them and with other elements in the system, such as technologies and ideologies, in order to function as a mobile and dynamic system. Correspondingly, the contemporary studies of travel experience suggest focusing on the relationships and dynamics of tourism production and tourist consumption (Mordue, 2005), which is represented in this reconceptualised system. Thirdly, according to Ryan (1997), travel experience covers a wide range of influential factors and variables. Therefore, a system with the flexibility and dynamic to cover the ‘complex whole’ is appropriate to explain experiences in different stages or scenarios. Fourthly, from a liquid modern perspective, the dualism and separation of home and away is disregarded. This cultural system suggests a stronger sociality linking home and away, facilitated by ICTs. It helps to understand how travel experience is affected by social interactions with friends and family back home.
This Fluid Networked System of Culture can also be used in a wider context to understand travel experiences in other cases other than Chinese outbound backpackers. Given its nature, this cultural system is open for interpretation in various contexts. However, some elements such as the role the Chinese value of harmony plays in the group dynamic, and the obligation to report safety to home are relatively ‘Chinese’, and less likely to apply to different cultural contexts. In addition, this thesis is set in a specific mobile and intercultural context, particularly that of East meets West. As such, some events and reactions represented in this system might not be the same case while adopted in other contexts. However, for further studies of international travel experiences, or the experience of immigrants and international students, the System could provide comprehensive insights into these groups in a hypermobile setting.

The second practical implication is based on the investigation of Chinese outbound backpackers from this study. By addressing the literature gap discussed earlier, characteristics of outbound Chinese backpackers suggested by this study also have implications for the travel industry. Firstly, better understanding Chinese backpackers’ online behaviours could potentially be beneficial for mobile application and online forum developers to design more user-friendly products for this market. Targeting group orientation, their fear of the unknown, as well as reliance on word of mouth among Chinese outbound backpackers, could prove beneficial to the industry and ICT developers. Mobile application developers can either attach new function onto existing applications or design new applications to assist Chinese backpackers to find like-minded backpackers, overcome language barriers, and provide more last-minute assistance at a destination. Since online backpacker forums are the main locations for Chinese backpackers to find travel companions, a more user-friendly platform, or more systematic management will help Chinese backpackers to find like-minded travel companions more easily, and to secure higher-quality travel experiences.
Thirdly, the investigation of Chinese outbound backpackers also provides implications for tour operators, in particular, those who target emerging outbound markets. Chinese outbound backpackers and independent travellers, a new trend in the booming Chinese outbound market, is worthy of attention (Xiang, 2013; Chen, Bao and Huang, 2014). Meeting Chinese backpackers’ expectation and needs, holiday products that combine pre-trip training, on-trip mobile data packages, as well as recommendations for authentic dining and accommodation experiences will attract certain customers. Additionally, even though destinations in Europe are relatively mature, in order to target the market specifically on Chinese backpackers, local tourism boards and destination management organisations are required to understand the behaviour of them further. Activity and sensitivity on digital enclaves, preferences of travelling in a small group, staying in wider range of accommodation, and enjoyment of maintaining connectedness on social media during travel are all useful characteristics of this emerging market of Chinese outbound backpackers for tourism boards and DMOs to understand. In addition, applying a qualitative approach is beneficial for practitioners to understand the reasons for these behaviours and the roots of these motives, which will be beneficial for them to tackle these issues more accurately.

10.5 Limitations

There are several limitations identified with regards to this study. Firstly, although Chinese outbound backpackers were chosen for their distinct characteristics - something that has been explained in Chapter One – using a qualitative approach by adopting one single case for developing the system of culture could potentially lead to problems about the transferability of theories in other cases. Secondly, this study only investigated those who travel as a group. Thus, acknowledging the existence of Chinese outbound backpackers who travel alone, the findings cannot fully represent all Chinese backpackers travelling in Europe. Thirdly, only three trips were undertaken in the multi-sited ethnographic field work. With distinct cultural differences among
European countries, the four countries selected for this field work, although rather different from each other, cannot fully represent Europe as a whole. Fourthly, this study only adopted the new mobilities paradigm and liquid modernity as theoretical lenses; however, I acknowledge that other theories and turns such as actor-network theory, postmodernity, performance turn and network capital could be applied in reconceptualising the three-layer system of culture. However, the new mobilities paradigm and liquid modernity are the most suitable theoretical approaches to reconceptualise the three-layer system of culture, as discussed at length throughout this thesis.

