Asian female solo travellers

Dissertation

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Abstract

This research study explores female travellers, with a particular focus on Asian women. Asian female travellers represent a considerable part of the Asian travel market. In recent years, under the influence of globalisation and experience economy, an increasing number of single Asian women tourists are seeking meaningful travel experiences. However, existent research is mainly from a Western perspective, and research on Asian women's solo trips is rare in the tourism research discourse.

For the purpose of filling this gap, this study conducted exploratory qualitative research to observe this particular group. Data collection involved the independent travel experiences shared online by ten Asian female bloggers, focusing on their travel motivations, constraints and challenges during their individual journeys, and the significance and meaning of solo travel to them.

The findings from the research reveal that many different elements can affect the travelling decisions of single Asian women. The general factors driving Asian women's travel can be categorised into three areas: travel passion, freedom, and life-altering experiences. Through travelling, they mostly have the feeling of freedom and independence from Asian gender norms and cultural identities. Meanwhile, Asian women encounter safety risks and socio-cultural constraints more frequently than male tourists and Western female tourists. Even when faced with such severe situations, they express a profound, meaningful reflection about self-improvement, broadening their horizons, and risk management.

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work, and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person, nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher education.

Zhaoyi XIE

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Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Background

Solo travellers are becoming a significant part of the fast-growing international tourism market. Klook's (2019) travel trends survey of 2400 participants revealed that solo travel represents one of the six trends in the tours and activities sector (www.klook.com). In particular, Jordan and Aitchison (2008) note that female travellers travelling independently have experienced significant and influential growth. In addition, the participation and consumption of women in travel is increasingly evident, and they are now regarded as a growing force in the tourism industry (Shaw, Henderson & Bialeschki, 2013). Due to the rise of solo travel among women, there needs to be more research to understand this phenomenon (Heimtun & Abelsen, 2013).

This considerable change in travel trends is linked to demographic shifts and increased freedom; for instance, the increasing single population, single families, rise in individualistic culture, delayed marriage, and the increase in the number of couples without children (Wilson & Harris, 2006). Also, traditional family ideologies have changed, and societal expectations of marriage and child production do not have as great an impact as they did in the past (Berdychevsky, Gibson & Bell, 2013). As a direct result of these shifts, women living in contemporary Asia have access to a wider range of resources and opportunities to gain more leisure/travel options (Yang, Khoo-Lattimore & Arcodia, 2015). Chiang and Jogaratnam (2006) describe adventure, social interaction, education, and self-understanding as the main goals of single female travellers. Rather than being loners, these women are bold, confident, determined adventurers. They do not stay at home or depend on their husbands, friends, or packaged tours when they feel a trip beckoning (McNamara & Prideaux, 2010). Thus, independent travel seems to be one of the many ways in which women

exercise their recently-gained financial and social autonomy. From another perspective, solo female travellers can meet various psychological needs through independent travel, including getting rid of daily stress, resisting social stereotypes and nursing ethics, creating and restoring friendships, coping with negative life events, and adapting to different life stages (Berdychevsky et al., 2013).

It is widely reported in existing literature that women find an autonomous, self-determining "own journey" through solo travel. At the same time, from the perspective of feminism, people question this notion and reveal the extent to which this problem belongs to their own journey. The results of Wilson's (2004) study indicate that female travellers do not have access to tourism experiences to the same extent that men do. Therefore, a more appropriate concept of solo female travel is that it is a "relative escape comparing with the male travellers who have fewer constraints on the route" (Caruana, Crane & Fitchett, 2008). In order to understand the travel behaviours and experiences of this social group or "niche market", constraint frameworks have been adapted in various studies of women's travel (Wilson, 2004; Wilson & Little, 2008; Yang et al., 2015). Jordan and Aitchison (2008) suggest that women have limited freedom and access to leisure and travel activities, despite the increasing choices and opportunities they have nowadays. One of the most commonly-discussed limitations is fear and security issues, which means that women's experiences are often limited by the need to maintain a safe route, thereby reducing their opportunities for further risk-taking. Most interviewees in solo female traveller research studies have alleged that during trips, they must deal with problems such as undesired male attention, sexual harassment, and violence, which reduce their level of participation in outdoor leisure activities (Wilson & Little, 2005, 2008; Yang et al., 2015). Another form of constraint revolves around the social and cultural acceptability of gender, where the behaviour of "her" is regulated by the social and cultural norms of the host destination, as well as local opinions of 'appropriate' female behaviour (Harris & Wilson, 2007). That is to say, the journey, escape, and experience of women is always relative to the expectations and perceptions of society towards the family, gender perceptions and ideologies relative to the destination, and limited freedom of movement related to not staying out alone at night (Heimtun & Abelsen, 2013).

While previous studies and guidebooks focused on women travellers often record the history of the journey or provide tips on how to travel safely and successfully overcome the many limitations associated with women's travel (Bialeschki, 2005; Jordan & Aitchison, 2008; Wilson & Little, 2008), recent literature has focused on the beneficial aspects of empowering contemporary independent women (Berdychevsky et al., 2013; Fullagar, 2011; Xu & Liu, 2018). Research has also shown that solo travel has some impact on female travellers. According to Shaw et al. (2013), women who travel independently challenge the assumptions of societal ideologies, and try to break the line between unconventional and traditional concepts of the female, even though they may not have done this consciously. After a trip, they gain a profound understanding of themselves, and are more interested in changing life experiences, identity, and self-empowerment (Xu & Liu, 2018). The results of Wilson (2004) indicate that single female travellers face identifiable and real limitations, which may be due to the background of their home environment or the sociocultural structure of the destination from which they travel. However, these restrictions are not static, insurmountable, or even consciously recognised by many of the women interviewed. In fact, it is increasingly evident that women are looking for ways and means by which to "negotiate" their constraints, challenges, and limitations (Harris & Wilson, 2007).

Furthermore, Fullagar (2011) suggests that evidence from women's negotiations indicates that restrictions are not an insurmountable obstacle, and that such restrictions do not necessarily impede travel. In addition, concerns about negotiations make women a positive factor in determining their lifestyle and enjoying a separate travel experience, rather than passively accepting their environment and constraints (Xu & Liu, 2018). Thus, linked to the concept of negotiation, lone travel has also proven to be a place of resistance, freedom, and empowerment for women. By travelling alone, it is clear that women are able to overcome the structures and roles which influence and control their lives.

Despite the abundance of studies on solo female travellers originating from Western countries, little empirical research has explored the touristic experiences of Asian

women (Seow & Brown, 2018). While several studies have discussed the independent travel aspects of Western women (Bialeschki, 2005, Caruana et al., 2008; Harris & Wilson, 2007, Wilson, 2004; Wilson & Little, 2005; 2008) little is known about the potential differences in travelling solo for Asian women. In order to fill this gap, this study aims to understand the experiences of Asian women as solo travellers, including travel motivations, any constraints/challenges faced when journeying alone, and the specific beneficial influences of independent travel.

1.2 Research aims and objectives

Based on the growing phenomenon of solo travel among women, and the knowledge gaps in Asian women's solo travel, the objectives of this study are as follows:

- To identify the reasons behind, and motivations for, Asian women choosing to travel alone;
- To determine the constraints associated with Asian female solo travel;
- To explore the significance and importance of Asian women travelling alone, and its broader role in everyday life.

1.3 Dissertation structure

This dissertation is divided into six chapters. First, the overview and structure of the dissertation are established in the introduction chapter. The second chapter includes a review and discussion of published literature, to explain in more detail the concept of solo women's free travel, as introduced in the previous chapter. The literature review begins with an in-depth discussion of the contributions of feminist and gender studies to tourism research. Women's motivation and driving factors for travelling alone are then briefly examined by considering the role of women in travel and exploration history. Finally, by reviewing the theory of leisure restraints and negotiation, and their relevance to tourism behaviour research, the meaning and influence of solo travel on women is defined. Chapter 3 discusses the methodological aspects of the study, and examines in more detail the explanatory and qualitative paradigms which guide this research. The chapter begins with a study of philosophy, an overview of ontology and epistemological interpretation, and the use of interpretivism in this study. It describes

qualitative research methods involving data collection from online travel blogs and information analysis through a thematic method. The fourth chapter presents the results of the collected qualitative data. Next is the discussion section, which analyses the information from the previous chapter and discusses the overall meaning of the results, intending to link the findings to existing theories and literature. Finally, the sixth chapter summarises the whole study, expounds the purpose and objectives of the research, and offers a comprehensive understanding of the research. The final chapter presents the significance of the research, in addition to offering suggestions and recommendations for further studies.

Chapter Two

Literature review

2.1 Introduction

Tourism is a sociocultural phenomenon, as travellers' experiences are influenced by cultural forces, including gender (Berdychevsky et al., 2013). It is believed that travel motivation is gendered, as it is based on the social reality and background of males and females involved in tourism. Furthermore, the different ways in which a traveller's society views female and male travellers is essential, because the expectations of involvement in tourism are mediated by several stakeholders, and grounded in gendered perspectives (Frohlick, 2013). Historically, women have had to face gender-related barriers in their pursuit of recreation activities. Until the nineteenth century, the golden age of the voyage, women could rarely find a way to travel (Harris & Wilson, 2007). In the 1970s, changes in female roles had a major impact on the travel market, although marketers did not realise their potential, and public leisure was still predominantly male oriented (Caruana, Crane & Fitchett, 2008). In fact, only in the late 1970s and early 1980s did Western women become the subject of academic tourism research, and there was an increase in the number of documents about "female travel experience," proving their unique needs, motivations, and constraints (Wilson, 2004). Nowadays, promoting the understanding of women as travel consumers or "gendered visitors" is crucial, as it is estimated that women account for about half of the leisure and business travel markets (Heimtun & Abelsen, 2013). Tourism is associated with happiness and well-being, and in terms of fostering positive health and promoting happiness and life satisfaction, leisure and recreation play a vital role (McCabe & Johnson, 2013) When comparing some leisure activities, Jordan and Aitchison (2008) found that holidays have a statistically significant effect on increasing happiness. Filep and Deery's (2010) theory of well-being shows that positive emotions, participation, relationships, meaning and achievement are elements of happiness. Research investigating leisure as a place for gender identity construction

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has showed that women can ensure their subjectivity or resist gender stereotypes in an all-female leisure environment (Andrews, 2015). Henderson and Gibson (2013) found that casual conversations are an important part of women's friendship, and a source of women's autonomy and empowerment, because women's the social and emotional support provided in friendship helps them to deal with negative life events. Therefore, as an important form of leisure and recreational activities, travel plays an essential role in their well-being in life. Fullagar (2008) argues that leisure practices, such as crafting, sports and travelling, contribute to women's well-being, and improves their recovery from depression by allowing them to transcend traditional gender roles and care ethics, as well as establishing new relationships with themselves and others.

