

Transformational Tourism: The Example of Backpackers in Tibet

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be electronically available to the public.

Abstract

Hannam (2009) stated that travel played an important role in helping people, especially young people, to develop their inner self. Experiences, relationships and memories continue to influence ongoing journeys, including future physical travels, work lives, raising children, coping with illness, falling in love and dealing with loss. However, few studies have been done in investigating individuals' changes during certain travel experience. The purpose of this study is to explore the general themes of transformation travel based on narrative analysis of individuals' stories about their trips to Tibet. To reach the main goal, this study is focused on investigating three sub-questions:

- (1) How do travellers describe their experience in Tibet?
- (2) How do they narrate their personal change when they return home?
- (3) How do they story the relationship of personal change and the experience in Tibet?

Data collection is based on in-depth interviews with eight participants. In the follow-up interviews, participants are interviewed online when they have finished their trip and returned home for four to six months.

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Dedication

To my parents

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Hannam (2009) stated that travel plays an important role in helping people to develop their inner selves. As Lean described, tourism is a powerful vehicle for changing people's thinking and behavior, not only during travel, but also upon their return home (Lean, 2009). Experiences, relationships, and memories continue to influence people's lives, including future physical travels, work lives, raising children, coping with illness, falling in love and dealing with loss. No matter how huge or little the influence is, the journey transforms individuals to a certain degree. In this study, transformation can also be referred to as change, shift, personal growth, or development. Transformation not only influences people's lives "right here right now" during the travel, but also their life after the travel (Lean, 2012). It deserves to be paid attention by researchers.

However, few studies have been done in this area. The most related are studies that focus on backpackers' motivation (Chaim, 2005; Chaim 2004; Loker-Murphy & Pearce, 1995; Loker-Murphy, 1997, etc), secular pilgrimage (Barber, 1993; Cohen, 1992; Graburn, 2001; Hyde & Harman, 2011; Margry, 2008), spiritual travel (Bull, 2006; Laura, 1999; Lean, 2009; Richard, 2011; Robert, 2011; Shackley, 2011; Smith, 2003), wellness and mindfulness tourism (Moscardo, 1996; Smith & Kelly, 2006; Steiner & Reisinger 2006), and that explores the effect of cultural contact through travel and youth travelers (Chaim 2005; Ganghua, 2013; Giddens, 1991). They either ignored travelers' post-travel experience or paid less enough attention on investigating the similarity of transformational experience among certain type of travellers. Because of the lack of literature on this topic, this study aims to fill the gap by exploring backpackers' narratives of personal change in Tibet, focusing on Chinese youth. It explores participants' transformative journey, using narrative inquiry as the methodology—narrative analysis and analysis of narrative. Data collection is based on in-depth interviews

with eight participants. In the follow-up interviews, participants were interviewed online when they had finished their trip and returned home for about one month. Narrative analysis was employed to examine participants' experiences in Tibet and their personal changes. Furthermore, analysis of narrative was used to explore general themes of their transformation experience.

1.1 Purpose of Study

The purpose of this narrative study is to explore themes of transformation travel found in backpackers' narratives of their visits to Tibet.

1.2 Research Questions

The general topic to be explored in this study is the changing stories of travellers in Tibet. To reach the main goal, this study is focused on investigating three sub-questions:

- (4) What are their narratives of their experience in Tibet?
- (5) How do they narrate their personal change when they return home?
- (6) What themes of personal change arise in their narratives?

It is notable that the design of narrative methodology allows the researcher to comparison and contrast within the stories of participants and also between the narratives of participants. Thus, there is change inherent in the process of reflecting and storytelling our experience as new meaning and insight is gained.

1.3 Significance of the Study

This study is significant as there is currently only limited literature on transformation tourism. Furthermore, research on tourism as a personal experience in Tibet, is a relatively infrequent topic in the body of scholarly tourism research. Also, the study will contribute to the literature on the transformation traveller's profiles, and experiences of travellers.

Certainly, it also builds on the literature of related areas including spiritual travel, pilgrimage tourism, modern pilgrimage tourism—secular tourism, and sense of place in the aspects of tourism and psychology. In addition, I expect to add my research to contemporary Chinese youth studies. As this study is focusing on Chinese youth, it provides a fresh view of observing the concerns and confusion of Chinese youth.

From this study, I also hope to provide insights for government, destination management organizations (DMOs), destination branding and other related tourism industries such as online traveller communities. Many sacred places, such as Rishikesh in India, have been promoted as destinations rich with spiritual depth and open for travellers to come and learn religious practices and engage in exploration of the self (Alex, 2011). Another example is the Camino de Santiago. Alex (2011) found that Camino generally takes on themes of transformation and re-creation although the tourism industry promotion of the pilgrimage takes on a slightly different flavor. In the case of Tibet, it is well known as a beautiful place has gorgeous landscape and a mystery place to make travellers search self and get spiritual with purification. Based on the overview of travel blogs, it is tagged as a place that “the journey of heart”, “the sacred place”, “shocking”, “spiritual”, and “make me transformed” and so forth. The values of Chinese youth are changing. This research may provide insight into how government, DMOs and tourism industries might adjust their promotion strategy to meet their market requirement..

This study provides a foundation for future research on how in-bound travellers to China describe their trip in Tibet. I urge for research on travellers’ transformative experiences in other destinations. Besides, I hope for a future study of the positive or passive to elements of personal change from travelling would also be very interesting.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter discusses the emerging concepts of transformation in pilgrimage, transformation in places, and transformation in backpacking. It also briefly introduces tourism in Tibet. There are four main sections in this chapter. The first section “transformation in pilgrimage” provides a review of literature on pilgrimage tourism and modern pilgrims, that is, secular pilgrims and valuistic travellers. It also describes the emerging transformation in both traditional pilgrims and post-modern pilgrims who are seeking personal growth through a meaningful journey. The second section, “transformation in places”, scans the literature on sense-of-place and emphasizes the relationship between landscape, spiritual experience, and individuals’. The third section, “transformation in backpacking” provides an overview of the profile and characteristics of backpackers, as well as a picture of contemporary Chinese backpackers. The fourth section introduces the “Tourism in Tibet.”

2.1 Tourism in Tibet

Tibet is one of the “must-visit” places in the world for many people, especially backpackers. It is especially popular among backpackers because of its unique natural mysteriousness and incredibly beautiful landscape. Many travellers believe Tibet is a place to become spiritually cleaned, purified, renewed or even reborn. As reported by Tibetan Travel Bureau (Shangcai, 2013), from January to April, over 670,000 travellers visited Tibet, 25.2% more than that of last year. The total income from visitors in the year of 2012 was 730 million yuans, or 31% more than that of last year.

Although numerous studies focus on Tibetan geography, culture, and religious, rarely have studies investigated the deep motivations of why travellers choose Tibet as a trip destination. Also, limited research examined travellers’ inner experience during the trip.

Julien (2005) searched “the importance of various themes depicted by photographs (85 in total, all in color)” in *The Lonely Plant of Tibet*. *The Lonely Plant* is a guidebook giving detailed information about destinations around the world. Analysis of themes present in photos in the guide, shows that religion accounts for the biggest portion (68%), followed by theme of mountains (32%). Chinese travellers usually expect Tibet will offer a very different culture and that Tibetan people are very religious (Julien, 2005). Tibet also appeals to some religious tourism researchers due to the fact that it contains certain categories of Buddhism. Moreover, as a destination, its image is shaped as a place to get spiritually purified. The image that tourists hold of destinations affects their expectation and further influences the experience (Ehsan et al., 2012). Thus, similar with what India is in young western travellers’ eyes, many Chinese youngsters perceive Tibet as a place to experience change. Therefore, to explore how Chinese backpackers experience internal transformation, Tibet is the best choice within the region of China.

2.2 Transformation in pilgrimage

Pilgrimage is a religious and cultural phenomenon, pilgrimage is an essential characteristic of the world's major religions, including Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and Christianity (Collins-Kreiner, 2010). A pilgrimage has been defined as “a journey resulting from religious causes, externally to a holy site, and internally for spiritual purposes and internal understanding” (Barber, 1993). It is originally referred to as a “circulation”, the large-scale of movements of people, objects, capital and information throughout the world (Collins-Kreiner, 2010, p 440). Different places are sites of pilgrimage for different religious. For example, Lumbini, the birthplace of Bhuddha, is a sacred place site in the eyes of Buddhism; Tibetan Buddhism views Lhasa as the center city of this religion; Christian pilgrimage occurs in Santiago de Compostela; and Islamic pilgrims visit Mecca, and so forth.

The pilgrimage is either informal, or highly structured as group tours. For example, Christians like walking alone along the road to Santiago de Compostela while Muslims make the pilgrimage to Hajj with a stay in tents for several nights in groups of 50–100 individuals in a large tent (Kahn, 2006).