10.6 Reflection on the Process

The initial focus of my study was Chinese outbound backpackers’ travel experiences in Europe. Since experience is deeply rooted in culture, when I came across the three-layer system of culture, I found it helpful for categorising various culture theories to help me to understand experiences from various aspects. However, at the same time I realised this three-layer hierarchy could no longer provide an adequate explanation of current phenomena, especially the case I investigated. Excited about this theoretical gap in a wider context, I switched the research focus to reconceptualising the three-layer system of culture, but still used Chinese backpackers’ experiences as a case not only to contribute to the empirical approach in the process, but also to contribute to the backpacker literature.

Reflexively, throughout the PhD process, I played dual roles as a Chinese backpacker and also a researcher. In Chapter Five, I discussed the balance of my role as an insider and outsider throughout data collection and data analysis. Beyond that, during the writing up stage, being a Chinese backpacker myself helped the ‘researcher self’ to achieve better understandings of various circumstances, and to discover underlying cultural influences. Additionally, this PhD process has also reshaped my worldview, by positioning myself as an interpretive researcher who believes that the access to reality is only possible through social constructions.
10.7 Future research directions

Future research can develop and examine the reconceptualised Fluid Networked System of Culture by applying it in various contexts and fields such as in the study of immigrants, international students, and other cross-cultural mobile groups. Applying this reconceptualised system to different fields helps to comprehend the Fluid Networked System of Culture from the empirical approach. Additionally, new theoretical approaches such as ANT, performance turn, and social materiality can be applied to explore and bring in new understandings of the Fluid Networked System of Culture.

The findings on Chinese outbound backpackers also calls for future studies in travel group dynamics. Studies of group dynamics to date mainly focus on mass travel groups, whilst the group dynamic of individual self-organised travel has been overlooked. Future research can undertake relevant quantitative and qualitative studies into small group dynamics, as well as how group dynamics affect travel experiences in various forms of self-organised tours.

Chinese outbound backpackers as an emerging market and a social phenomenon require further investigation. Quantitative studies of Chinese outbound backpackers’ motivations, typologies, behaviours and preferences, as well as qualitative studies of outbound backpackers’ identities, particularly the perception and experience paradoxically construction by Chinese values and the Western backpacker culture in the context of East meets West. Thus, longitudinal studies are suggested in order to look at the impact of the Western experience on Chinese backpackers’ transformation, by investigating changes of their perceptions and worldviews after returning home. In addition, issues such as host and guest relations, authenticity, gender and power, and responsible travel are worth being further explored in the context of Chinese outbound backpackers, in order to enrich the context of backpacker studies.
Furthermore, this reconceptualisation process responded to the theoretical transition from the solid modernity to the liquid modernity and requires further research. This transition calls for more critiques and further reconceptualisation of traditional theories developed under solid modernity. Additionally, it also calls for using alternative theoretical lenses to update or reconceptualise them, as newer theories may allow for an adequate understandings of current social phenomena.

10.8 Final remark

By reconceptualising the traditional three-layer system of culture, this PhD set out to not only provide a new and comprehensive framework to understand the complexity of Chinese backpackers’ experiences, but also responds to several theoretical turns and creates an updated system for wider application, in understanding similar intercultural and mobile settings. From theory, to methodology, to context, this PhD contributes at various levels and also calls for potential future research.

This PhD thesis develops several original approaches. Theoretically, I combined the liquid modernity and the new mobilities paradigm as theoretical lenses, and developed the basic framework of the Fluid Network System of Culture, consulting their characteristics and propositions. Methodologically, I further developed the idea of Marcus (1995)’s ‘follow the people’ in the context of mobile ethnography. In terms of the research design, I focused on the researched body’s movement, and emphasised the same importance of following physical movements as well as virtual ones. Contextually, beyond contributing to the backpacker literature in a Chinese context, this thesis also contributes to knowledge in a wider context (for example, harmony and negotiating ideologies literature) to enrich that literature, from the aspect of tourism.