2.2 Solo female travellers

As mentioned in Chapter 1, independent travellers are considered to be a growing market with different needs, expectations, and attitudes than packaged and mass tourists.

Today, this fragmented and alternative group of travellers reflects a broader global phenomenon known as "new tourism" (Rosenbloom, 2013). In this new global travel world, "new visitors" are characterised by individuality, flexibility, spontaneity, unpredictability, and environmental awareness (Frohlick, 2013). It is also noted that flexibility, as the core component of new tourism, is vital at four levels: travel organisation; production and distribution of travel; choice of holidays, booking, purchase and payment; and enjoyment of the travel experience. In some senses, solo travellers leave home alone, travel mainly on their own, and are responsible for their own travel activities, choices, and itineraries (Bianchi, 2016). Furthermore, compared with other visitors, independent travellers spend longer times in the holiday destination (Bond, 2015). Recently, women have increasingly begun to choose to travel abroad independently, which is now being discussed by scholars (Andrews, 2015; Berdychevsky et al., 2013; Cheng, 2007; Chiang & Jogaratnam, 2006). As a form of public leisure, independent travel takes women away from the familiar family surroundings and into an unfamiliar tourist environment and culture. (Caruana et al., 2008). A study by Wilson and Little (2005) shows that solo female travellers have the desire to challenge themselves, to find a sense of autonomy, to meet new friends and

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to "step out of their own comfort zone". Indeed, Berdychevsky et al. (2013) describes the "girlfriend getaway trip", especially overseas and on their own travel, as a means of enhancing women's independence. These findings suggest that women's independent travel provides a unique and important way by which to improve women's consciousness of their 'self'. In essence, an independent form of travel provides "a space that allows rewriting of a script as a woman" (Fullagar, 2011, p.128). The aforementioned research is mostly focused or based on solo Western female travellers, highlighting the need to inspect the particularities of solo Asian women travellers.

2.3 Solo Asian women travellers

Asian women who travel alone re present a specific niche market. With the rapid emergence of the Asian tourism market, it is becoming both an important destination and country of origin. In particular, the rapid development of China's domestic tourism industry since the 1990s has attracted the attention of Chinese and international tourism. Besides, due to the improvement of the national economy, the long-term policy and social well-being, the characteristics of Chinese culture and the abundant tourism resources have all played a role in its development (Zhou, 2010). A survey by Li, Wen and Leung (2011) interviewed 204 Asian women on travel motivations and behaviour patterns and collected sociodemographic information. The findings show that most solo female tourists have received a higher education, have a good income, and are between 18 and 35 years of age. The study also demonstrates that most of these female tourists prefer to travel independently rather than participating in package tours, and more than two-thirds of the people are repeat visitors, which means they are more experienced travellers. Cheng's (2007) study of Chinese female tourists found that independent forms of travel provide women with a sense of freedom and control over their time at the destination. Zhang and Hitchcock's (2017) study suggests that Chinese female travellers consider travel as a way to support their self-identity as travelling in Macau is not just a leisure activity, but a means of improving and enhancing interpersonal relationships for them. The traditional status of women in Asia is more to support others, and to be centred on marriage and family (Liu, 2011). This widespread sociocultural value does not seem

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to be changed radically by the influence of Confucianism, in which Chinese women's traditionally more subordinate identity and social class consciousness stems from a long history that is dominated by a male perspective (Guo, 2014). In the early twenty-first century, Asian women began to develop individualised voices and to be influenced by consumerism and consumer culture (Winter et al., 2009). They began to build their modern female image in a broader social space transcending family and career, and gradually became an emerging tourism group with high spending power, and increasingly more willing to demonstrate their changing identity and self-awareness of independence (Li et al., 2011). Therefore, sightseeing and vacations have become a popular choice for them to express their newfound independence and self-awareness (Zhang & Hitchcock, 2017). Despite these newly-established freedoms, Asian women's travel experiences are often still influenced by traditional cultural ethics, to some extent, to the relatively free solo traveller (Guo, 2014). Thus, the study of their travel motivations is key to gaining in-depth knowledge about this specific traveller group.

2.4 Motivations of female travellers

Travel means taking risks by going into new spaces, away from familiar people and the home environment. Therefore, investigating the driving factors behind this unique traveller type is important. There are two perspectives of the definition of happiness in contemporary life: (1) hedonic methods, or subjective well-being, and (2) eudaimonic methods, or psychological (McCabe & Johnson, 2013). The hedonic approach treats happiness in terms of well-being and avoidance of pain, while the eudaimonic approach treats happiness in terms of achieving personal potential and personal autonomy, with a focus on self-fulfilment and self-determination. Kim, Lee, Uysal, Kim, and Ahn (2015) developed these dimensions, including autonomy, control, and resistance to social pressure; personal development; a sense of ability; a sense of direction, a sense of purpose and meaning; positive relationship with others and sense of belonging. In addition, four types of motivations are proposed by Bianchi (2016): 'physic', 'culture' 'interpersonal relationship' and 'status/prestige'. Chiang and Jogaratnam (2006) argue that visitors are motivated by both "push" factors (relaxation, self-fulfilment, escape, and reinforcement) and "pull" factors (destination

attractions, natural features and local culture). Filep and Deery (2010) believe that any leisure activity, including travel, involves two motivating factors: "approach" (seeking) and "escape" (avoiding). Hence, it can be seen that a variety of incentives, both internal and external, contribute to the travel decisions of tourists (Wilson, 2004).

External motivation

Women in contemporary society have increased their choices, resources, and opportunities to gain a great deal of travel and leisure options (Berdychevsky et al., 2013). Three factors can explain the growing importance of travelling for women. Firstly, an increasing number of women can access better education and employment opportunities, with reduced social pressures for marriage and childbirth, meaning that women have more time, financial resources, and social networks with which to travel (Chiang & Jogaratnam, 2006). Secondly, as Bond (2015) points out, female travellers have strong purchasing power, and tend to spend more on destinations than male travellers do. Thirdly, previous research has shown that most women play a dominant role in the travel decision-making process, choosing whether to travel and where to go (Harris & Wilson, 2007; Henderson & Gibson, 2013; Salazar & Zhang, 2013). These demographic shifts show the changes in women's lives, and open up new opportunities for leisure and travel. Thus, women have become the primary target for many travel companies (Li, Wen & Leung, 2011).

Inherent motivation

When considering leisure and tourism activities, individuals tend to gravitate towards escaping their everyday environment while meeting the intrinsic motivations of achievement and self-development. In addition, travelling alone gives women a sense of freedom and control over their time and decisions (Shaw et al., 2013). Various studies have further investigated the motives of solo female travellers. In a group of solo British female travellers, Wilson and Harris (2006) found that the motivations shared by their participants involved recreation, social interaction, escape, and self-esteem. However, many of these motivations are directly related to gender, especially in the hope of overcoming a lack of self-confidence (Wilson, 2004). By interviewing

British and American solo female travellers, McNamara and Prideaux (2010) argue that social connections have also proven to be an important motivating factor which fills the gaps in life left by divorce or children leaving home. According to Heimtun and Abelsen's (2013) study, individual travel is seen as a "pause" in the daily routine of a family, or as the last free time before becoming a parent. In addition, single-person travel gives these women a sense of freedom and control over their time and decisions. In research involving female backpackers in Australia, similar motivations were noted (Berdychevsky et al., 2013), showing that many women travel alone to escape relationships at home and to prove that they can travel by themselves. However, research on the motivations of Asian solo travellers is limited. Li et al.'s (2011) study of China's outbound travel motivations showed that Chinese women travellers are willing to travel independently to Hong Kong for shopping and entertainment. Clearly, further research needs to be conducted to investigate the motivations and experiences of Asian travellers, especially in the context of the growth in Asian tourism demand (Winter, Teo & Chang, 2009; Yang et al., 2015; Zhou, 2010). As the primary focus of this study is not only motivation and beneficial experiences, women's travel constraints and challenges also need to be considered in the context of independent travel.

2.5 Female travellers' constraints and challenges

Although these social demographic changes bring benefits and freedoms, this does not mean that women enjoy leisure and tourism activities without any constraints or challenges. Constraints are described differently as factors that prevent a person from participating in a leisure activity, spending more time doing these activities, or achieving desired levels of satisfaction and benefits (Shaw et al., 2013). At the heart of women's restrictions to leisure is the notion that women and men perceive and experience constraint in different ways, and women may face a more specific, unique, and restrictive situation. Jordan and Aitchison (2008), for example, discovered that women reported constraints such as gender role expectations, physical weakness, family commitments, body image, and lack of skills compared to men. In addition, due to women's concerns about harassment or violence perpetrated by men, the restrictions of women seem to be more pronounced when they participate in outdoor

activities or activities in public areas (Wilson & Little, 2008).

A series of women-centric tourism information means that there are not only important women's independent tourism markets, but women may have unique needs and specific recommendations for individual travel (Wilson, 2004). Research on women's travel behaviour (Wilson & Little, 2005) has found that, although they are eager to travel independently and to be alone, women tend to have a disproportional fear about their personal safety during travel. When travelling alone, it is almost impossible for a woman to avoid the risk of being targeted in the form of staring and sexual harassment in many destinations (Jordan & Aitchison, 2008). Because of isolated and remote features, certain recreation spaces are generally considered to be unfavourable to independent female travellers, such as public and national parks or forest areas which are regarded by women as 'dangerous landscapes' (Kim et al., 2015). Research has found a clear concern about female travellers going out alone at night, and this highlights a time limit for them to enter public places (Jordan & Aitchison, 2008). In some conservative and traditional areas, it is difficult for local people to accept single female travellers, and they are consequently considered eccentric or unconventional (Wilson & Little, 2008). It is for these reasons that women report more concern about their personal safety than men do and more "social control" in terms of leisure activities engagement (Berdychevsky, Gibson & Bell, 2013).

Compared with Western women, Winter, Teo, and Chang (2009) and Yang, Khoo-Lattimore, and Arcodia (2016) argue that the risks of Asian women are more strongly influenced by their different gender ideologies. For example, through the observation of the travel experiences of Western and South Asian women, Seow and Brown's (2018) study suggests that Asian women are more concerned about risking their family's reputation when using public leisure spaces, while Western respondents did not share the same perception. In general, Asian women suffer from the domination of a patriarchal ideology which affects their behaviour in the region (Yang et al., 2018). Furthermore, studies have shown that Asian women are generally considered as timid and dependent; thus, they are regarded as being unsuited for (Guo, 2014), or not as inclined to, engage in solo travel (Zhang & Hitchcock, 2017). Especially in East Asia,

under the broad influence of the Confucian doctrine, society used to be controlled by the patriarchy, with the overarching belief that men were the core of the family and women's role was limited to household matters (Guo, 2014). From a young age, women were taught the virtues of submission and endurance while carrying out their family duties (Fan and Zheng, 2007). Even in modern times, many Asian women are still willing to accept their subservience to men, as it is considered to bring a harmonious society (Xu & Liu, 2018). Asian women are more subordinate to cultural tendencies, thus depriving these women of the right to participate in leisure activities (Yang et., 2015). Although subject to social oppression, Seow and Brown (2018) found that solo Asian women travellers increasingly show resistance to Asian gender norms via independent travel, requiring them to change themselves and be strong when faced with the inherent risks of travelling alone.