The relationship between pilgrimage and tourism has been discussed for many years. Tourism studies nowadays divide pilgrimages into two dimensions: the traditional (religious) pilgrimage and modern (secular) journey. Today, pilgrimage is being reshaped throughout the world. That is, the majority of pilgrimages are falling into the latter form pilgrimage. (Richard, 1991; Collins-Kreiner, 2010). Although both secular pilgrimages and religious pilgrimage involve a search for spiritual fulfillment, they are different in the motivation. That is, religious pilgrims out for religious devotions while the latter one go in pursuit of a solution to a secular problem (Richard, 1992). A religious pilgrimage is referred to as a journey to particular places that have spiritual importance attached, like the place of birth or death of founders or saints, or the place of their "calling" or spiritual awakening. But the meaning attached to the place where people make a secular pilgrimage could be much more various than that of religious pilgrimage.

Many historical religious pilgrimage places for Buddhists, Christians or Muslims are popular among a number of non-religious travellers from all corners of the world. The reason for this phenomenon is multidimensional. In short, either religious or non-religious travellers tend to attach a wide variety of meaning to religious sites. Such journeys constitute the recent development of secular pilgrimages. It is bridging travel studies and religious studies (Collins-Kreiner, 2010a; Margry, 2008; Olsen & Timothy, 2006)

As research goes deeper, valuistic travel as a relatively new concept has been discussed recently. Darius (2012) described *valuistic journey* as encompassing “the concepts of both traditional religious and modern secular pilgrimage, and such journeys may be seen as a

means of demonstrating the values of their participants as well as revealing their personal and social identity"(p. 41). The motivation of valuistic travellers is aiming to seek or express a valuistic ideal (Darius, 2012). There are four categories of experiences of valuistic travellers: the experience of travelling, the experience of identity manifestation, the experience of community, and the experience of the transcendent (Darius, 2012).

The experience of travelling. A valuistic journey is about travelling in space and time for something in particular (to visit or experience a place or event). The journey has particular external and internal aims. These journeys also denote a breaking out of routine and liberation from everyday life.

The experience of identity manifestation. Identity is the perception of the self on both social and personal (self-consciousness) levels, with self-description and distinguishing factors enabling self-identification to arise in particular situation. A valuistic journey allows the expression of personal and social identity, both confirming and demonstrating it.

The experience of community. Pilgrims become aware that they are temporarily entering and becoming a member of the group which they are in *communitas* with. They imagine they are part of a greater community than they were before. Other members of the group influence their thoughts and behavior. They go together, sharing common feelings and differences. They arrive together at the destination and then return transformed and enriched from a shared experience.

The experience of the transcendent. Encountering the divine, with enhanced consciousness of identity and in a state of high emotion, pilgrims are at the level of the transcendent. Transcendent experiences occur during the rituals close to their hearts, shared with fellow travellers and with a sense of sacredness; valuistic travellers say they are touched by 'something'.

Because youth travellers are looking for experience, they are eager to develop their view of inside self and outside world, they have a tendency to want to experience a valuistic journey (Darius, 2012). Therefore, Darius's study provides a new way of perceiving travel experience by focusing on how value searching matters a journey for a certain group of travellers. It proves that journeying has the potential to provide meanings to self-perception and the experience of being touched by 'something'. However, like many other researchers, Darius focused only on the motivation and on-site experience, neglecting the changes upon returning home. As Collins-Kreiner (2010) called for in her study *Researching Pilgrimage*—future researchers should look into questions like “to what extent were they affected after their return home, regardless of their initial classification as tourist or pilgrim?”, this study mainly investigates the transformational experience of both on-site and upon returning home.

A transformational traveller, is referred to as a travel (usually backpacker) who seeks a deep experience of self-exploration, self-knowledge, or self-reinforcement, and such experience makes he/she feels touched on the journey and changes him/her in terms of self-perception and values to various degree. According to Collins-Kreiner (2010), the changes experienced can be categorized into three levels: external characteristics (languages, clothing, hairstyle and jewelery), perceptions (outlook on life, beliefs and behavior), and attitudes (psychological change or a change in attitude) Due to the fact that people's external looking changes according to the requirement of various events and different settings in daily life, people's external changes are affected by many other completed elements. Therefore, the transformation (changes) this study investigating mainly focus on changes on travellers' interpretation on life, values, beliefs and behavior, and changes on their traits or even personalities, and so forth.

2.3 Transformation in places

In the last two decades, substantial literature has been addressed into the relationship between place and individuals, including research on sense of places in geography, environmental psychology in environment, spiritual journey in tourism.

In the field of psychology, it is found that the external environment is able to raise an individual's level of sensory awareness which is directly related to spiritual inspiration and meaningful experience (Laura & Dorothy, 1999). Similarly, mindfulness makes travellers actively experience the place and keeps thinking about everything on-going in a setting (Moscardo, 1996). Mindfulness is referred to as "a state of mind that results from drawing novel distinctions, examining information from new perspectives, and being sensitive to context" (Langer, 1993, p44). Individuals connect their personal identity and deepest-held values with the 'particulars' of a place (Laura & Dorothy, 1999), because when an individual thoroughly experiences a place, one begins to gain a life that is full of quality and meaning, not simply in the material sense (Robert, 1995). Moscardo (1996) found that mindful travellers tend to learn more from their journey than other travellers and they are more aware of the consequences of their behavior.

The feeling of "awe" is another element that contributes to a transformational journey. Awe is a result of certain experience often perceived and narrated as peak, spiritual, optimal, or extraordinary experience (Robert, 2011). It usually happens in nature-based settings, especially in extremely outdoors adventures. Awe affects individuals in dramatic ways. Robert (2011) summarized the recent nature based tourism literature and concluded the characteristics of awe experiences: 1) a spiritual connection with nature 2) transformative experiences 3) goal clarification, 4) a refinement of the nature-human relationship, 5) and a sense of feeling humbled

“...a harmony of contrasts; it is at once daunting, and yet again singularly attracting, in its impress upon the mind. It humbles and at the same time exalts us, circumscribes and extends us beyond ourselves, on the one hand releasing in us a feeling analogous to fear, and on the other rejoicing us” (Otto, 1958, p.41)

Therefore, when individual are shocked by nature beauty, the feeling of awe may cause they rethink about the meaning of life and inspire them with new insights, and reset the goals and priorities of their life (McDonald, etc., 2009; Koeeni, 2005; Pomfret, 2006). Thus, by experiencing awe, travellers might recall some moments on the site experience as the epiphanies that make them changed or even transformed.

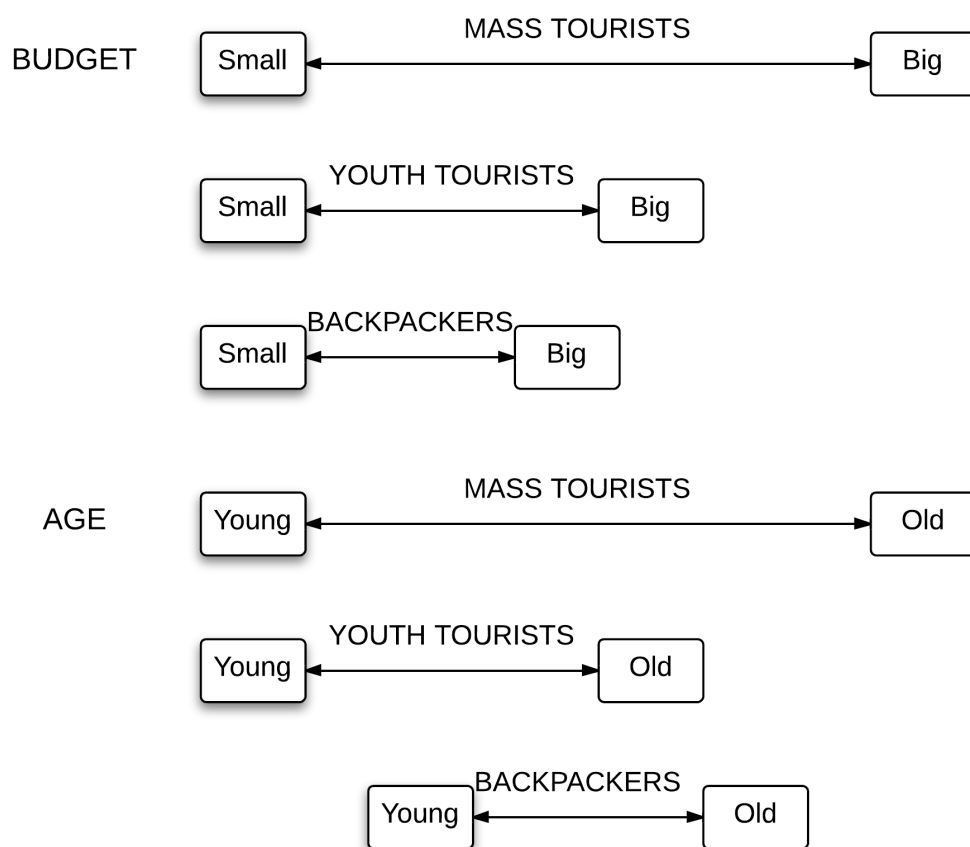
Thus, sensory awareness, mindfulness and the feeling of awe, are all important factors for travellers to broaden eyes, and to perceive life and the world in a different way. Those factors connect transient feeling to particular places, and as well as potential personal changes later.