This PhD started from investigating Chinese backpacker travel experiences guided by the three-layer system of culture, and resulted in reconceptualising the original system and developing the
Fluid Networked System of Culture through an abductive approach. By providing rich empirical material, thick descriptions of Chinese backpackers also facilitate new understandings and interpretations of Chinese outbound backpackers. The Fluid Networked System of Culture is equipped to investigate current mobile issues, and it is believed that this will bring further socio-cultural impact by allowing for better understandings of mobile experiences in various contexts.
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APPENDIX 1

Research Action Plan

**Before the trip**

Online:
Getting to be familiar with Qyer forum, particular the ‘Europe’ discussing group.

Contact the moderator and explain the research purpose. Ask the permission to conduct the study in the forum.

Create a post and details research purpose.

Engage in discussion with potential participants and doing netnography at the same time: screenshots of all conversations.

Target and confirm participants and start follow them on Sina Weibo and travel blog

Checking and screen shot daily posts on Sina Weibo, pay attention to contexts and comments.

Keep updating online activities every day, particularly pay attention to their ‘doing homework’ habits, anxieties and excitements before the trip, and any relevant emotions and perceptions caused by culture and value.

Get to know preparations of equipment and necessities, their hostel and transport bookings.

Try to find out participants’ value and perception towards travel. Introduce netnographic interviews when necessary.

Confirm their arrival time and getting ready for the corporeal fieldwork.

**During the trip**

Corporeal trip:
Well-prepared before the fieldwork: camera, laptop, notebook, audio recorder etc.

Keep in same pace as participants.

Participate their daily activities and pay attention to their social relationships, not only in between each other, but also with locals and backpackers from other countries.

Pay attention to engagement with non-human actors: backpacks, hostel, transport ICT, GPS etc. Especially the role of these non-human actors in the sociality.

Pay attention to impacts of cultural differences in social contacts as well as perceptions and values of Chinese outbound backpackers, several in-depth interviews should be conducted for this issue.

Observe/Ask participant travel experience, and what influence negative/positive experience, what actors/elements involves to contribute this.
Take notes every day and reflect myself as a researcher, and at the same time as a Chinese outbound backpackers.

Online:
Keep track on Chinese backpackers’ online activities (SNS, Travel forum, Instant Messenger)

Screen shot their daily posts and reflect these to their daily activities and experiences

Pay attention to how long distance socialites maintains and built through ICT.

Compare behaviours online and offline

**After the trip:**

Online:
Follow updates on SNS, Qyer and Blogs, pay attention to the use of photo and the emphasis of their description.

Pay attention to how they reflect the overall trip compared with what material have collected.

Conduct several e-mail interviews to understand changes of their shared value and the knowledge of travel.

Keep tracks on their interactions with others on Qyers and Sina Weibo.
APPENDIX 2

Semi-structured Interview Agenda

Interview 1

1. Let’s talk about your backpacking experiences.
   让我们谈谈你的背包旅行经历。
   • Have you done backpacking before? Where have you been? 你有背包旅行经验吗？如果有，都去过哪些地方？
   • What is ‘backpacking’ in your opinion? How do you come out with this conclusion? 你觉得背包旅行在你眼中是一个什么样的概念？你是如何得出这样一个结论的？

2. Have you been to Europe before? If did, where have you been? 你以前来过欧洲吗？如果有，去过哪些地方？
   • Before your visit, what is your perception of the ‘West’? 在你来欧洲之前，你对西方的概念是什么？
   • Now you are here in the West, what is your first impression of the ‘Western World’? Is it the same as what you imagined? If not, what is the difference? 现在你到了所谓的西方国家，你对‘西方世界’的第一印象是什么？和你之前想象中的一样吗？如果不同，不一样的地方在哪？