2.6 Negotiation and empowerment of female solo travellers

While research on constraints provides a new way to understand the travel experiences of women, it is now widely recognised that people try to "negotiate" their constraints to ensure leisure engagement (Xu & Liu, 2018). The growing interest in the concept of negotiation has led to extending the analysis of the way women think about constraints.

It is now widely believed that people rarely give up leisure participation, even when faced with constraints and challenges (Filep & Deery, 2010). The concept of negotiation suggests that people are looking for ways and strategies with which to cope with their constraints and the difficulties encountered on the route, which not only increases their involvement, but also allows them to hold a positive attitude towards other challenges in later life (Caruana et al., 2008). The negotiation, as a positive act or strategy to overcome restrictions, is a form of resistance in which women become active, self-fulfilling life participants rather than victims of an oppressive patriarchal society. Leisure is described as a vehicle for women resisting the mainstream discourse of a passive and subordinate position in society (Rosenbloom, 2013). The research of Yang et al. (2018) shows that the choice of participating in leisure activities does not usually depend on a complete lack of

constraints, but rather how people negotiate through these constraints. As such, constraints are more likely to change one's level of participation, rather than completely eliminating it. Furthermore, the work by Harris and Wilson (2007) notes that the importance of motivation is related to people's willingness to deal with constraints and challenges in recreational activities. Thus, the concept of negotiation has significant impacts on the study of women's leisure and travel, and it repositions women as taking an active role in their lives and dealing with limitations through negotiations (Zhou, 2010).

A recent survey of international solo female travellers found that, although more than half of the respondents indicated that they felt unsafe when travelling alone, only a few people experienced sexual harassment firsthand (Bond, 2015). However, for many visitors, negotiating in unfamiliar spaces and places can be a discouraging task, especially for those who choose to travel on their own (Wilson & Little, 2005). The study of Wilson and Little (2008) shows that there are some important social, cultural, and geographical issues that can be raised about how independent visitors negotiate public travel spaces; for example, how independent tourists and solo travellers respond to the challenges of unknown landscapes without fully understanding the culture of local communities. In addition, how do they ensure their safety and make adequate judgments when they operate outside of familiar cultural practices (Yang et al., 2015). Heimtun and Abelsen (2013) studied this aspect while exploring the meanings of independent travel. They pointed out that solo women travellers resisted the gaze of others in restaurants by reading books, or pretending to be married by wearing wedding rings. McNamara and Prideaux (2010) revealed that one goal of single female travellers is to challenge themselves and expand their comfort zone. Additionally, travelling independently is seen as a transformative experience in Yang et al.'s (2016) risk perception study of Asian solo female travellers, such as going to a bar alone to challenge gender norms. Wilson (2004) posits that overcoming constraints and challenges by travelling alone can give women a greater sense of accomplishment and self-determination.

Women's tourism has been found to add meaning to their lives and improve their quality of life (Wilson & Harris, 2006). Certainly, tourism may be an area of self-

expression and self-exploration, which is enhanced by the quality of the travel space, and could also offer a sense of escape and freedom from everyday life, as well as a strong sense of belonging and higher social status (Seow & Brown, 2018). Therefore, solo travel away from home can allow women to find themselves and their identities, as they have the time and space to focus on themselves. This is a way for women to empower themselves by choosing their freedom, and controlling their own movement and opportunities to interact with new people and places (Berdychevsky et al., 2013).

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter reviews relevant literature on the subject of female independent travel; in particular, the establishment of a conceptual framework and measurement items for this research. Previous research is rooted in gender research and suitable for the travel motivation, restrictions faced by female tourists, and the meaningful outcomes of solo female travel. The female travel experience has a commonality, but as this literature review shows, research on the unique environment of Asian women's solo travel experiences needs to be extended.

Chapter Three

Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter commences with an overview of the research purposes and research philosophy, ontology, and epistemology. Thereafter, it illustrates the notions of netnography and thematic analysis. The following section covers data collection, explaining where and how data is collected. At the end of this chapter, the ethical issues and research limitations of the study are discussed.

3.2 Aims and objectives

While the solo female travel industry is, overall, a growing market, there has recently been a more pronounced rise in the Asian female traveller market. However, the majority of research on independent travel for women focuses on Western women. Thus, to address the gap, the main interest of this research lies in exploring the solo travel of Asian women.

The aims and objectives of this study are as follows:
- To identify the reasons behind, and motivations for, Asian women choosing to travel alone;
- To determine constraints associated with Asian female solo travel;
- To explore the significance and importance of Asian women travelling alone, and its broader role in everyday life.

3.3 Research philosophy

Research philosophy is the general concept of how to collect and analyse data on a particular phenomenon (Hillman & Radel, 2018). In other words, it is a theory which

guides researchers in their research design, research strategies, questionnaire design, and sampling (Harrison & Reilly, 2011). In addition, Durbarry (2017) highlights that research philosophy plays an essential role in improving and refining the research methods, which can thus help researchers to better collect data and answer the research questions.

According to the exploratory features of the research objectives, which focus on Asian women's independent travel experiences, the paradigm which emphasises richness, description, and meaning is considered the most appropriate. Thus, a qualitative and interpretive approach is applied to this study. Originated in the social and behavioural sciences, qualitative research refers to a method of understanding the reasons, opinions, and motivations through the use of observation and interviewing of the participants (Gray, 2018). In addition, Veal (2011) argued that qualitative research methods are designed to explain the behaviour and attitude of the target audience, referring to specific topics. Interpretivism is a major research philosophy which relies on people to provide an interpretation of their situation or behaviour. Interpretive researchers believe that reality can only be fully understood through subjective explanations and interviews (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2010). Therefore, they could "enter" the subject's thoughts and see the world from different angles (Durbarry, 2017). This, of course, shows a more flexible method of data collection, usually involving qualitative methods (Tuli, 2010).

3.4 Ontology and epistemology

In the field of philosophy, there are two major concepts: ontology and epistemology (Veal, 2011). Ontology refers to the philosophical assumptions about the nature of reality, which supposes the observer sees the "real world" through the interpretative lens, the observer's point of view and similar methods (Gray, 2018). In simple terms, ontology as a part of the paradigm raises questions about the nature of the world and reality, while epistemology, as an element of the research paradigm, focuses on the nature, origin, and boundaries of knowledge (Goertz & Mahoney, 2012). Therefore, epistemology concerns two basic questions: How can I understand reality? Also, what is the relationship between the knower and the known? Cua and Garrett (2009) posit

that epistemology involves the problem of what is considered acceptable in a discipline. Since research is a process which begins with ontological and epistemological assumptions (Harrison & Reilly, 2011), Durbarry (2017) states that it is crucial to first and foremost consider the appropriate ontology and epistemological hypotheses. However, this process is not one-way, but rather complicated, because not only do ontology and epistemology have an impact on methodology, but the results obtained by a certain methodology can adversely affect philosophical assumptions (see Fig. 1).
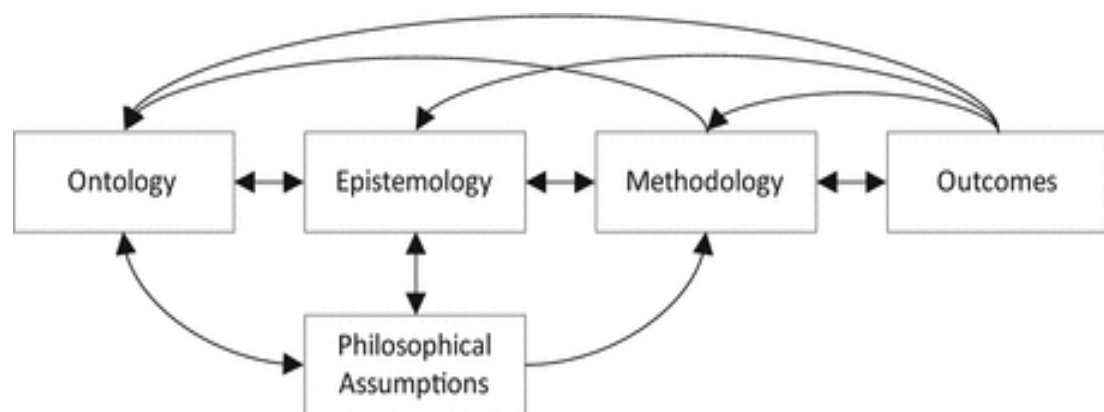
Figure 1 Philosophy of research

(Source: Harrison & Reilly, 2011)

This study explores Asian women's travel experiences and reflections from their blogs, and applies the interpretative and qualitative research method to gain an in-depth and comprehensive understanding of the challenges and significant influences brought by their independent travel.

3.5 Netnography

Owing to its secondary characteristics, the database of this research mainly comprises existing data of major research in the past; government statistics and internal data sources from different media, such as articles from respected journals, university research centres, or non-profit organisations (Walliman, 2017).

As an application of ethnographic methods in the study of network culture, netnography is a method to collect a considerable amount of data which comes from the digital traces of public conversations recorded and manifested by the communication network Kozinets (2015). The process of netnography (Fig. 2) includes: (1) identifying the focus group for the research (2) targeting potential website areas (such as forums and blogs); (3) observing or participating in the online communication to gather data from the site; (4) producing reliable interpretation and analysis after observation and participation in community activities; (4) demonstrating the data analysis of the research; (5) presenting the findings.