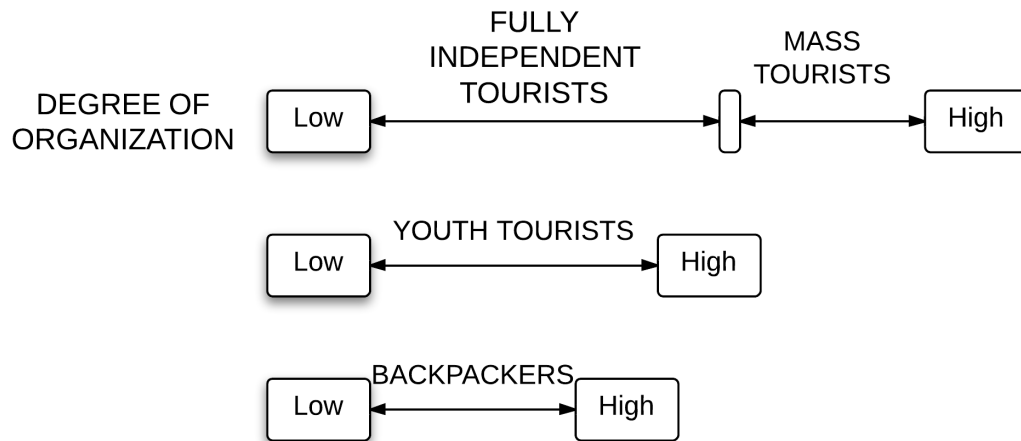
In a word, many researchers from various areas, including environment, geography and psychology, have noticed the significance of unfolding research by joining place and human sense as a whole. In this topic there are numerous outstanding work on exploring the interaction between individuals and places from different points of view; nevertheless, there is little research discussing on how the on-site feeling effect on experiencers' later changes, and there is lesser study on conducting narrative studies that, hearing the stories of participants, under the frame of leisure studies.

2.4 Transformation in backpacking among youth from China

Many researchers hold different opinions on this point. Although precise definitions vary, there are some similarities of backpackers' characteristics. The common characteristics of backpackers are that they are relatively young travellers with tight budgets (Jay, 1976;

Cohen, 1972), following an independently organized and flexible travel schedule (Pearce, 1990; Slaughter, 2004), and seeking experiences that broaden their self-exploration. They differ from regular tourists. Figure 1 illustrates how backpackers are characterized by age, budget, and degree of organizations. It shows that backpackers usually travel with smaller budget and lower degree of organization, comparing with youth tourists and mass tourists. Most backpackers are adult but not ready to settle down. Thus, the age group of backpackers is between the youth tourists and mass tourists.





Figure

1. Characteristics of Backpackers (based on Philip & Laurie, 1995)

Compared to other tourists, backpackers have more desire to escape from the busy life, head to the untouched places, and gain a deep experience of that area (Anders, 2003). Challenges during travel experience provide opportunities to expend themselves in some respects, including displays of independence, adaptability, resourcefulness, open-mindedness, and so forth (Jay, 1976). Numerous studies have been done to build a profile of backpackers and their impact on host cultures; however, less research have been done in questing travellers' self-reflection on their travel experience.

Due to the challenges of a rapidly changing society, backpacking in China is becoming increasingly popular among youth from China (Lim, 2009; Ong, 2012). Although there is abundant of previous research on backpackers' motivation, especially of Western backpackers and Israeli backpackers, only a few studies have investigated the motivations of Chinese backpackers. Ganghua and his colleagues segmented the motivation of Chinese backpackers into four categories, including social interaction, self-actualization, destination experience, and escape and relaxation (Ganghua& Jigang& Songshan, 2013). They also divided the travellers into three dimensions—self-actualizers, destination experiencers and social seekers (Ganghua, 2013).

Self-actualizers take backpacking as a way to realize self-actualization; the primary

purpose of destination experiencers backpackers is to explore the culture, history and society of the destination, to communicate with the local people and to experience the local lifestyle; for social seekers, the most important motivational factor is seeking social interaction (Ganghua, 2013). This study surveyed 206 Chinese backpackers, 49.5% of them are self-actualizer, while destination experiencers and social seekers respectively account for 34.4% and 16.2%. The result indicated that self-actualization (self-cognition and self-improvement) and destination experience are the main motivation of Chinese backpackers.

Chinese youth are hungry for meaning and seek a sense of direction for their life. Although parents usually tell their child what to do, and even arrange a certain future for them, they are eager to search for the answers by themselves. Travel becomes an important way to escape the life they are familiar with, to experience a different life in a place afar, and to explore “who I am.” On the way of searching, they begin to reinvent self. Therefore, transformative travel is what they are seeking.

Transforming its economic system from planned economy to a market-oriented one, China has been experienced a tremendous transformation since the policy of reform and open-up in late 1980s. Along with the increase of people’s living standards, the social-cultural aspects of the country have changed a lot. For Chinese youth who born in 1980s or 1990s, their values are much more heterogeneous than other demographics (Xuyong, 2005; Stanley, 2009). Compared to their parents, Chinese youth have more spiritual requirements. In the year of 1978, Chinese government started the international trade policy, which is also termed as “open-up policy.” Because of that policy, Chinese economy develops rapidly in the past 30 years. Along with the rise of GDP, the Chinese society flourishes with all kinds of new products from western world, such as KFC, Nike, Zara, and Starbucks. The generation of Chinese youth who are born after 1980 (the post-1980s) encounter with the result of western culture. They have been influenced by the western culture as the international trading

goes on. Several surveys investigate the inroads that Western culture has made into the values held by many urban Chinese youth (Xingjia, 2007; Haiyang, 2008; Wei, 2008; Stanley, 2009). For example, a survey was conducted among 629 students at thirty-three universities throughout China by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (Xingjia, 2007). Based on the result, Xingjia stated (2007) that over 94 percent admitted they had been influenced by Western culture, including Western political ideas and Western lifestyle. It was also claimed by more than 82 percent that Western video products are an important source of cultural influence on Chinese youth. Chinese youth watch Western movies such as *Transformers*, *Ice Age*, and TV shows such as *Friends*, to name a few. Those shows broadcasting western culture have become a part of their life. This generation of Chinese has been affected by the western world values even though maybe they have not realized.

Nevertheless, it is not possible for them to completely escape from Chinese tradition. According to Chinese traditions, young people should seriously look for someone to marry once they leave campus. Single youth, especially single females over the age of 25 years, will face heavy social pressure to marry from friends and, especially, family. Also, they face the huge pressure of purchasing a house and a car because they are becoming the most important elements for marriage, as a sign of their economic ability. Therefore with little time to bridge between school and society, Chinese youth need to take life seriously and realistically once they leave university. They are thrown roughly into a materialistic and status-conscious world. In contrast, youth in West are marrying and beginning a serious “career” in their lives much later – and to some extent have the option of remaining single for life.

Therefore, this generation of Chinese youth exists in a gap between traditional and modern society. They are dancing in fetters. If we define getting old as the mental state of losing passion and courage for dreaming, they are too soon getting old. Under such circumstances, the demands for self-cognition (knowing oneself better and testing oneself),

self-improvement (improving personal skills and developing personal capacity), and social interaction (Lim, 2009) have been growing in the world of Chinese youth.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

With the aim of examining the general themes of transformation journey in Tibet, this study employs narrative inquiry, both narrative analysis and analysis of narrative, as the methodology.

3.1 Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry is a multidisciplinary enterprise that has a long history in many fields of social science, including psychology, education, anthropology, economics, history and linguistics (Riessman, 2008). As Riessman conceptualized in the book (2008) *Narrative methods in human sciences*: sociologists examined experiences of a variety of groups by investigating selected individuals' histories and documents in the early twentieth century; anthropologists tried to use life history methods in searching for communities' cultural change and that became a tradition that persisted into the 1960s; the historical sociology of Daniel Bertaux in France kept this realist tradition in which narrative accounts (including the language a particular informant may select, the narrative style, and so forth) represented a means for the investigator's analytic description of cultures and lives.

It is notable that narrative is widely employed for exploring researching tourists' experience. For example, Chaim (2005) did a pioneering work in examining Israeli travellers' self-change in the form of personal narratives. He found that "who were inclined toward recreational and diversionary experiences also viewed the trip as transformative." He also encourages future research in examining the "discursive features by means of which identity and self-change are established among different forms of tourism" (Chaim , 2004). Therefore, based on the experience of the former researchers, this study chooses narrative as the method.