3. Let us talk about the planning of your trip. 让我们来谈谈你的行前准备。
   • When did you start plan your trip? 你何时开始计划这趟旅行？
   • Where did you gather your travel information? Why you chose this/these channel(s)? 你从哪里获取旅行信息？为什么选择这些渠道获取旅行信息？
   • Do you normally plan everything in-advance or you rarely plan things before your trip? Why? 你通常都是提前计划好行程还是没怎么计划？为什么？
   • Tell me what you have with you for this trip? 请告诉我你这趟旅行都带了些什么？

4. Let’s talk about ICTs. 让我们来谈谈信息通信技术。
   • What social networking sites you are using? 你都用哪些社交网站？
   • Are you going to use social media to share your travel experiences? 你有用社交网站来分享你的旅行经历吗？
• Do you plan to use any mobile devices in your trip? If so, what are they? How they are going to facilitate your trip? 你有用移动科技来支持你的旅行吗？如果有，请说明有哪些。它们将如何协助你的旅程？

5. Now we are travelling in a group of () people. 你现在和（ ）人组成一队。

• Can you tell me why you prefer to travel in a group rather than on your own? 你为什么相比较于一个人旅行，更倾向于一群人旅行呢？
• Could you please tell me why did you find your travel companions online? How did you select your travel companions? 你为什么选择在网上找驴友？你是如何选择驴友的？
• What do you think of them? What is your opinion towards travelling for a long time with people you never met in real life? 你觉得他们怎么样？和一群你之前没在现实生活中遇到的人长途旅行一段时间，你对这种行为的态度是？
• In your opinion, what kind of role will your travel companions play in your overall travel experience? 你觉得驴友在你整体的旅行体验当中扮演什么样的角色？

6. Let’s talk about meeting with others and contacts with friends and families in your trip. 让我们来谈谈旅行当中的社会关系遇到的人，以及和国内的亲朋好友之间的联系。

• What is your attitude towards meeting locals and other backpackers? 你对在途中认识当地人和其他背包客抱着什么样的态度？
• Are you planning to make new friends in your trip? Why? 你有打算在旅行当中结交新朋友吗？为什么？
• In terms of your friends and families, do they know about that you are undertaking this trip? Are you going to keep them updates? How and Why? 对于远在家乡的亲人和朋友，他们知道你的这趟旅行吗？你有打算跟他们告知你的进度吗？为什么？如何跟进？
Interview 2

1. Now we are approaching the end of your trip, after weeks in Western countries, let’s talk about your feeling of the western culture, how do you find it? 现在你的旅程已经接近尾声，在西方国家旅行的这些日子之后，请你谈谈你的西方文化的看法和感受。
   - Travelling in western countries leads to cultural differences issue, have you encountered any excitements or difficulties in terms of cross-cultural communication? If did, could you please share your experiences? 在西方国家旅行会碰到一些跨文化交际的境遇，你是否曾遇到相关的让你觉得有趣或者困难的地方？如果有，可否分享一下？
   - Do you think your understanding of western culture is different after this trip? If do, what makes this change? 这趟旅行会让你对西方文化有不同的认识么？如果有，有什么新的认识或观念上的改变？

2. Let’s talk about the travel group. 让我们来谈谈你的驴友团。
   - How do you find your travel companions and in-group interactions throughout the trip? 你觉得整趟旅程中几个人间的沟通怎么样？你觉得你的驴友怎么样？
   - Will you keep in contact with these donkey friends after this trip? Why? 旅行结束后你还会和这些驴友继续保持联络吗？为什么？
   - Have you backpacking alone before? If did, what is the differences between travel alone and travel in a group? 你之前有独自背包旅行过吗？如果有，独自旅行和一组人旅行最大的区别在于？

3. Let’s talk about your encounters with others. 让我们来聊聊除了驴友团之外的其他交流和接触。
APPENDIX 3

Consent Form

• I the undersigned voluntarily agree to take part in the study on the Chinese outbound backpackers in Europe: reconceptualisation of three-layer system of culture

• I have read and understood the Information Sheet provided. I have been given a full explanation by the investigators of the nature, purpose, location and likely duration of the study, and of what I will be expected to do. I have been advised about any discomfort and possible ill-effects on my health and well-being which may result. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions on all aspects of the study and have understood the advice and information given as a result.