Netnographic Research

1 – Research focus

2 – Community Identification and selection

3 – Engagement, immersion, data collection

4 –Analysis & Iterative Interpretation

5 – Present findings
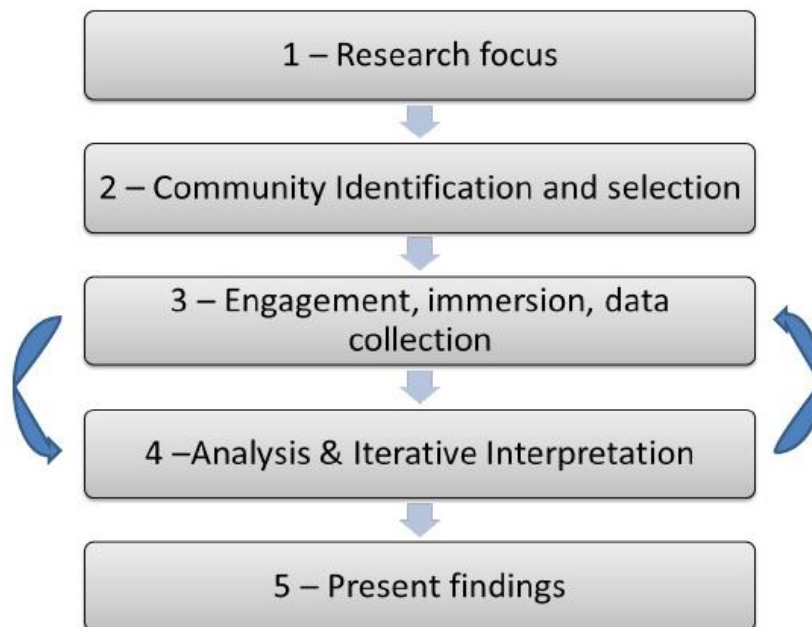
Figure 2: Process of Netnography

(Source: Kozinets, 2015)

Thus, the netnography method which has been designed to conduct research on the Internet, and was adapted to the study of online communities and cultures, presents a meaningful and useful approach to this qualitative research study on understanding why single Asian women choose to travel alone, what kind of challenges emerge on their journeys, and in which ways this form of travel affects them (Durbarry, 2017). In the online community, a large amount of information concerning the expectations,

desires, experiences, and beliefs of users can be expressed and generated, both implicitly and explicitly (Schmallegger & Carson, 2008). According to Kozinets (2015), the netnography method uses 'natural' and 'non-fabricated' data, which mainly comes from publicly-available online sources such as blogs, discussion boards, or comments posted on social networking sites. Originally developed for marketing and consumer research, netnography is increasingly being applied to the study of hospitality, leisure, events, and tourism (Stebbins, 2010). There are a variety of netnographic study techniques, including content analysis, historical analysis, semiotics, hermeneutics, narrative analysis, and thematic analysis (Rokka, 2010). However, thematic analysis is applied in this research, which provides a more subjective interpretation of the "themes" in the database.

3.6 Data collection

Social media

The development of information and communication technologies, especially in the field of Web 2.0 and social media, has opened up a mutual digital world. Tourists' behaviour and tourism-related industries have been influenced by the widespread adoption and use of Web 2.0 (Kozinets, 2015).

Social media has created a new dialogue approach in terms of conversations about travel services, routes, and destinations, as they promote direct interaction between travel providers and consumers (Leung, Law, Van Hoof & Buhalis, 2013). As a powerful social tool for online communication, SM provides a platform for the tourist to share and extend reviews about the travel experience (Leung et al., 2013; Sigala, Christou & Gretzel, 2016). Social media has been recognised as an innovative knowledge sharing network because it allows travel consumers to communicate, share, and interact with others (Oz, 2015; Sotiriadis, 2017). However, experiences and comments shared in the online community impact the perceptions and choices of tourism consumers. Oz (2015) believes that because there is nothing harmful in the sharing of personal experiences and reviews, social media has a higher level of perceived trustworthiness compared to traditional tourism information sources such as travel agencies and advertisements. Previous social media-related research suggests

that social media is considered a reliable and important source of information for travel planning purposes (Sigala et al., 2016; Oz, 2015).

The literature shows that social media plays an essential role in addressing many tourism issues, such as information searching and decision making of tourist behaviour, marketing and communication with travel consumers, and business management of functions and activity (Leung et al., 2013). In addition, the process of co-designation, co-production, and co-marketing emerge when social media is used by tourists who can be called co-consumers in this stage (Sigala, Christou & Gretzel, 2016). Therefore, social media has radically altered the entire tourism information process, including the searching, rating, co-production, and distribution of the information of travel providers and destinations.

Blogs

Among the main types of social media, blog sites provide comments on specific topics or subjects. Bosangit, McCabe and Hibbert (2009) point out that allowing readers to leave publicly visible comments and interact with other reviewers is an important reason for the popularity of many blogs.

In fact, blog writing is considered a process of self-reflection, as bloggers explore themselves by writing text (Mack, Blose & Pan, 2008). Bosangit et al. (2009) note that storytelling is a way to create a person's own identity, as it involves telling every detail about the self. Moreover, like a traditional diary or written narrative, blogs deliver the travellers' inner experience openly with people who are interested, and stories about travel experiences have always been popular (Zhang & Hitchcock, 2017). Nowadays, travel blogs have become an integral part of the modern travel experience, as visitors' awareness of self-identity can be linked through their narrative stories and how they relate to various aspects of self-conceptualisation, including values, preferences, and social relationships (Volo, 2010). Therefore, to some extent, bloggers can be seen as storytellers who express their feelings and experiences by introspecting their memories, as a way to relive the travel (Schmallegger & Carson, 2008).

It is believed that blog sites have become a space for urban women to break the traditional gender norms via 'personalised writing', which is disassociated from male-centred discourse and allows the discovery of the radical variations of women (Okazaki & Hirose, 2009). Tourism researchers believe that blogs can be a valuable resource in studying the behaviour and psychology of travellers, as they can present different tourists' experiences and insights into the same form of travel (Bosangit et al., 2009; Mack et al., 2008; Volo, 2010). Meanwhile, preferences for tourism activities and travel destinations can also be revealed through blogs (Sharda & Ponnada, 2008). Therefore, in order to gain a deeper understanding of consumer needs, many travel service operators choose to hire knowledgeable individuals or experienced travellers to research blogs to develop more appropriate products and services (Volo, 2010).

In summary, blogs provide an opportunity to learn how independent Asian female travellers conceive their travel experiences, and how they review their travel destinations (Zhang & Hitchcock, 2017). However, from the perspective of market segmentation or gender studies, this dimension has not been thoroughly investigated in the literature on Asian women as travellers and tourists (Xu & Liu, 2018; Yang et al., 2015).

Selected blogs

Studying the selected travel blogs published on social network sites can help to build on the interest in Internet ethnography. This social science and perspective can be described as a virtual ethnographic approach, or netnography, where the blog environment is the site of fieldwork (Bowler Jr, 2010). An interpretivist approach and qualitative and unobtrusive data collection methods were utilised to obtain relevant travel blogs data. Thematic analysis was used in the process of data analysis. This research goes beyond the mainstream view of the commercial value of female visitors, examining how solo Asian female travellers conceive their experiences and how independent travel has affected them.

The blog sample was intentionally chosen with two rules: (a) relevancy: the blog content should contain detailed travel narratives about the blogger's travel experience

and reflection (b) richness: it should consist of an adequate description of the experience.

The ten different travel blogs selected as the main sources of information are presented below:

Singaporean:
https://www.wildjunket.com/how-to-create-a-life-of-travel/
https://www.lydiascapes.com/

Malaysian:
https://www.fivefeetflat.net/
http://yqtravelling.com/
https://www.thegonegoat.com/

Filipino:
https://www.solitarywanderer.com/
https://iamaileen.com/

Japanese:
http://www.thejapanesetraveler.com/

Korean:
http://runawayjuno.com/

Chinese:
https://happytowander.com/
https://www.weibo.com/smilemolly?topnav=1&wvr=6&topsug=1&is_hot=1

The initial blog selection was of fifteen travel bloggers who posted in English or Chinese, after which the sample size was reduced to nine in English and one in Chinese. Through repeated rereading, five blogs were excluded that only described travel routes in English. Since English is widely used worldwide, most Asian female bloggers in different languages choose to write blogs in English. The blog searching

for this study was conducted between April 2019 and May 2019. The process of review began with the goal of ensuring that bloggers are Asian women who posted their personal travel experiences in the publicly-accessible cyber world. The focus then turns to whether the blog reflects the personal feelings associated with independent travel, which contributes to the influence, either negative or positive, of the participation of women in solo trips.

The key term 'single Asian women travel blog' was employed to search for these blogs online. The age of participants ranges from 20 to 40 years old. However, due to the unobtrusive approach employed, not every participant in this study mentioned their age. To protect the confidentiality of the participants, pseudonyms were used when presenting the findings. The table below (Table.1) presents the essential information of the selected bloggers.

	Name	Nationality	Age	Destinations
1	Nellie	Singaporean	38	89
2	Lydia	Singaporean	X	29
3	Anis	Malaysian	X	28
4	Yun Qing	Malaysian	X	14
5	Pashmina	Malaysian	28	9
6	Aleah	Philippian	X	38
7	Aleen	Philippian	27	45
8	Arisa	Japanese	27	6
9	Juno	Korean	X	54
10	Christina	Chinese	X	29

Table 1: Bloggers' Profile

3.7 Data analysis

As one of the most common analytical methods in qualitative research, thematic analysis presents the most useful approach to capturing the complexity of meaning in a text database (Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2012), as thematic analysis focuses on the examination of themes in the data and descriptions of the data set (Sather-Wagstaff, 2011). In order to facilitate the reader's understanding of how text is interpreted and reported, a network-like diagram is used to provide valuable topical graphical representations and their relationships (Guest et al., 2012). Thematic

analysis goes beyond the calculation of clear words or phrases, and focuses on identifying and describing implicit and explicit ideas in the data; namely the subject. Then, common codes are developed to represent the identified themes, and are applied or linked to the raw data as a summary tag for later analysis (Hillman & Radel, 2018). Sometimes it may include code frequencies comparison, code co-occurrences, and a graph displaying the relationships between the code in the data set (Walters, 2016). Thus, thematic analysis will be carried out in the process of analysing the qualitative data, since it helps to identify patterns of meaning across a dataset which provides answers to the particular research question being addressed (Guest et al., 2012). There is a six-phase process (Fig. 3) to develop the thematic analysis.
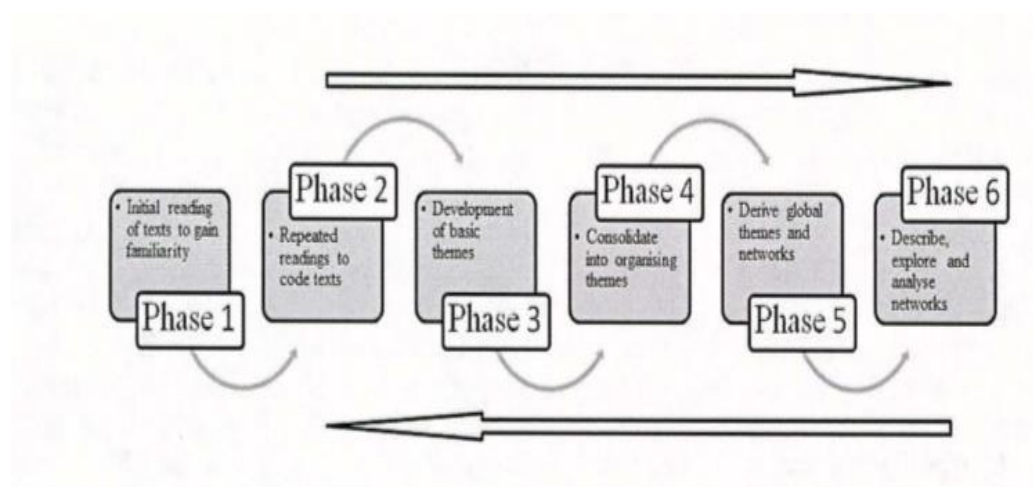
Figure 3: Six-phase process of TA

Source: Walters (2016)

The six-phase process, which is explained above, was used to help with data analysis in this study.