There are two types of narrative inquiry (Bruner, 1985, p 12). Polkinghorne defined them as narrative analysis and analysis of narrative (1995). According to Polkinghorne,

researchers conduct analysis of narrative on the base of stories and attempt to gain common themes across a series of stories while they focus on configuring narratives of experience into a story or stories in narrative analysis. In short, analysis of narrative uses stories to get general result, whereas narrative analysis applies pieces of narratives to create stories. Both narrative analysis and analysis of narrative are used in this study.

3.2 Method

i. Participants

At the outset of the study, the participants were to be Chinese young backpackers aging from 18 to 35 years old (people below 18 are normally too young to backpack independently while the ones over 35 years old may have already transformed, or are travelling for other purpose beside self-discovery). The intended subjects were people who were single, either male or female, with no children, and they were to be solo travellers. Here, solo travellers were referred to as travellers departing along without predetermined plan of meeting somebody they already know (this allows travellers to meet someone on the trip and travel together). There were a couple of reasons for limiting the respondents to solo travellers. On one side, travelling with somebody one has already known inclines to produce on-trip social interactivities that make the motivation of those activities to become far way complicated than that of travelling alone. On the other side solo travellers are more flexible in choosing when and where to go, and with whom to go with, so they are more likely to have personal change. Another condition for a qualified participant is, because all interviews were to be based on the respondent's Tibetan experiences, he or she had to have been in Tibet for more than one week. The number of times the respondent had been to Tibet was not a matter. Besides, because of time limitation of research and consideration of their availabilities, all participants were chosen from those who would return home in one month. As a result, eight

participants were recruited. They were in age of ranging from 22 to 27, staying in Tibet for 7 to 14 days. Many of them have got a bachelor and above degree (Nana went to graduate school; Dan just graduated; Jane was in her last year of undergrad; Hao went to college; Han did not went to Secondary Vocational School; Cun, Guo and Ai had graduated for two years or above). Jane was the only one who travel while she was supposed to be sitting in her campus classroom , and the rest of them were in their gap between quitting their last job to looking for the next one. All participants had never visited Tibet previously, except Hao—it was his third visit.

Convenience sampling is a common type of sampling scheme among qualitative researchers (Anthony & Kathleen, 2007; Martin, 1996). It is applied by choosing the most accessible participants. As stated by Martin (1996), the advantages of convenience sampling exist in its minimal cost in terms of money, time, and effort, while the disadvantages are a risk of lack of representativeness, these disadvantages do not apply much in narrative research. With those merits and limits in mind, I used convenience sampling in this study.

There is no precise requirement for the sample size in narrative inquiry. Similar with phenomenology that the number of interviews should be between 6 (Morse, 1994) and 10 (Creswell, 1998), the sample size of a certain kinds of narrative analyses could be less than 10 (Margarete, 1995). Therefore, I was thinking of 6 participants , however, I invited initially eight . Many unexpected situations happened as the study progressed, and there may drop out.be participants who withdraw as the study unfolds. For example, participants may change travel plan in the middle of the trip, and they are possible to reject to accept follow-up interview. Therefore, to be on the safe side, the first round of interviews involves a few more participants. In the end, fortunately, all eight participants were very patient and corporative. Except one participant whom I could not contact in the second round of interview, all the others were supportive to my research until the end of data collection, which I appreciated a

lot.

ii. Participant recruitment

The recruitment was conducted in youth hostels, teahouses, and some other leisure places that are popular among travellers. Places recommended on *The Lonely Planet* are highlighted. To protect confidentiality, pseudonyms have been assigned to each participant.

The original plan of recruiting participants was to use convenience sampling, but in the first week staying in Lhasa, I only got two participants. Timing is the main reason for such a situation. The original plan was to begin interviews in August 2013, but I arrived there about one month later. It means that I missed the “student season”—university students usually travel during July to August, and then go back to school on September. Lhasa was crowded with travellers in September still, but most of them were either beyond thirty-five years old, or travelling in groups, and many of them were married. So after discussing with my supervisor, Professor Smith, I changed the plan. I made some posters (see [appendix E](#)) and pasted them on walls of places popular to young travellers, such as Dong Cuo (东措) Hostel, Ping Cuo (平措) Hostel, Bang Da Cang (邦达仓) Hotel, and Nu Wo (驴窝) Restaurant. I stated the purpose and questions of this study, and cut the bottom of each poster into a few branches and had my phone number on each piece. Meanwhile I kept looking for participants by convenience sampling as planned originally. And in the end, I got eight participants: Jane, Dan, Guo, Cun, Nana, Han, Ai, and Hao (anonymous). I could not contact Hao for the second interview, so he was viewed as quitted, but his case was kept still because he had been to Tibet more than once and he told me how Tibet changed his life in the first interview.

iii. Data collection

The source of data was drawn from based on semi-structured interviews. Each

participant will be asked to participate in two rounds of interviews (one during the trip, and the second one month following) as briefly introduced in Figure 2.

	Information	What time? During or after the trip?	Interview Location
Interview 1 (Transcript 1)	Experience in Tibet	During the trip	Tibet
Interview 2 (Transcript 2)	Personal change after the trip	One month after the trip	Online/ By phone

*Figure 2 Data collection-Interviews

Specifically, in the first round, in-depth, one-on-one interviews were conducted in Lhasa, the center city of Tibet. Interviews were semi-structured focusing on their experience during Tibet, guided by the following questions:

- 1) Tell me the story of your experience in Tibet so far.
- 2) Tell me about the moments during your trip that woke you up or made you see the world in a very different way.

Responses to these questions may be probed further to better understand the subject's experiences and answers. (All the interviews were audiotaped and then transcribed in Chinese. As Polkinghorne (1988) stated in *Narrative Knowing and The Human Science*, to enhance the credibility of the study, the transcripts should be as detailed as possible, including codes for pauses, talk-over, and voice tone (p. 176).

In the second round, follow-up in-depth personal interviews were conducted one month after the conclusion of each trip. Interviews are conducted by email, telephone, or online video software, about the possible personal changes:

1. Now that you are home, tell me the story of how Tibet affected you
2. How will you recall your trip? How will you relay your trip to your friends?

I conducted the first round of interviews in Lhasa in September 2013 and the follow-up interviews by phone in the period of February 2014 to April 2014. In both rounds, each interview took me one to three hours. All interviews were recorded, by recording pen for face-to-face interviews, and by an application, Piezo, for telephone interviews. I transcribed interviews into Chinese, and then conduct narrative analysis in English. All quotations from interviews are original in Chinese and then I transcribed them into English with the help of some dictionary websites such as iciba.com

iv. Data analysis

A narrative story for each traveller was based on what he or she narrated (transcript one) the Tibet trip in the interview one (story one). Similar to the previous step, following the second interview, each participant' transcript was ordered and presented as a narrative story about his or her personal change (story two). Furthermore, with the goal of investigating the relationship between the participants' experience and personal changes, analysis of narrative will be used to develop themes emerging across all participants' stories (Figure 3).

	Information	Resource	Types of Analysis	Focused of analysis
Story 1	Experience in Tibet	Transcript 1	Narrative analysis	One participant
Story 2	Personal change	Transcript 2	Narrative analysis	One participant
General Themes	Common elements among all participants' changing stories	Story 1 and 2	Analysis of narrative	All participants

*Figure 3 Data analysis

In this study, both narrative analysis and analysis of narrative are embedded. Each participant contributes two narrative stories—narrative story one and story two—that are

based on transcripts of interview one and interview two, relatively. First, based on each participant's description about the experience during (story one) and after (story two) the trip to Tibet. Then, a story (story three) is created in describing how he or she experienced transformation through travel to Tibet.

3.3 Limitations of the study

There are several limitations to this study that have already been alluded to. First, in the process of transcribing, with the border of text, I lost many characteristics of participants, including their accent and face expression. And that might influence on analyzing their travel motivation and personal profile. Second, it is noticeable that English is not my first language and I am not a professional interpreter, yet myself translated all related documents. Unclear expression is possible. Third, it is 5-7 month that upon participants return home to do the second interview; however, participants may need various time to react to the trip, that is, to digest the transformation.

3.4 Assessing the quality of narrative

In narrative studies, reliability usually refers to the dependability of the data, and validity to the strength of the analysis of the data (Polkinghorne, 1988). Instead of concluding a certain result that can be examined repeatedly as quantitative researches, this study is an exploratory, explanatory journey, and the reliability is not formal provable but relying on the details of the procedures to evoke an acceptance of the trustworthiness of the data.

There are several strengths I bring as a researcher to make this study trustworthy: a) I interviewed participants with letting them know my research purpose and a couple of frame questions as I described in the session of methodology. With the understanding that a stimulus provoking a measurable response would be incorporate, I interviewed each participant as doing a discourse; b) while interviewing, I also made notes on a notebook or on

my laptop to keep as much details as possible, including participants' tone, face expressions, and body languages, and these details were important reference for story writing; c) each interview was recorded and then transcribed based on its original record. And later, in the process of analyzing, I returned to the original recordings with the hope to enhance the accuracy of data generation; d) until I finished all data collection, I had intended to limit the communication between my participants and I to avoid unnecessary bias caused by unbalanced level of knowledge of them; however, looking back with reflexivity, I wonder how different the way they told their stories would be if they did not know me as a researcher and knew nothing about my research.