• I consent to my personal data, as outlined in the accompanying information sheet, being used for this study and other research. I understand that all personal data relating to volunteers is held and processed in the strictest confidence, and in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998).

• I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without needing to justify my decision and without prejudice.

• I confirm that I have read and understood the above and freely consent to participating in this study. I have been given adequate time to consider my participation and agree to comply with the instructions and restrictions of the study.

Name of volunteer (BLOCK CAPITALS) .................................................................

Signed ..............................................................................................................

Date ...................................................................................................................

Name of researcher/person taking consent (BLOCK CAPITALS) .................................................................

Signed ..............................................................................................................

Date ...................................................................................................................
APPENDIX 4

Ethical Issues in Research for PGR Students

Please complete this form in discussion with your Supervisors and sign where indicated. Your Principal Supervisor must countersign the form. If ethical approval is required, please contact the Chair of the FBEL Ethics’ Committee for instructions on how to obtain ethical approval and guidance on the required documentation. Once complete send the completed form to the Faculty’s PGR students’ administrator who will place it on your file.

YOU MAY NOT COLLECT DATA BEFORE IT HAS BEEN CONFIRMED THAT ETHICAL APPROVAL IS NOT REQUIRED, OR UNTIL A FAVOURABLE ETHICAL OPINION IS OBTAINED.

If data are collected without required ethical approval, you could be asked to destroy the data or, if already submitted, that your work will not be marked. If you change your method or sample, a new form must be completed.

Name of student: Wenjie Cai
School: SHTM
Principal Supervisor: Dr. Scott Cohen
2nd Supervisor: Prof. John Tribe

Please answer **Yes** or **No** to the following questions. If you answer **Yes** to any question, ethical approval will be required for your study either from the Faculty of Business, Economics and Law (FBEL) Ethics’ Committee or the University Ethics’ Committee (UEC).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes/No</th>
<th>Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does the study, or may the study, involve undergraduate students either in FBEL or across the University?</td>
<td><strong>YES</strong></td>
<td>Seek approval from FBEL Ethics’ committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does, or may the study, involve access to records of personal or sensitive confidential information?</td>
<td><strong>YES</strong></td>
<td>Seek approval from FBEL Ethics’ committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does, or may, the study, involve Faculty of Business, Economics and Law staff as subjects, investigating their working or professional practices?</td>
<td><strong>YES</strong></td>
<td>Seek approval from FBEL Ethics’ committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does, or may, the study involve staff across The University of Surrey, investigating their working or professional practices?</td>
<td><strong>YES</strong></td>
<td>Seek approval from University Ethics’ Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the study involve vulnerable groups (e.g. children under 16 years, over 16’s who are unable to give informed consent, prisoners or young offenders)?</td>
<td><strong>YES</strong></td>
<td>Seek approval from FBEL Ethics’ committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will the respondents receive payment (including in kind or involvement in prize draws)?</td>
<td><strong>YES</strong></td>
<td>Seek approval from FBEL Ethics’ committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Could questioning – in questionnaire or in interview – or other methods used, cause offence, be distressing or be deeply personal for the target group?</td>
<td><strong>YES</strong></td>
<td>Seek approval from FBEL Ethics’ committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the study involve any risk to a participant’s health (e.g. invasive physiological or psychological procedures)?</td>
<td><strong>YES</strong></td>
<td>Seek approval from University Ethics’ Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the research involve donation of bodily materials, organs and the recently deceased?</td>
<td><strong>YES</strong></td>
<td>Seek approval from University Ethics’ Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the research require participants to take part in the study without their knowledge and consent at the time (e.g. covert observations)?</td>
<td><strong>YES</strong></td>
<td>Seek approval from FBEL Ethics’ committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the research involve activities where the safety of the researcher may be in question?</td>
<td><strong>YES</strong></td>
<td>Seek approval from FBEL Ethics’ committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does your research study involve staff or patients from the NHS or a Health Service overseas?</td>
<td><strong>YES</strong></td>
<td>Seek approval from Health Service Research Ethics’ Committee AND University Ethics’ Committee</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Principal Supervisor’s comments: Student’s signature Date: 10/04/2014