Familiarisation with data

By 'immersing' in the database, some interesting and significant features were noticed and marked. These notes should be determined by the research questions, and the broader issues surrounding what is happening in the data.

Generating codes

In this step, data is organised in a similar manner and the content is reduced to a merged block of text. Thus, more comprehensive and systematic characters were

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concluded and presented by different codes. The coding involves attaching simplified, clear labels (codes) to the "blocks" of data in order to help organise data around meaningful patterns.

Searching and constructing themes

The focus of this phase is on a broader theme and involves categorising different codes into potential themes. Themes capture the essential and extended meaning of data. As noted by Braun, Clarke, Hayfield, and Terry (2019), themes may combine different data, or may appear in a variety of environments but they often interpret most data sets with smaller units of meaning (code). In this study, six underlying themes are identified: 'travel passion'. 'freedom', 'uncomfortable attention', 'Asian stereotype', 'self-improvement' and 'broaden horizons'.

Reviewing themes

In this phase, all data extracts of each theme were reread in order to ensure a consistent pattern.

The key to this step is to compile and review all coded data to ensure that the data is relevant to the central organisation concept; a secondary review phase involves examining the topic against the entire data set.

Defining themes

This step identifies and defines the unique nature of each theme. Then a concise, clear name is given to each theme, which immediately lets the reader know what the sense of theme is. At the end of this step, the relationship of codes, basic themes, and themes is presented in the thematic network table below (Table.2).

Codes	Basic themes	Themes
Escape the routine	Travel passion	Travel motivation
Create life of travel	Freedom	
Curious		
Explore novelty		
Make your own choice		
Creepy note	Gendered risk	Encountered difficulties
Uncomfortable attention	Asian stereotypes	
Hard decision in her life		
Unstable lifestyle		
Create shock to the family		
Self-discovery	Self-improvement	Meaningful influence
Build up confidence	Broaden the horizon	
Be lucky		
Get out of comfort zone		
Meet new friends		

Table 2   Thematic network table

3.8 Ethical

The data collection methods conducted in this study has led to considerations related to researchers' disclosure and informed consent. These issues were addressed within the ethical framework expected of any research involving human subjects (Bell & Wray-Bliss, 2009). The ethical issue of online blogs is the acceptance of the concept of public and private online spaces, and the differences in accessibility of researchers. Researchers should consider eliminating any identifiable information when collecting research data. Therefore, in order to avoid collecting private information, blogs requiring registration were excluded. Any identifiable information, such as names, were replaced by pseudonyms to ensure the anonymity of the bloggers.

3.9 Limitations

The small sample size of this study could be a limitation to this qualitative and

explorative research, since it leads to higher variability and low representation, which affects the reliability of results. The purpose of qualitative research is to explore and explain, meaning this study is more subjective than quantitative research, which uses numerical data such as numbers and figures to interpret a particular phenomenon (Durbarry, 2017).

The correlation of the collected data presents another limitation because this research uses second-hand resources. Also, the selected data collection approach, netnography, cannot provide detailed perceptions of any given topic. Network researchers need to rely on search engines such as Google to identify relevant communities and data quickly and easily, which makes netnography a fast and straightforward way to collect data (Bowler Jr, 2010). However, this apparent simplicity could raise concerns over the accuracy and relevance of the results, because, to some extent, the results depend on an appropriate keyword search (Kozinets, 2015). Therefore, comprehensive research techniques need to be applied to gain further understanding.

The reliability of the online content posted by bloggers has previously been discussed (Mack et al., 2008). On some sites, bloggers can rate their visitors and sort the total number of posts and comments by date and rating (Volo, 2010). Thus, it is difficult to identify false individuals posting with an interest in and benefit from a particular product or service.

3.10 Conclusion

This chapter describes several research objectives which were achieved by collecting information from travel blogs published by solo Asian women travellers. The strategy of qualitative research is to gain an in-depth understanding of their perceptions about their solo travel participation, which allows investigating the impact of this travel for these women. Netnography, a form of secondary research which gathers data mainly through online travel blogs, is utilised as a data collection method. However, the concern surrounding the reliability and accuracy of the data collection process is seen as a limitation of this research. In the data analysis stage, the thematic analysis precisely locates, examines, and records themes within the research database. The

following chapter describes and interprets the findings of the travel experiences and feelings in the selected blogs.

Chapter Four

Findings

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the results of the thematic analysis of the collected data are presented. In addition, the thematic framework (Fig. 5) demonstrates graphically interesting and novel results. The headings of this chapter correspond to the concepts and themes in the thematic framework, which are supported by the quotes taken from the blogs. There are three main headings based on the global themes, which are travel motivation, difficulties encountered, and meaningful influence. Travel passion, freedom, life-altering experiences, gendered risk, Asian stereotypes, unfair treatment, self-improvement, broadening horizons, and risk management are used as sub-headings based on the sub-themes. In order to provide better support and interpretation of the findings, some quotations from the blogs are used directly.
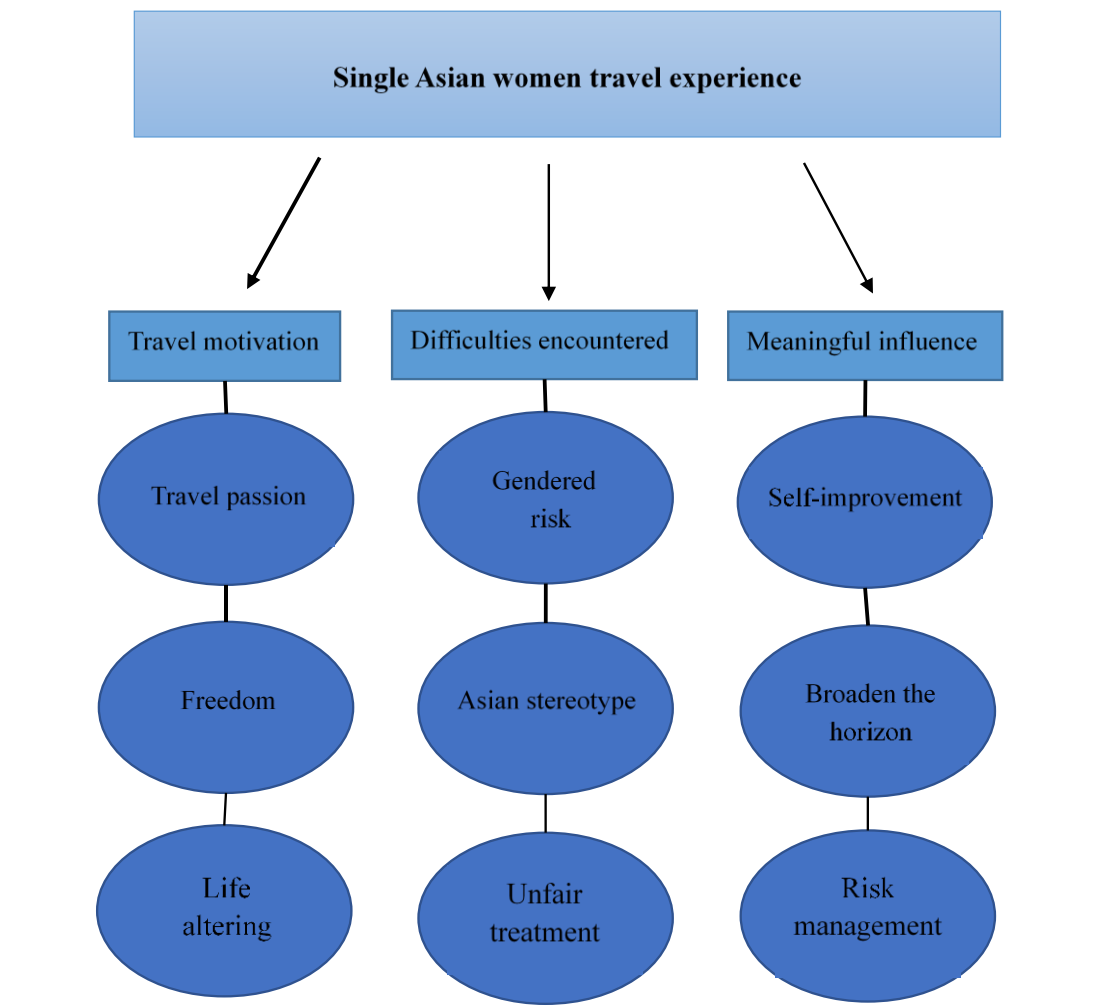
Figure 4. The thematic framework of single Asian women's travel experience

4.2 Travel motivations

There is a wide range of reasons why these Asian women bloggers chose their solo trips. The common motivations presented by them are a passion for travel, and freedom. However, some different and unique enthusiasm for travelling alone is included in the others.

4.2.1 Travel passion

In this study, all the participants reveal their passion for travel and eagerness to create

a 'life of travel'. For Aleah, the reason to travel alone is simple and straightforward:

After all, I travel solo not because I want to prove something. I travel alone because I want to, I need to, and because I can – Aleah

When talking about solo travel, Aileen shows her enjoyment of and enthusiasm for it.

Travelling solo means I can create my own adventures, and discover on my own terms! - Aileen

However, growing up in an unconventional family gave Lydia more of a travelling spirit from a young age.

Since I was a small toddler, they broke all parental records to take their kids on holidays. From when I was little up to the years we were sitting for our high school final exams and still had to do our homework while taking the Eurorail from one city to another. Much to the horror of all other stereotypical competitive Asian parents. - Lydia

When women think of independent travel, the motivation of "experience" is important, because it allows them to explore the world and learn new things.

I also want to travel the world, to move around and to see 'new' interesting stuff as I gain location independence – Aileen.