3.5 Reflexivity and my story

In many fields of social research, the importance of reflexivity has been discussed and argued. In the process of connecting and analyzing data, researchers are not able to absolutely separate from what they are observing and recording. The researcher's personal history, including previous experiences related to the research topic, may consciously or unconsciously influence how he or she perceives the data—participants' experiences (in narrative inquiry). Thus, for the sake of providing the context of the research to evaluate the quality and better understand the contribution and limits of the findings, it is very necessary and important for the researcher to add reflexivity into the body of research paper.

Etherington argues (2004) that for some researchers, reflexivity is little more than a means of checking for biases in the conduct of research. For others, reflexivity becomes the primary methodological vehicle for inquiry, e.g. in autoethnographic and autobiographical inquiries. She refers to research reflexivity as:

the capacity of the researcher to acknowledge how their own experiences and contexts (which may be fluid and changing) inform the process and outcomes of

inquiry (Etherington, 2004, pp. 31-32).

The capacity for critical self-awareness and reflexivity requires the researcher to be frank about where he or she is coming from. Thus, the researcher should work explicitly in an “unsettling” way (Pollner, 1991, p. #) with his or her presuppositions. Thus, with these in mind, I believe it is necessary and important to present my story in Tibet.

My story

I have spent another summer in Tibet. This was the third one since I first encountered it in 2011. Every year I travelled for spiritual education. I always ask myself, why is Tibet so special to me? What exact things are attracting me to come back again and again? To be honest, I have no idea. I mean, there are too many elements: the breathtaking beautiful snow mountains, the moving-to-tears sunrise at Namtso, the rainbows in Nyingchi that came out almost every afternoon after rain, the delicious milk tea served in the “光明” milk tea house, the Tibetan music loudly played in taxis and jeeps, or just simply because of the truthful smile on Tibetans’ faces. All those are beautiful memories, though, there are two things that I miss the most: one is to have a cup of milk tea, and the other one is to spend hours sitting quietly in front of the Jokhang temple.

Three years, from 2011 to 2013, three times to Tibet, each time has different meaning for me. What makes the three trips different may be the experiences themselves, or the time they occurred in my life.

In 2013, I flew to Tibet again to collect data for my research. From Wuhan to Lhasa, via Chongqing, it took me about six hours. Everything was still the same, just like I had never left. I booked the same room as the one I used in 2012, and chose the same bed. Touching on the edge of the bed little by little, I felt connected with my past self:

Me in 2012

I revisited Tibet and continued to Nepal in 2012. I was living in a relatively new hostel— “Bang Da Cang” (邦达仓). It was an afternoon when I arrived, there was nobody in, but before long, travellers came back one after another. On that night, a dozen people sat on the ground, crowded into a circle. A man was playing his guitar and singing about wandering. I had some beer, although I knew that was not good for people just arriving. I got acquainted with some new friends, Mo, Ting, Phoenix, and Nan. Later we spent most of the trip together.



(Bang Da Cang, 2012)

We went to Nam Lake (纳木错), and continued to Shigatse (日喀则), Yamdrok Yamtso (羊湖), Old Tingri County (老定日县), until Zhangmu(樟木) which is on the Nepal-China border. The view of Nam Lake made me very peaceful. I love sitting by the lakeside and thinking. For me, Tibet is a magic place that I believe gives me inspiration. Every time I return, no matter how many unhappy things happened preciously in that year, I could find a

place to sit down, calm down and talk to myself. Later, Phoenix and I hiked the hills along the lakeside. We both felt rather ill due to the high altitude sickness then. To save energy, we rarely talked. My body was almost exhausted due to my physical limitations but my spirit was very free and happy; I guessed Phoenix was in deep thought as well. On the way to Zhangmu, we carpooled in a Jeep with its Tibetan driver, Dunzhu (顿珠). Our car slipped along a narrow road as winding as a snake. The left side of our car was against the hill and the right side was a drop onto sheer rocks. What was worse was that it was raining heavily, with fog. It was very dangerous. My heart went up and down with the trend of the road, though, it was full of joy.

The morning we parted, after seeing Phoenix and Nan away, I became alone again, but I cherished the loneliness. I found a note about that morning in my dairy:

Zhangmu, a city embraced by mountains; it was raining in the early morning, while we said goodbye and then faded away from each others' sight after hugging. Please let me stay with the mountains and the rain. 'Un, why not rent a room and write for half a year!' ...This thought is no longer as transitory as what happened in the past, but an agenda that I will seriously put on my life -lan list, and I will make great effort to make it happen in the future...be brave, go for what you want! (Translated by the author).

One reason I miss Tibet so much is that when I put myself there I can keep my mind empty for a short while. Such experience is always very precious. I often lolled back against a round stone pier painted in red in Johkang Temple Square. I would call that my "private spot." The other day when I arrived, I went straight to the red stone. When I put my right hand on the pier, the sense of touch took me back to the year of 2011.

Me in 2011

“2011 was a turning point of my life. I made an important decision in late June after struggling for nearly one year. I decided to leave my previous employer and went to Canada to pursue a Master’s degree. It should have been a simple decision, but because of the strong objection from my parents, and pressure from other relatives who were encouraged by my parents, it got very complicated, and in the end it became a war of me against all the other family members. At that time, the relationship between my parents and me was very tense.

My father and I never got along well. At that time, the temperature between us dropped nearly to freezing point. I tried to reach him. I called him every other day, but there was either no answer or the sound of hanging up. When he finally replied to my message, he said if I insisted on going abroad, he would rather make a thorough break with me. I replied, “Are you pushing me to die?” He replied to me this time very quickly: “Then go die! Don’t call me father any more!”

...

My mom did not give me those hurtful words. She upset me because I felt she betrayed me. I thought that she was pretending to be neutral to help me persuade my father. I believed her like I always did and we sometimes discussed about how to handle the situation, but then I found she was just pretending to help me and nosing out my plan. Later, she encouraged my uncles and aunties to repeat call-bombs aiming to persuade me to give up. Once in a while, I would get a call from one of them everyday. My mom always had my most trust, so I felt really sad and isolated when I found she had changed her side in the middle (or maybe she was not on my side in the beginning).

At that time, I was living by myself in a dorm for company workers. Actually, the residence was modified from an old hotel. It was old, small and humid, only one bedroom and one bathroom, no lobby, no kitchen. It made me very inhibited. Every day, I went to work, did my responsibilities well, and played jokes with my co-workers, pretending nothing was

wrong. But every late afternoon after work, I came back to that little room, I cried, sometimes with hysteria, especially after I got those calls from my mom or the other relatives, or got rejected by my father again. I was in extreme depression at that time. To be honest, I was too disappointed in my parents and the world to even breath. I thought I had better take a break, so I bought a one-way train ticket from Guangzhou to Lhasa.

It was the longest train line within China, and took me 56 hours. Of course, on the train I met some new friends: Siyan, Bang, and Quan, and we lived together in Dongcuo Hostel when we arrived at Lhasa. We met a lot of interesting people there. I love Tibetans' smiles. People in big cities always busy catching up with others do not smile as purely as Tibetans whose smiles are from inside out, inspiring me to smile like them. I was impressed by the power of their belief, which is like a medicine that releases the hardness of living at such a high-altitude environment. When I first stood upon the square in front of the Jokhong Temple, seeing those pilgrims full-body prostrating in the sunset, I strongly felt that my body was just a container. I had never ever in my life felt so close to the sky (Subjective aside: this feeling may have been caused by the high altitude— over 3600 meters). It was weird to say so, yet I wished I were an orphan at that time, because if were I would only need to be responsible for myself, so I could allow myself die in that moment of great peace and happiness.



(Jokhang Temple, 2011)

Beside Jokhang Temple, Nam Lake was another special place for me. Another morning, after a terrible night with little sleep due to serious high altitude sickness, I used my last reserves of strength to climb to the viewpoint for sunrise on the top of a hill by Nam Lake. I

was entirely exhausted...Suddenly, I saw it! I could still remember how the first ray of the sunlight traversed the veil of cloud, and dropped on the snow that lined up along the Ridge of Nyenchentanglha Mountain. The refraction caused by the bright snow embroidered the tranquil surface of Nam Lake with a golden rim. As more and more rays of sunlight coming out, the lake became a golden plate. I was so moved, my eyes were full of tears, and my shoulders were shaking, as though my wondering soul was awakening. It was like everything I suffered before was to help me grow up and encounter this beautiful moment. I was so surprised by these unexpected and deep emotions to this unacquainted land. I knew something had been changed in that instant.



(The First Ray by Nam Lake, Photo by Kaifeng Feng, 2011)

2013, “Will I Still Love You?”