Principal Supervisor’s signature Date: 14/04/2014
穷游网

Thursday 8 May 2014

穷游网你好，

我名叫蔡文杰，是萨里大学旅游与酒店管理学院的在读博士生。我正在研究中国背包客在欧洲的旅行体验，作为数据收集的其中一部分，我将采用网上民族志这种方法了解中国背包客的网上行为。穷游网提供了一个极丰富的网络信息平台，供中国出境背包客交流分享，这也是我选择穷游网进行网络数据收集的重要原因。

在此，我希望穷游网能够通过我的申请，并准许我在穷游网上进行调查，我的申请材料包括：
1. 博士在读证明。
2. 导师证明证实数据收集目的。
3. 数据收集方案及研究者声明。

期待您的回复。
谢谢。

蔡文杰
Wenjie Cai
PhD Researcher in Tourism
School of Hospitality and Tourism Management
Faculty of Business, Economics and Law
University of Surrey
w.cai@surrey.ac.uk
+44 (0) 74 2015 0587
Data Collection Plan

Data collection in Qyer.com will be mainly divided into two parts. The first part doing participant observation in the Europe section in order to understand how Chinese backpackers prepare and share their travel experiences online. Key themes will be defined by thematic analysis of collected data.

The second part will link to my corporeal fieldwork. I will contact several potential participants and join their backpacking trips after getting their consents.

- I agree data collection will base on the principle of not disturbing users in Qyer.com, and the whole research will be undertaken overtly. Informed consent will be asked before collecting data; all data collected is not used for commercial purpose.

数据收集计划

在穷游网的数据搜集计划大致可以分为两个阶段。第一阶段我将采用参与式观察法在穷游论坛的欧洲板块进行数据收集。目的是了解中国出境背包客的网上行为，尤其是他们如何通过网络平台搜集旅行信息，计划出行和分享旅行体验，本部分搜集的数据将通过主题分析法定义主题。

第二部分将和我的野外研究相挂钩。我会在经过允许和同意下联络几位潜在的参与者。我将加入他们的背包旅行，进行实地数据搜集。

- 我保证不以任何的形式打扰穷游用户，所有的数据搜集都在公开的情况下进行。所有的数据收集和采用都将征求穷游网的同意，所收集的数据不用于商业用途。
APPENDIX 6

15th May 2014

Dear Qyer.com,

As Wenjie Cai’s principal PhD supervisor, I am writing to confirm the purpose of his data collection. Wenjie is a second year PhD student in tourism, and his research is to examine Chinese outbound backpackers’ travel experiences in Europe. One part of his study is to understand Chinese backpackers’ online behaviour by conducting netnography in travel forums. He intends to understand backpacker online culture and behaviour by doing participant observation. After discussion and consideration, has proposed to conduct his online data collection in Qyer.com.

I would be extremely grateful if you would allow Wenjie to conduct his online data collection on your forum.

Yours sincerely,

Scott

Dr Scott Cohen
School of Hospitality and Tourism Management
APPENDIX 7

What happens when the research study stops?

At the end of the project, the participant will be informed when their part of study will be presented in the finding of the thesis or publications.

What if there is a problem?

Any complaint or concern about any aspect of the way you have been dealt with during the course of the study will be addressed; please contact Dr. Scott Cohen on s.cohen@surrey.ac.uk. You may also contact the Head of School Prof. Graham Miller on g.miller@surrey.ac.uk.

Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?

Yes. All of the information you give will be anonymised so that those reading reports from the research will not know who has contributed to it.

Data will be stored securely in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

If it is possible that a participant might share information with you suggesting that they or someone else may be at risk of significant harm you should add: However, should you disclose that you or someone else is at risk then the researcher may need to report this to an appropriate authority. This would usually be discussed with you first.

Contact details of researcher and, where appropriate supervisor?

Wenjie Cai email: w.cai@surrey.ac.uk
Dr. Scott Cohen: s.cohen@surrey.ac.uk
Prof. John Tribe: j.tribe@surrey.ac.uk

Thank you for taking the time to read this Information Sheet.