When you travel alone, there is a higher chance of meeting new friends. I'm naturally an introvert, but when I'm travelling, you can find me talking to fellow travellers more. I usually don't do this when I have a travel companion; after all, when you're with someone, the tendency is to stick together. – Aleah

Another blogger agreed that travelling alone could create more opportunities to gain social relationships and connect with fellow travellers.

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It's a simple mind trick. It's harder to approach a couple since they already have their own world. Solo travellers bond with each other way easier. That's how I got to meet so many great friends. - Juno

In addition, Anis felt inspired when exploring the novelty of meeting people:

I enjoy hanging out with anyone who can make me think and tell me something I don't know. Great writing and great ideas inspire me. - Anis

This study shows that an inherent eagerness to travel made the bloggers travel alone, at the same time, all the positive aspects of solo travel encourage them to keep exploring the world independently.

4.2.2 Freedom

In this study, most of the female bloggers mentioned a feeling of freedom and increased flexibility as the main reasons why they choose to travel alone. For example, Anis points out that travelling alone means that she can control her days, and she also talks about how to make it a priority to consider her personal needs:

It's about the total and complete freedom I get when I'm by myself. Other travellers cite the confidence boost they get, the chance to meet more people, and the opportunity to relax without the need for company. – Anis

Participants' journeys are usually unrestricted and vary in terms of route. Aleah considers herself a "lazy traveller" and she prefers to 'follow [her] own pace'.

You can go as slow or as quick as you like, sleep wherever and whenever you want, eat the food you feel like eating. Freedom: this is the most important reason why I travel solo. - Aleah

Also, Juno has a strong feeling towards independent travel, even when one has a partner.

Even if you're like two peas in a pod with your partner, travelling as two can create friction in many situations. But if you're alone? The choice is all yours – Juno.

In this study, these bloggers show their preferences for the unrestricted and flexible style of solo travel.

4.2.3 Life altering

Besides being passionate and feeling freedom in their solo travel, there are some special incentives that further influence people's decisions to take this kind of trip.

Through reading and re-reading the posts of these bloggers, there exists an interesting fact about their experience of living abroad, which gave their opportunity to see more of the world. Having studied in America, Nellie experienced a new and interesting world, and this laid a foundation for her independent travel.

Experiencing life abroad and connecting with people of different cultures opened my eyes to a whole new world of possibilities. - Nellie

Similarly, Arisa's exchange student experience in Thailand gave her many ideas about what she would like to do in the future.

Studying abroad in Thailand and meeting a lot of people who came from all over the world has changed the value of my life completely. You only live once. I'm just gonna do whatever I wanna do with my life. - Arisa

Unlike the other bloggers, Yun Qing was inspired by a Western solo traveller who is, like her, an independent travel tutor.

Having a travel role model makes it easier to cross that bridge from being scared of travelling alone to being a kick-ass solo traveller. For every person who wants to venture into solo travelling, I hope there is someone in your life to guide you. - Yun

The life-changing experiences of some of these female bloggers not only changed their views of the world, but also planted the seeds of solo travel in their minds.

4.3 Difficulties encountered

Since security issues are still a problem that cannot be ignored in individual travel, especially for single women, it is not an easy task for Asian females to travel alone.

4.3.1 Gendered risk

The perceptions of gendered risk by the Asian female travellers are reinforced by street harassment experiences, such as receiving uncomfortable gazes and unwanted physical contact when travelling alone. Aileen shared her distressing experience when she travelled alone in Israel and Indonesia.

There is hardly a day that creeps won't leave you in peace. From getting cat-called and eye-fucked and chatted up (even by security no less) in Jerusalem (I was covered from head to toe), to getting grabbed by the waist and shoulders as I conversed with other women in an upscale bar in Seminyak. - Aileen

Pashmina pointed out that her status as a solo female traveller and the perception of Asian women's own vulnerability is a factor limiting her enjoyment of travel.

The constant need to justify my marital status and the purpose of why I am doing this. It feels like the tide might be changing in some cities, but if you go to remote places or rural villages, it can be hard. In Georgia, Mestia, to evade constant speculation, I told them I was on an assignment and had a family of my own back home. - Pashmina

Yun Qing sometimes felt embarrassed and helpless when faced with the constant sexualised inspection of men.

I love dancing. I love salsa, bachata, merengue, tango, you name it.   But every time I try to go dancing, I'm inundated by predatory males who want more than to dance with me. So should I stop dancing? I think it's unfair, because I love doing it, and guys should be more respectful. But, realistically, to keep doing it means having to keep dealing with distasteful and uncomfortable situations. – Yun Qing

In Nellie's blog, there are some accounts of undesirable sexual harassment that she encountered on her travels.

It happened in Cusco, Peru. I was excited because they had a Latino dancing nightlife, which is hard to come by in Asia. Again, the dance instructor took a liking to me and basically stuck to me song after song. I was happy at first because I got to practice with someone really good, but at one point, during a bachata tutorial, he tried to kiss me. – Nellie

As female travellers, gender vulnerability exposes them to risk and fear stemming from males.

4.3.2 Asian stereotypes

Due to conservative Asian values and social norms, solo travel is still a foreign concept in most Asian cultures. Asian societies' expectations for women are that women should be family-oriented rather than travelling.

To the chagrin of my parents, travel made me realise that my passion wasn't in law, but writing and photography, two nail-bitingly unstable professions. I know this because Asian stereotypes heavily shaped my life growing up, and I still feel the effects today. For instance, I grew up thinking it was normal that Asian people didn't go camping, skiing, or hiking. – Christina

Therefore, most Asian female solo travellers had to confront the opposition of their families and the disapproval of their traditional societies.

The social trends in Japan stood in my way. Because it is too common to get a job right after graduation, and it's ridiculous to even have a doubt about it, I have to explain my dream to so many people who assume that I will get a job, to make them really understand what I wanna do in the future. – Arisa

As a Korean who grew up in a conservative household, my departure from my career created enough shock to change everything in my life; including my relationship with my own family. - Juno

Moreover, some of the bloggers were stereotyped and judged as "weak targets" and "free chicks" by the local people in the destinations where they travelled.

When they see me, all they see is another Asian face for them to barrage with "Ni haos", "ching chongs", and snooty, judgmental stares… An all-too-common reality for many Asian travellers, myself included. – Yun Qing

Christina, even though she had a male travel partner whom she met during the trip, still could not avoid sexual harassment from other men.

I've had boys shout "NICE CHINESE PUSSY!" at me while walking down the street. I've had people assume I was a prostitute while holding hands with my white boyfriend. – Christina

Compared to Western women, Asian women have a short history of independent travel. Thus, they are not easily accepted by either their home society or host destination.

4.3.3 Unfair treatment

There is another form of discrimination known as 'Asian-Asian racism', which refers to unequal treatment among Asian people as a result of ethnicity, language, religion, etc. Juno illustrates this kind of experience in her blog.

A girl looks like them can't speak their language but English and hang out with foreigners. To them, I'm a show-off.   - Juno

Due to this misjudgement of locals, she got different treatment which upset and frustrated her.

When walking down the street with my backpack, I feel I'm being stared at by locals who think I'm weird. No one gives a damn about me. Just sometimes, it is frustrating to be treated differently anywhere I go. As a traveller, I don't want to be treated differently; I want to experience what the local people do. - Juno

Additionally, in Asian culture, society, mainly males and the older generation, consider family to be the most important thing in one's life. After forming a family and raising children, they can live a complete life. Therefore, as mentioned in Yun Qing's blog, men and women hold different views on female independent travel.

Another person made a face and said, "What sort of parents let their daughter travel alone?" Funnily, it is men who say such things to my face. No woman has ever told me that we womenfolk should stay at home and knit. Usually, women tell me that they dare not travel alone, but they do not make threats. – Yun Qing

Thus, besides uncomfortable attention from males and disapproval by Asian society, these Asian female solo travellers also need to deal with other forms of unexpected treatment when travelling alone.

4.4 Meaningful influence

Despite these difficulties and challenges, these Asian solo travellers still have many positive feelings and reflections towards their solo trip experiences.

4.4.1 Self-improvement

Many participants have written about travelling alone being a process of

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transformation and self-discovery, in which they gain confidence and become more independent and courageous.

Travelling and being constantly faced with new situations and circumstances sharpens your skillset; your adaptability. You learn to be more open-minded, to accept help or look for help, to be independent and not just curdle up and complain. Instead, you learn to interact with people; and when I say people, it's not just your travel partners or your fellow countrymen: it's any stranger that comes your way. 'Cause that's survival. – Lydia

Aleah found that travelling alone increased her independence. During the trip, she had to learn to manage her own travel arrangements, because the only person she was able to rely on was herself.

When I travel by myself, I learn not only to trust people (and I have never been let down by them!), I learn to trust myself too; to listen to my intuition and believe that I can handle whatever is thrown my way. - Aleah

The women took this kind of travel experience as a journey of self-discovery, by getting out of their comfort zones, testing and expanding their 'resourcefulness', and enhancing their self-understanding.

After her first backpacking in Europe. Suddenly and unexpectedly, travel had pushed me outside of my comfort zone and began filling the gaps in my life that were so sorely empty. – Christina

Beyond that, I personally feel it is empowering to set out on your own, and it is far more empowering when you're on your own on a mission to hike, cycle, or do something out of your comfort zone - Pashmina

I like travelling solo for a number of reasons, not the least of which is the opportunity to push myself and see how far I can go relying only on myself - Aleah

Anis valued the negative aspects of her solo trip, as dealing with these issues was an excellent way to discover more about her problem-solving abilities:

We all experience fear, whether first-time travellers or experienced adventurers. See fear as an opportunity; a guidepost of sorts to identify your problems and solve them efficiently. - Anis

Besides, some of these discoveries have an impact on the identity of women. Solo travel is more self-conscious, where new identities can be formed.

The journey hardens and softens you. Breaks and builds you up. Cuts, sharpens, and polishes you, and it will hurt. But the process of that is that you emerge more resilient to hardship, sharpen your patience metre, and learn to let nature take its course in due time - Lydia

Solo travel also means paying more attention to one's well-being, as Juno observed:

Through travelling, I learned how to be independent and embrace the adventurous unknown… For better or worse, my perspective on life changed with every trip I took. I've become a better person for it, but most significantly, I've learned the importance of seizing every moment and making each second of my life matter. – Juno

The inner discovery of solo travel was valued by the participants, and added more meaning to their life.

4.4.2 Broadening horizons

For the Asian solo travel bloggers, the independent form of travel provides a different and unique experience that they cannot have in their everyday lives.

Juno felt lucky to have the opportunity to travel and see the world:

Travelling the world broadens my view of the world, and I have realised how lucky I am.
While getting out there, meeting people, and hearing their stories, I couldn't help but see one clear fact. - Juno

Furthermore, participation in solo travel enriches their knowledge by meeting more people, learning how to interact with others, and building friendships with other visitors and locals.