Looking back to 2013, that was my third time to Lhasa, I had a little bit of difficulty adjusting myself to its rapid modernization. I saw some cars passing—BMWs, Mercedes-

Benz, and Audis. I even saw a Land Rover driving the wrong way, crossing the pedestrian zone. Many modern construction projects were in progress. Streets were crowded with Han-Chinese travellers. I felt Lhasa to be both familiar and strange. I comforted myself: “Anyway, it might be the fate that all cities would be developed and modernized sooner or later and there is no exception including Lhasa”, feeling a little bit depressed, still. Moreover, I found some travellers were so arrogant that they spoke loudly at holy places, shot photos of pilgrims as closely as they wanted, and did self-shot pictures at every interesting place, and moved in groups like fluent locusts. Also, I felt a little bit worried about the attitude of young travellers. For example, if I had not talk to K, I would not believe that he prepared his grad school entrance examination while he journeying Tibet. He posted pictures to online communities, pretending he was visiting here and there, but in fact he spent most of his time in the hostel and preparing for the exam. When I met him at Dongcuo Hostel, he was reading a textbook on his bed. He had left home for over half a month but he did not travel by himself so he was not my participant. Even so, he showed great interest in my research and insisted on telling me his story. He said he wanted his friends to admire him, “when they are working hard at home, I am travelling and having fun. When I pass the exam they will admire me as a genius. I think travelling is not fun, but I travel a lot. I post pictures of every place I have been to and let my friends know. That’s the meaning of travelling for me.” He was not experiencing Tibet, instead, he was marking Tibet on his map of “where I’ve been to.” I asked myself: “Tibet, will I still love you?”

While questioning my love of Tibet, I kept looking around and searching for participants. One night in Jokhang Temple, I met a Han-Chinese woman seated in the spot that I always sat in. She did nothing but sit there and watch people kowtowing as if in a trance. She had mid-long hair, and was wearing a linen top and light blue jeans. I did not know why but I felt connected to her at the first sight. So I talked to her, with the hope that

she might be my participant. Unfortunately, she refused to be interviewed, but she loved to chat about herself and Tibet. She said if this was the first day she had come there. She would be more than willing to accept my interview, but it's not. She would leave tomorrow morning. So this was the last night, and she had to stay alone with him. She had visited Tibet once a year over the past seven years. Tibet is her lover.

Do you know the feeling that you are about to leave your dearest lover? That's how I am feeling right this moment.

I asked her the question that had troubled me for a few days: "has Tibet ever make you disappointed or not sure about whether you will love him any more?" I can still remember every word she answered. She said she didn't think her love would change. Because all things she dislike are produced by the outsiders, such as the travellers, Han-Chinese businessmen and others. What she like is still the same. Although the environment of Johkong Temple Square has been changed a lot in these past seven years, the power of religion stays still. Those Tibetans kowtowing over there, they started doing that when they were little children. That is the root of Tibet. That is why Tibet is Tibet. Only if these change, will her love change.

I was so moved that my eyes were almost wet. I felt that encountering her was unbelievable, amazing: I met her right at the moment when I was troubled, and it was her answer that perfectly cleared my confusion. Furthermore, she and I had something in common: our dressing style, our both revisiting Tibet again and again, and we even our fondness for the same seat. No wonder I felt connected with her at the first sight! It was just like she was assigned to guide me. There was no doubt that she enlightened me in a very deep way although we only met for about half an hour.

Now when I recall the strangers I met in Tibet, I feel that an encounter with someone was not a random meeting, but a meaningful education. Strangers dropped by my life, taught

me a lesson, and then left. Sometimes, I did not even have their name. But there is one thing for sure: they were very important, not only for each of my journeys, but also for my whole life.

4.0 Narrative Analysis

i. Participant: Dan

Dan's Narrative Story one:

Dan is a recent graduate who just finished his undergraduate studies in the previous June. When I saw him in Lhasa, he was right in the gap between school and work. Tibet was not in his original plan. He came to Lhasa only because of an impromptu idea proposed by a friend he newly met on the road. He described travelling to Tibet as a soul-returning trip.

He was majoring in fine arts and is gifted in olive nut carving (ONC). He had just rejected an offer of teaching in his university. This role-breaking offer arose only because of his excellent talent in ONC. Asked why not take the job, he said he just wanted to focus on his carving. "I hate exams. I have to take many quality certification exams if I choose to be a teacher. There are too many rules and regulations for a teacher, and that will distract me from my art."

Dan was well known as the top painter in his hometown, a small city. Despite high expectations from his teachers, parents, and himself, he did very badly in National College Entrance Examination (NCEE). He could not go to his dream university but a low quality one. He was so frustrated especially his friend who is far behind him in ONC turns out being accepted by his dream university.

He wanted to take another year and try the NCEE again, but his father said no. Even after he had already started at the university he thought about quitting now and then. The situation changed because of two things. The first is that he met his present girlfriend soon. The second is related to a dream. One day, he walked around the campus and went into an area. He was one hundred percent sure that he had never been there, but he felt everything was very familiar. And then he suddenly realized he had dreamed of this scenario. It made

him think of a similar scenario many years ago, when he was still a second year high school student: he had come to a new place but then he found he had dreamed about that place many times. He thought he was fated to be in this high school. Therefore, inspired by the dream, he started to accept the truth and worked very hard on campus until he became the top student again.

Dan was always dangling between living a realistic life or a life pursuing his own dream. “I am not a realistic person, or I would do a very stable job in my hometown. My hometown is in a small county and is beautiful and relaxing. I can easily live a decent life there, but since I have left (to go to university), I have never had interest in such a steady life. I don’t like my life to only be about living it up. It has to be more meaningful. I always think so. But the feeling became stronger after I set foot on the road here.

I am very lucky that my family support me, even though they still have some concerns. I have an older sister who has married. She and my brother-in-law live in the same place of my parents. Usually they come to my home at dinnertime and we have a meal together. Today, it is rare for family to have a dinner together but we practice it everyday. So even though I am not working at my hometown, they have my sister’s company. This is a very important reason for them not objecting to me refusing the job offer.

“My parents always warning me not to talk to strangers, but I found it’s not right. On the road, you could have a very happy time with a stranger, having meals, chatting, or sharing a room, even if you have known him for only a couple of hours. I knew a stranger. We shared a room, because when I arrived, there was no bed available. He was the one arriving just before me and when he arrived there was no bed as well, so he took a double room. He said, ‘you can sleep in my room if you do not mind.’ I felt a little embarrassed, but there was no another solution, so we shared

the room. In the next days, we searched for indigenous restaurants that are well known among local people. We are similar in many aspects, including interests, thoughts, and style, and even the same taste in choosing food. I think it's so called 'karma', or 'fate'. People's relationship is decreed by fate. The old saying goes: 'Fate brings people together no matter how far apart they may be', and if two people don't have karma, even if they brush up against each other, they won't have a second glance to each other."

Asked whether he has the feeling of openness during the trip, he said yes, "The first time was at Mountain Wutai. That was my first time being such a high altitude. Also, it's the first time riding a stranger's car. People's first experience is usually very impressive. So when I stood at a place so high, I saw the bird-eyes landscape was so beautiful, I felt openness", "Similarly, in campus, I love to seeing freshmen fighting for a position while I am at the top of the organization."

He said he love to travel alone. "I love the life style here. It's so slow", "It's no need to think too much, just enjoy every moment", "It's a good time to digest all the unhappiness, pain, loneliness and so on, just like to empty the trash. "

These days in Tibet he heard some stories from his new friends met on the road. For example, he met a former nurse and a man who once worked in a bank. "They are both attractive and admirable positions, with nice payment. Why did they give up such good jobs?" He asked himself. It might because his horizons got broadened, or because the new friends have encouraged him, when I asked him where he was still hesitating now, he said "I am very sure now. I follow my heart. When I reached the top of a mountain and I saw the higher one, I felt my intention to climb to the higher. I like challenges in my liked areas such as my art. Many good jobs in many people's eyes does not fit me, no matter how stable or how well paid they are. I used to double myself in this point, but after I knew the bank guy

and the nurse, now I am clear what I want and what I do not want. They make me certain about my choice.” Asked whether he will back again, he said “Yeah, I definitely will back. Next time I will stay longer.....uhhhhh, alone ”

When he just arrived Lhasa, he posted a message in Weixin: “You will never know what blue sky is unless you come to Tibet (Lhasa)”, plus a picture of the clear blue sky.

When he took a carpool to Yamdrok Lake, the dark cloudscapes were so low that they were almost driving in the clouds. When he arrived at the spot of watching the bird view of Yamdrok Lake, he was so disappointed because it was raining and he couldn't see anything but clouds. Frustrated, he moved back; however, the weather suddenly changed when they just passed the next corner of the lookout. The dark cloud disappeared, and the sky turned to be clear and blue again. Watched the unbelievable beautiful Yamdrok Lake, he was so surprised and happy at that moment, crazily yelling at the lake. He posted a Weixin regarding to this: “Stepping on the top of the cloud, my soul gets lifted up”.

Dan's Narrative Story Two:

Dan recently opened an online-store, selling his olive-nut-carving art works. It has become the way he makes his living. He thought Tibet did not change him dramatically but after the trip, he is more confident and clear about in which way he would choose to live.

When Dan had just come back home, he felt very relaxed, no more concerns on what to eat, where to go and what to do. His friends admired him for his journey. They thought he had done a great thing. But Dan thought it was not a big deal. He said, “If only they would start the first step, it will be just an easy piece.” Dan said he was kind of introverted and admired those extrovert people who were able to find a lot of topics to talk about with others, but now, “When friends ask me about my trip to Tibet, I can talk a lot because that was my real experience. That's different than stories heard from others. And I talked to strangers in

Tibet and some of them have become my good friend. That also helps me to change from a introvert to one who is more outgoing.”

Jumping out of the box is what Dan learn from the trip. He thought we should not limit ourselves to a certain environment; we should go out, see more, be open to more and so absorb more. That is not only good for his art creativity but also for horizon opening. Moreover, one of Dan’s initial goals of this trip is to get some inspiration on his art works, and he did it. He got inspired from Tibetan culture and religious art. Now he is applying those ideas in his carvings.

Since he has come back, his parents have encouraged him to find a stable job, but he does not want to. He is very satisfied about his life of these days—easy and free. At the same time, he understands that his parents would be less worried if he gets a stable job. So he said he would still accept it if there comes a good opportunity and his parents insist on it.

When he recalled Tibet, what he most misses there is slow lifestyle. Currently, Dan’s life is very easy: he usually has some friends to chat with, or to drink afternoon tea, and then he works on his carving to make some money. He is happy with it. His recent goal is to make more money and revisit Tibet with his girlfriend.

ii. Participant: Jane

Jane's Narrative Story one:

Jane came into Bang Da Cang very late in a night, and she stayed there for the next two nights. That made me not the only person in the room. When I first met her, it was very late and the light of the room was turned off. So I could not see her face. Relying on the weak moonlight, I sensed that my new neighbor was a young raunchy girl with her hair in a tangle mess. We said hello and then fell asleep. The next morning when I woke up, she had already tidied up, and had a little bit makeup. Then I saw her face amazingly beautiful! She asked me if I have hair dryer, and then we became acquainted.

We went out separately in the daytime—I looked for participants and she had plans with friends she met on the road—so, only in the night, we went back and talked a little bit. One night, we were lying on our beds and chatting, until next morning, she told me a lot about herself. Her father died a few months previously, and her mother had an affair with her cousin. Also, she had an aged lover who was almost fifty years old. “Our relationship is very clear. He spends money on me, in exchange for my beauty and young body.” I was too shocked to say any thing about her story, but Jane's voice was quite calm. She continued:

“My ex-boyfriend had changed me a lot. I used to be very simple and plain. At that time, I was a good student. I didn't make up and I looked normal. He was very sweet in the beginning, but later, he slept with other girls, one after another. What's funny is I always forgave him. But later, he started hitting me. Even so, I didn't want to break up with him. I thought he treated me so bad because I am developing while he wasn't, so I meant to get pregnant and then get aborted, with the hope of making him confident. I was so naive! Of

course it didn't work. I started to hate him and planed to revenge...In the end I made all his friends leave him, and almost sent him to jail."

So, Jane started her journey when she was in the edge of breakdown. She escaped her normal life, hoping to leave sad things behind and take a breath. "CH [the city she studied at] reminds me of my ex-boyfriend. My hometown reminds me of my father. I can't stay in neither of the two for one more minute!"

Travelling to Tibet is a journey of looking for positive energy. She met a Nepali guy who became his boyfriend later. And that guy had been her main positive energy. "He makes me want to become a better person. I even thought about going to Australia because he was applying for a MBA there. He is a gift for me." Jane said she was most impressive by the snow mountains she met on the road. "Mountains are so shock. I am an emotional person, but they make me cool. And that kind of influence is invisible, gentle, soft, and powerful. I felt I was purified! Truly, purified by the mountains."

Jane's Narrative Story two:

For Jane, it was a very personal experience. Tibet is different than any other place she had been to because she thought every single thing she encountered and every single person she met there had an impact on her life. She often recalls of the experience there and connects that to her current life, especially when she feels confused. "It's an inspirational spring, a river; it keeps water running out. When I need it, I'll go and get some; when I don't need it, it just lies there, still and quiet." The color of her world was black, but it became white after being cleaned there. Tibet gives her many positive effects, including an urge to become a better person, and a will to make her life better.

"I have been whitened"

It is the mountains that make her feel spiritual clarified. "Those mountains, they have lived for hundreds of years while we can only live for tens of years. I might die tomorrow,

but those mountains would still be there. They won't disappear...I would", "I am so small, so tiny..." She said, "Suddenly, I realized that life is already full of uncertainty. It is not necessary to add more drama. Maybe I am still longing to adventure in my heart, but now I just want a stable and quiet life. "

When Jane was very little, she had been sexually assaulted twice by two different uncles. Her father used to abuse her mother until he was gone a few months ago all in a sudden. Before long she found her mother had an affair with her cousin. When she was in the private school she had fringe sexual activities with a peer girl. She was once abused and cheated on by his ex-boyfriend, her first lover. To prove her love, she even on purposely to be pregnant and then aborted just to make him feel less self-inferior. Eventually, their relationship closed with the end of Jane took hard revenge and almost sent the boy to jail.

One night, Jane was riding a truck around Tibet. The truck was trapped in the half way up to a mountain. It was over 5000 meters high. And the truck driver and she had to stop there until the other morning. "There was only one bed and one quilt on the truck. When I hanged up a call with a friend, the driver had fell asleep on the bed with the quilt. I didn't want to sleep with him, so I huddled up against the front seat for a whole night. The heating system was turned off to save gas without even ask me. That was almost minus 20 degree and we were in the middle of a high-altitude snow mountain! I could barely sleep, not only because it was too cold, but also because I was afraid the driver would do some bad thing to me. " Getting through this, she told herself never treat herself that bad again. She said, "I still don't know whether the driver is a good or bad person, or maybe both. Maybe it's the nature of human being. "

Although that was the toughest night, it was the most beautiful one at the same time. The friend, she mentioned that she was calling to, was actually a Nepali boy. They met in Nepal and they were dating at that time. She said the stars at that night were the most

beautiful ones she had even seen in her whole life. She was so excited then that she could not help yelling to her mobile phone. And on the other line of the call, he smiled at her, warmly. It made Jane full of contentment and happiness.

Jane used to worship her peers who posted their travel pictures on online communities showing how many places they have been to with very limited budget. Now she no longer worshiped them. “When I was staying in Pingcuo Hostel, I saw some travellers playing with their mobile phone or Ipad, instead of hanging out. I found out they were posting pictures to make others admire them. Aware of that, I realized that it is not necessary to worship others based on one piece of their lives. For example, the bar owners in Lhasa, that I used to admire very much, I thought they must be full of passion and looking for freedom, but it turned out their lives were not romantic as I imagined. Many of them were just making their lives, exactly like we did on the mainland. Besides, I felt many male travelers have some prejudices to single female travellers. They are always looking for one-night-stand opportunities with single female travellers, I think.”

For her, Tibet is a place to release, to let the pain in her personal history go, or to “get whiten” beyond all the black days. Now the relationship between her and her mother is better. “I cherish every time I stayed with my mom. My dad left me suddenly; I am so afraid that my mom will disappear without any sign. And the most important thing is I have been educated by the mountains to be steady and open-minded. I used to be so adventurous that I’d dare to try so many things, but now, I tend to be peaceful. Sometimes, I just want to stay alone. ”

iii. Participant: Guo

Guo’s Narrative Story one:

Guo was born and grew up in Beijing. His parents are young and healthy, with no need of his care. So after quitting his job, he thought it was the best time to relax and travel. He

planned to visit the Nepal, and western China expects for Xinjiang. The way he chose to travelled is multiple: hitchhiking, carpooling, and public transport. He stayed in Tibet around eight days, and then continued to go to Nepal. Asked why he visited Tibet, he answered because Tibet is the second largest province in West China, and also Tibet is on his way to Nepal.

He looked forward to meet one or two people that have a lot in common with him. Asked whether he has such friends or not, he said he has some close friends but, “we don’t have enough common interests.” He emphasized that what he is looking for is a friend 90% or more like him in everything, either male or female. “If I die right now, I would wish I had some soul mates. This is what I most value. And Tibet is a place well known for this type of friends.” Furthermore, he hopes to enhance his ability to live independently.

During the interview, he was chewing gum. He was not in a hurry to do anything but he frequently looked at his mobile phone that popped out text or voice messages every now and then, and replied to them. When asked questions, he usually took a while to think about the answers. Additionally, he said a few times: “我很水的 (Beijing dialect, meaning his story is disappointing.) ” It seems like he does not have particular interest in Tibet. Also, he sounded very unmoved when described his journey in a monotone. He agrees with the beauty of the landscape, and the friendship of Tibetan people, but he was not strongly affected.