Each new travel experience on my own always leaves me astonished, reflective, and thoughtful about the world, the fascinating people of all kinds, and the majestic nature that overwhelms our small beings - Yun Qing

I loved meeting strangers. The conversations, the insights, and the personalities offer varied perspectives that are often easy to overlook when we meet familiar people in familiar settings - Pashmina

The travel experiences shared by these bloggers demonstrate that the 'new things' in solo travel expanded their view of the world and allowed them to gain insight about life.

4.4.3 Risk management

The challenges and difficulties encountered by these bloggers did not deter their willingness and enthusiasm for solo travel, but rather let them learn how to deal and negotiate with both risk and fear.

After the scary experience during the solo travel, Yun Qing gave some travel tips for the solo traveller, such as travelling independently in a familiar city which 'you have been to many times with other people' and 'strike up a conservation with other solo travellers' to get rid of lonely and negative feeling. In Aleah's blog, she posted a wide range of solo travel tips for women in terms of travel planning, hotel selection, and solo traveller-friendly destinations.

There can be quite a bit of planning involved if it is your first time, right down to choosing a suitable flight to make sure you don't arrive at your destination after dark, to picking a safe area to stay in.

The narratives above show that these Asian female travellers try to negotiate and avoid the risk and difficulties, which makes them more confident to travel alone.

4.5 Conclusion

After analysing the travel narratives of ten female Asian solo travel bloggers, the findings are presented through three global themes and six sub-themes. Because of their travel enthusiasm and curiosity about the outside world, these bloggers choose to travel independently. Although there are many challenges on their solo trips, especially harassment from men, the experience of solo travel has brought them many positive effects and life lessons. In the following discussion chapter, the similarities and differences between the findings and the literature are compared and interpreted.

Chapter Five

Discussion

5.1 Introduction

Based on a qualitative and explanatory analysis of women's solo trip experiences, this study explores the concept of "independent travel" for Asian women. This chapter analyses the travel bloggers' stories explored in the previous chapter, and compares them to the literature review in chapter two in an attempt to answer the research questions of this study. Although this chapter combines women's independent travel literature, the discussion is not restricted by the existing literature, and it tries to find new understandings of this emerging field. There are three headings: independent travel motivations, 'hard time' on solo trips, and meaningful travel for single Asian women, which correspond to answering each research question. In each section, a deeper meaning of the findings is discussed and related to the existing literature.

5.2 Independent travel motivations

As explored in the stories of female bloggers in this study, the inner passion of travel helped 'push' them to travel around the world. Moreover, women think that travelling is a good method to explore the outside world and try to seek the 'life of travel'. This is in line with Kim et al.'s (2009) findings of the 'push' factors of the visitor. They found that discovering novelties is a driving factor for travel. This also echoes the "approach" (seeking) theory of Filep and Deery (2010), which added a happiness approach in terms of well-being and avoidance of pain to explain the travel motivation. Some of the bloggers expressed their enjoyment of solo travel, which is related to one dimension of hedonism, referring to a simple pleasure and satisfaction when travelling (McCabe & Johnson, 2013). Besides those already mentioned, the wish to experience a different culture and new people in the host destination was found as important for these women. This is similar to Zhang and Hitchcock's (2017) research results, which suggest that the enhancement of interpersonal relationships

was significant for Chinese female travellers in Macau. This motivation has also been shown in McNamara and Prideaux's (2010) findings, in that developing and maintaining social connections during travel that offer social support and decrease loneliness is regarded as an important factor in women's travel motivation. Moreover, it has been found that some bloggers perceive solo travel as a way to prove how independent they are and test their abilities. These findings support the results of Kim et al.'s (2009) study regarding the seeking of autonomy, a sense of ability, and personal development of female solo travellers. Another piece of literature relevant to this finding is Li et al.'s (2011) study showing that women want to travel alone for the purposes of independence and autonomy; to see if they can "do it on their own". Especially for Asian women who are taught obedience and dare of rebelling for a long time, travelling alone is a way for them to challenge and push the boundaries. Therefore, seeking pleasure from travel, discovering novelties, and testing their ability are the essential purposes of Asian women travellers.

Based on the independent travel experiences described in these blogs, it can be said that the women chose to travel alone due to wanting to achieve a sense of freedom and control over time, as well as decision-making, during their solo trips. This is in line with the research of Shaw et al. (2013), which demonstrates that travelling alone provides people with a certain freedom of choice, and they are free to choose various leisure activities compared to when travelling with partners or children. In addition, since the bloggers are influenced by Asian culture which promotes the subordinate status of women, participating in travel is considered a symbol of liberation from Asian traditional norms and values, in which the male is the breadwinner while women act in a supportive and reproductive role. These findings concur with Cheng's (2007) research, which illustrates the 'freedom' behind this independent form of travel for Chinese women. Additionally, this finding is different from the 'freedom' of Western female tourists observed in the Western-centric research. The 'freedom' for Western female travellers is more related to an 'escape' from the ethics of care and daily routine of life, while Asian women aim to find their independence in a dominant masculine society. Thus, the 'freedom' incentive for Asian female travellers in this study expands the known motivation of women travellers.

What the results reveal is not only do passion for travel and freedom drive Asian women to embark on solo trips, but also life-altering experiences that have inspired them. In this study, some of the participants had partaken in an overseas exchange learning experience when they were younger. Most of the respondents in this study also had previous travel experiences in Europe or the United States. Such experiences have given them an independence of consciousness, and helped them to establish social connections with the outside world. In this way, respondents also looked for a more multicultural perspective through travelling that is different from their Asian homeland. This is supported in the results, in that the cultural experience in travel provided the expectations, fantasies, and myths for future travel (Bui et al., 2013).

Additionally, the similar education background of these ten bloggers echoes the findings in the study of Li et al. (2011), which found that the majority of Asian participants are well-educated and have received a Western education. Therefore, educational factors can be seen as a current and new interpretation of Asian women's independent travel. Moreover, it was found that Western independent traveller blogs have also affected these Asian women. The stories shared by Western female bloggers online have encouraged and inspired Asian women to travel alone. Some participants in the study even considered Western bloggers as a 'travel model'. Thus, to some extent, Western culture and values, such as education and Western women's prior experiences, affect the solo trip choices of the Asian female bloggers in this study. However, this is an area that needs to be explored more in female travel.

5.3 'Hard time' on solo trips

The majority of the Asian female bloggers refer to some 'unhappy' experiences when travelling by themselves. These negative experiences involved feelings of insecurity and vulnerability, and mostly resulted from sexual harassment by men. As confirmed by previous literature (e.g., Guo, 2014; Wilson & Little, 2008; Zhang & Hitchcock, 2017), the gendered risks and constraints revealed by the participants' narratives are related to their female identities. In addition, their perceptions and narratives of seemingly unavoidable sexual risks support the concept of gendered tourism spaces (Jordan &Aitchison 2008; Kim et al., 2015; Wilson & Little, 2008, 2005), in which

women's mobility is limited by social indoctrination and their bodies are subject to the male gaze. It is generally considered dangerous for women to go out alone, especially at night. In Berdichevsky et al.'s (2013) research, it is shown that, unlike male travellers, female travellers' awareness of their perceived weakness is increased during solo trips, and the fear of being sexually assaulted gives them a feeling of vulnerability (Winter et al., 2009). In the descriptions of these bloggers, their perception of gendered risk exists in a variety of destinations and places, such as on the street, public transport, and at tourist attractions. This is in line with the research of Yang et al. (2018), showing the unlimited geographical sexual risk experiences of Asian female tourists. Thus, Asian women are likely to be victims of gendered risk, regardless of the location.

Besides gendered risk, several bloggers stated that they were questioned and not understood by their family members who thought that travelling alone was not an appropriate action for unmarried Asian women. This is confirmed by Wilson and Little's (2008) study, showing that when Asian women speak of their overseas travel plans or reveal their dreams, other people have negative reactions including disapproval, surprise, concern, and even fear. This is associated with Asian social expectations and role constraints, and it is mentioned in other literature that many women discuss in their daily lives how others' perceptions of the appropriateness of women travelling alone affect their ability to achieve their desired goals (Yang et al., 2015). In other cases, family members inadvertently instil a sense of fear in these women by expressing tensions or concerns about their individual travel plans (Guo, 2014). Therefore, some Asian women feel that they cannot escape the rigid gender expectations of Asian society, which has been instilled for centuries and is difficult to shake.

Another risk found in this study is related to the independent travel experiences of Asian women being discriminated against or treated unfriendly. The paradoxical treatment of Asian travellers has also been recognised by previous researchers (Fan & Zheng, 2007; Zhang & Hitchcock, 2017). Due to the similar appearance of locals in some Asian countries where sex tourism prevails, Asian female travellers are more likely to be treated differently by both locals of the host destination and Western

tourists. This result supports the findings of racialised risk perceived by single Asian travellers in Yang et al.'s (2018) study. This study reveals another difference concerning the comments made by women and men. The bloggers' acquaintances said that they did not think they could travel alone themselves, and praised the bravery of the female solo travellers, while men seemed to be more concerned about their safety. This is similar to other findings on the different opinions of third parties (e.g. friends and family) towards Asian women participating in solo travel (Yang et al., 2018; Zhou, 2010). Thus, female fear is a result of a cultural construct that is developed and maintained by the interests of dominant male groups (Yang et al., 2016). The non-acceptance of, and disagreement with, female independent travel within Asian society is a challenge faced by Asian women.

5.4 Meaningful travel for single Asian women

In the context of women's independent travel, meaningful travel seems to revolve around three themes that come from a fundamental analysis of the female discourse and their stories. Firstly is the belief that independent travel provides a productive perspective on all aspects of reviewing the meaning of life and changing one's life, because this type of travel provides individuals, especially women – away from partners, family, or friends – time and space for reflection and self-development. This finding refers to the definition of meaningful travel, which is a travel experience that sees individuals looking for or discovering increased self-confidence and empowerment, considering their choices and perspectives in life (Caruana et al., 2008; Seow & Brown, 2018; Wilson & Harris, 2006). This increased sense of self-improvement is consistent with previous studies of backpackers (Heimtun & Abelsen, 2013) and solo Western female travellers (Henderson & Gibson, 2013; Wilson & Harris, 2006). However, the path of Asian women is slightly different to that of Western travellers, whose journeys of self-discovery often involve overcoming difficulties in solo travel. Participants in this study negotiated and constructed their identity by challenging the social expectations of Asian women. Participants' narratives reveal the struggles with their identity as a result of feeling sandwiched between their self and their social identity, and the perceptions of others (such as parents and family) who contribute to this struggle. This study, therefore, echoes other

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studies, such as those by Chen et al. (2014), Yang et al. (2018), and Zhang and Hitchcock (2017), who state that the distance between the participant's self-identity and the Asian woman's social identity is divided into two levels: race and gender. Thus, the most meaningful part of independent travel to Asian women is the self-discovery of their own identities, and also their identities in Asian society.

Although women are interested in the development of the "self", they still value their connections to the people and society they visit. The need for social interaction is echoed in prior literature (Wilson & Little, 2008; Xu & Liu, 2018; Yang et al., 2018). The benefits of women's independent tourism seem to come from their "meaningful" social and cultural interactions with other people (visitors and hosts), leading many of them to question their personal and social values as women. The interaction or exchange of information with locals, service providers, or other travellers is an important driver of solo travellers' satisfaction and pleasure (Bianchi, 2016; Wilson & Harris, 2006). Similarly, a study by McCabe and Johnson (2013) shows that human interaction, such as meeting new and interesting people, was the form of satisfaction mostly mentioned by the interviewed solo travellers. As such, communication with the outside world is another benefit that independent travel brings to Asian women.

When discussing vulnerability and fearfulness, the selected bloggers also provide some advice on overcoming or negotiating risks and constraints. This is in line with the study by Rosenbloom (2003), reporting that Asian participants protect themselves by adjusting their travel patterns to reduce risk rather than simply avoiding travelling alone. When travelling alone, these Asian female bloggers would identify and avoid certain isolated places, and tried not to go out alone at night, which is consistent with previous research findings (e.g., Wilson & Little, 2008). In particular, the study shows that Asian women resist Asian social constraints associated with culture and gender to continue their independent travel plans. In their individual travel decisions, resistance to cultural norms is especially important for these women. Khoo-Lattimore and Wilson (2017) point out that tourism is at a stage where women can resist gender stereotypes, thus creating a sense of empowerment for themselves. The study supports this statement, but also highlights that much effort is needed to overcome the reservations of others. Further support can be found in the report of Yang et al. (2018),

which states that Asians hold the empowerment concept more strongly than Westerners, because they feel the need to resist the assumptions that Asian women cannot travel alone. Wilson and Harris (2006) and Xu and Liu (2018) describe the world of the female solo trip as a potential resistance and negotiation space for women. Overall, the result highlights the significance of resistance in Asian women's decisions to travel independently.

Harris and Wilson (2007) and Wilson and Little (2005) provide a different angle from which to examine the female solo traveller world. These authors found that constraints do play a role in influencing the boundaries of people's choices, opportunities, and actions, but perhaps these boundaries are necessary for people to set the structure in their lives; within such a structure, women have the motivation and desire to overcome the challenges of life, leading to a sense of empowerment.

In short, these kinds of negotiations expand the understanding of women's restrictions in leisure and travel (Caruana et al., 2008; Wilson & Little, 2008; Yang et al., 2015), and link empowerment, resistance, and the notion of human institutions to recognise the power of individual women to overcome the limitations placed on their lives (Jordan & Aitchison, 2008; Seow & Brown, 2018; Yang et al., 2018, 2019). This management of risk represents another valuable asset of solo trips for Asian women.

5.5 Conclusion

The three research objectives were answered by comparing several themes related to the existing literature. It can be seen that there are many similarities between the Asian female solo travellers' narratives and the literature. However, young Asian independent travellers are not a homogeneous group. Their travel style and motivations reflect the changing trends of contemporary Asia. Through in-depth analysis, this study determines the social and psychological motivations of individual travel, including travel passion, freedom, flexibility, and discovery of novelty. The results also show that these solo tourists are not isolated, but that travelling alone actually increases the opportunity to interact with locals and/or other travellers, which results in more social connections and an extended horizon. Gendered risk presents a

common challenge to female travellers, while stereotypes of Asians and the resulting discrimination are unique and more frequent for Asian women. Furthermore, this study expands on the literature by revealing racial discrimination as another risk experienced by Asian travellers. The unfriendly and different treatment encountered by some participants in this study highlights the current situation in which Asian female solo travellers are often perceived as 'abnormal or rebellious' by their home societies, because they challenge and break Asian gender expectations by embracing solo travel.. These risks and challenges are rarely mentioned in the tourism literature focused on Western tourists. Therefore, this has a further impact on the meaning and experience of the independent travel of Asian women. The following chapter will present the implications and limitations of this research study.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

This study contributes to the literature by exploring the under-researched topic of Asian women's independent travel experiences. The study comprises respondents from different Asian countries, allowing transnational comparisons of Asian women's perceptions of solo travel. In addition, web-based data collection and thematic analysis provide an understanding of the different aspects of the actual and imaginary images of this travel pattern. This chapter will revisit the purpose and objectives of this dissertation. The implications of the findings and the limitations and considerations for future travel studies on Asian women will then be discussed. Finally, it will conclude with personal reflections about this research.

6.2 Aim and objectives review

This study aims to gain an in-depth understanding of Asian female independent travellers regarding their motivations, the challenges and difficulties encountered, and the significant meaning of travelling alone to their lives. After researching Asian women's travel blogs online, this study has been able to identify some outstanding answers to these aims and objectives.

- To identify the reasons and motivations behind Asian women's independent travel;

The purpose of this study is to delineate the motivations of Asian solo female travellers using a qualitative research approach. The results reveal three distinct motivation dimensions of solo women travellers: travel passion, freedom, and life-altering experiences. The first two factors indicate that travel motivation typically

follows a similar pattern, as determined in previous studies. Particularly, life-altering experiences, such as studying abroad and cultural travel in Western countries, have allowed the Asian women in this study more independent thinking and awareness.

- To determine constraints and challenges associated with Asian female solo travel;

This study explores the risks and challenges of Asian women travelling alone. According to the online travel blogs, sexual risk is considered the main constraint in this study. This result is similar to prior studies on Western solo travellers, revealing that sexual harassment is an important constraint limiting women travel pleasure and mobility. Furthermore, Asian participants feel increased vulnerability to this risk. In particular, due to the specific culture and gender norms in Asia, Asian female solo travellers generally feel that they differ from the social expectations of Asian women, and are opposed and questioned by their family and home societies. Moreover, this study reveals discrimination (including unfriendly treatment) as another constraint experienced by these Asian travellers, which expands the existent literature. Thus, Asian women resist stereotypes and discriminatory gender practices through travelling alone.

- To explore the significance and importance of Asian women travelling alone and its broader role in everyday life.

Although the female identity of the participants raises a variety of concerns and security risks, this study sheds light on the positive significance of being a woman, especially an Asian woman, in an independent travel space. The narratives of the participants indicate that solo travel allows them the opportunity for reflection and self-improvement. Travelling, in their minds, is not just a pure leisure activity, but also an opportunity for affirmation of their self-value and enhancement of their sense of independence. Asian women view solo travel as a valuable 'experience' in their lives, as it allows them to explore the world and learn new things. Besides broadening their horizons, Asian women gain or ameliorate their risk management skills by negotiating and dealing with different constraints and difficulties during solo trips. Commonly, Asian women are portrayed as submissive and lacking independence, and

travelling allows them an 'indulgent' chance to enjoy private leisure time, without job or familial obligations. Therefore, travelling alone provides an effective stage for Asian women to resist and challenge both deep-seated gender stereotypes, and the sociocultural pressures imposed upon themselves. This resistance was found to be a significant and meaningful factor in the independent travel experience of Asian women.

6.3 Implications

This study provides some insights for Asian female travellers who choose to travel independently. The Asian international tourism market has grown exponentially (Salazar & Zhang, 2013). Females travelling alone represent a growing segment of the international travel market, and solo travel has also become an increasingly popular niche market in recent years (Heimtun & Abelsen, 2013). Sotiriadis (2017) argues that it is vital to understand customer experience and develop new ways of creating value for customers. Therefore, by understanding the travel motivations of Asian women, travel providers could be able to focus their marketing strategies on providing a more comprehensive service to the market segment.

Since security is considered one of the main concerns of Asian solo female travellers, destination managers can promote a safer travel space and surroundings, which could ensure a feeling of safety and comfort when embarking on a solo adventure. Women from emerging developing economies are participants in social processes. In fact, this study shows that Asian female independent travellers need to deal with the risk of unfriendly and discretionary treatment. Tourism providers who want to cater to the female and non-Western tourism markets need to more deeply and appropriately consider the priority needs of these travellers, and ensure that everyone has equal space.

The findings provide an implication for managing the travel experience of young Asian independent travellers. The Asian women selected in this study have mostly experienced cultural interaction with Westerners at a young age. From a marketing perspective, there are signs that the English-learning-based travel industry is likely to

expand.

In future research, there is a need to enhance the understanding of Asian solo female travellers, so as to generate knowledge that will help the industry better cater to this emerging market segment and, more importantly, spread this knowledge beyond the wider academic community to raise awareness and create real change.

6.4 Limitations and future research

There are several limitations of the current research which need to be acknowledged. Firstly, because there are few prior studies comprehensively investigating the independent travel experience of Asian women, many of the conceptual items used in this study are derived from previous Western-centric research.

While web-based content analysis is conducted for Asian female solo tourists, the measures adopted in this research may not be sufficient to cover all aspects of their travel experience. Moreover, the relatively small sample size may not necessarily represent the entire population, consequently limiting the general applicability of the outcomes of the study. Future research could apply a variety of qualitative exploration methods, so as to produce a more inclusive library of measurement designs for a more thorough comprehension of Asian women's travel experiences.

The results and interpretation of this study were limited to a group of female travellers from East Asia, including Northeast and Southeast Asia, who participate in international and independent travel. For further investigations, it is recommended to expand the participant group of the study.

6.5 Personal reflection

Through conducting research on the independent travel experience of Asian women, I have gained a clear picture of this emerging and niche market. Women's independent tourism does not have a long history. Historically, the majority of people in this traveller group have been Western women. Thus, there are some research gaps in this

area. Although the study of Asian women who prefer to travel alone is deficient, a large number of online resources supported and inspired me on this topic. During the research process, I have learnt that these Asian travellers regard solo trips as individual adventures allowing them to discover the world and test their abilities. Moreover, travelling alone is a difficult decision for them, as they may not only meet the opposition of those close to them, but also expose themselves to risks from the outside world. However, it is these challenges and difficulties which make them think more, and cherish themselves and those around them. In particular, under the influence of Asian traditional culture values, independent travel has a further meaning in the resistance of Asian women to social and gender oppression, hence the pursuit of independence and liberation. As an Asian female student who has never travelled alone before, I feel it necessary to experience this form of travel, in order to explore both the outer world and my own personal inner world.

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