Friends

Guo met a lot of friends on the way. I do not know whether they are the type of real soul mates he craved. On his way from Ningxia to Lanzhou, Guo met a guy who had travelled to Tibet by roller-skating with another ten roller skaters. They moved two to three hundred miles per day, even faster than bikes. “I think the many people in the world are playful. They are brave to try and they make it. ”

In Lanzhou, Guo lived in a hostel called “Flowers.” He met some friends there and they recommended Gannan and Xining to Guo. Guo finally chose to go to Xining.

“The owner of ‘Flowers’ is flaky. He directed me a wrong way. There were two highways to Xining, an east one and a west one. There are more cars on the east one than the west, but he told me to go to the west one and not the right way. So I couldn’t find my way. My sense of direction is usually very good, but that time I really couldn’t find any direction! But finally I found a sign pointing to the entrance to the highway, so I waited there to ride a car. I have tried almost one hundred cars. It didn’t take me too much time because I was right outside of the tollgate.” So before long he was riding on a machine shop truck. The three drivers were pretty young and their jobs were to repair the crane. They drove me to Xining. I lived in a hostel called “0971.” I met Xiaolan, Niuniu, and Rongrong there. I arrived at that hostel in the afternoon and went out to set up as a street vendor with them that night. We sold the beads Xiaolan brought from Nepal, and plant pattern tattoos. Niuniu is majoring in arts. She can draw Henna tattoos to make some money. So those three days, we looked around such places as Kumbum Monastery in the day time, and sold stuff as street vendors in the nights. And then I went to Zhangye.”

In Zhangye, he met Little Muer and a Xi’an man. They went to Danxia where the movie *A Simple Noodle Story* was made. Next days, he took a ride to Mati Temple.

“The drivers were two local fat men. They looked strong and fierce, but very kind. We chatted on the road. They told me how many times they had taken a ride. On the way to Mati Temple, the driver met a friend who was driving a truck back. They stopped and talked. The friend was heading to have roasted whole lamb; he invited the driver and me to go together in the opposite direction to the Mati Temple. I was very happy to go. So we turned back to Ngawa, there were a lot of sheep but we couldn’t

find the sheep butcher, so we took the sheep seller to search for the butcher all over the mountains. Finally, we found the butcher beside a brook...that was my first time to see any one butchering sheep. I felt pity for the sheep but not too much...I have to say it was tasty. That was much better than going to Mati Temple.”

In his next destination, Dunhuang, he met Xiang, Kang and Si. At that time, they were painting the wall of a hostel to pay for their accommodation fees. Guo and the other four decided to come to Tibet together by hitchhiking.

Tibetan drivers

Before Guo came away, he heard a lot of about how Tibet was not safe, but he found that is not true. He was particularly impressed by the kindness of Tibetan drivers he met along the way.

“In Lhasa, Tibetans will smile at you if you smile at them. They are very kind. For example, when we rode a car to Nagqu Prefecture from Amdo, the driver asked how much we could afford, we said we were students and we were too poor to give him any money. The driver said fine and allowed us to ride his car. Actually I didn't trust him in the beginning. I thought I would pay for it if he still asked us to, so I still got in his car. We didn't understand each other because of the language issue, so we just kept moving on. In the end, he did send us to the right place without charge.”

“Although you don't understand their language you can feel their kindness. When we were in Yading, the driver arranged to meet us at five o'clock in the afternoon but we arrived there around eight. The mobile signal is very weak there, so the driver couldn't contact us. We all thought he must have gone back, but he was waiting for us. We only paid him 50 yuans per person for the round trip from Yading to Daocheng. He could have left earlier, but he didn't, he waited for us. I think he is such a nice person.

Our car broke down on the way. To fix the car, he took us to his friend's home and invited us to have some milk tea. I remember his name, Dunzhu. He was so nice."

"A few days before, we had headed to Nylingchi. The driver used to be a army officer but now he has retired. You could feel that he thought about everything from your point of view. He guided us to escape the entrance fee and took us to restaurants with tasty food at reasonable prices. Another driver, called Wangzha, took us to the Grand Canyon. He took us to his home and invited us to have breakfast for free. When we hiked in Grand Canyon, we were supposed to go back in two hours for a round trip, but it took us two and half hours for a single trip. At that time, it was raining, and the mud-rock kept falling down. The situation was very dangerous. He drove inside the canyon to pick us up. We were moved."

Furthermore, he thinks Tibetans are very religious, but, he has some confusion in his mind about Tibetans. For example, he doesn't understand why Tibetan drivers throw empty Redbull cans on the road since they respect the mountain along the road as holy.

"She's Namtso"

There is an old beautiful saying, that Mount Nyenchen Tanglha is a man and he is embracing and protecting his lover—Namtso (Nam lake). "When we arrived at Namtso, the driver said 'she's Namtso'. It was so breathtaking that it indeed looked like a beautiful lady."

"We watched the sunrise the next morning. I stood on the top of a little hill. I saw the light moving little by little from the mount to the lake. That was gorgeous!"

"When I looked at the sunrise, I was thinking I should have a girl with me next time. Ha-ha. Most of the time I feel ok, but sometimes I wish there was someone that I can share with. "

At the end of the interview, Guo said that he would pass the kindness he received on to others. Also, he emphasized that hitchhiking is a good way to travel but travellers must keep themselves safe.

Guo's Narrative Story two:

When I first saw Guo in Tibet, I thought he was an introvert, a quiet person. But before long I realized that I was wrong. He loves vintage style, fashion, bands, and he hosts a radio show online with his friends. The main menu of the show includes electrical music promotion, a themed talk show, travel destination introduction, and things related to travel. He is also planning to hold some unique interesting “theme parties” in some unexpected places of Beijing. His further goal is to start up an indie music label, and vintage-style clothes collections.

I thought he was a newbie backpacker, but I was wrong again. In the second interview, he told me he had been to almost half provinces of China. Asked what he missed most when he recalled the trip after five months, he said there were two things. The first, when he and his friend finally arrived their destination after hiking for five days, they felt all the hardiness along the way was worthy; the other is that those Tibetan people kowtowing to their holy place, Jokhang Temple, are very religious.

Newly coming back home, it took Guo a short time to adjust to his original life. Physically, like he said, he obviously breathed harder because of Beijing's bad air quality. Moreover, when he was on the trip, he had a lot of freedom to choose what to eat, what to do, and where to go, but his life in Beijing is about meeting friends, having a meal, or going to the pub. But Guo quickly got used to it. Now he is sending out CVs and looking for a new job—to earn some money for the next trip.

I asked Guo would he be different if he had not experienced the trip to Tibet? He answered me very surely:

“Of course I would be different. Now I am surer about what I want. That’s the most important. Because when I was outside, I had to responsible to every single issue. The choice I made was following my heart. For example, ‘where I am going for fun today? How? By train, by foot or hitchhiking?’ , ‘Who am I going to go with, and not go with...’ , and so on. When I was deciding these, I was following my inside will, without other distractions. Only walking closer to my heart, could I find out what I really want.”

In terms of what elements contribute most to his change, he thought both the people he met on the road, and, he himself, who kept mindful during the experience were very significant. Moreover, he thought the change at his age is not temporary. “It won’t disappear. It might be gone as time goes for some older ones, because they have had been through too much; and for those younger ones, like seventeen years old or eighteen, they are too tender to understand those deep meanings found during the trip. So twenty something is the right timing! ”

Furthermore, the trip experience has made him more capable for housework. In addition, he found some interesting kinds of work, much different than he used to know. For example, one position is called outdoor hiking leader. “I used to only know there are leaders guiding people to do some outdoor activities, but I didn’t know hiking is included.” With this in mind, Guo consider a lot about work interest when he is looking for a new job these days. Enough time to travel now and then is as important as the salary to consider when he is looking for a new job now. He had concerns before Tibet in terms of the travel fees, but his concerns are much less. It is partly because he found a practical way to make travel fees while travelling—to set up as a temporary street vendor, as he did in Lhasa.

iv. Participant: Cun

Cun’s Narrative Story one

Tibet as a destination was not Cun's first choice for this trip. He is the type of person who likes saving the best to the last. So he did not plan to jump to Tibet too fast; instead, his initial plan was to visit Nepal. Obviously, this did not work out because of the objection from his family. It is too soon to define him as a sweet boy heeding what his family says. In his words, "I used to care less about their opinions and only follow my own, but in last two year, because of my work, I kept dealing with kids and elders. I saw middle-aged people taking care of the old and young in the hospital. It taught me to think from others' point of view."

He used to work for a hospital, and was mainly responsible for software technical issues but not any more now. "I just wanted to quit my job. I'd spent too much time there. I needed frequent changes some changes, or the place would become my cage." He had had this thought for a while, and as the time went by, it became stronger and stronger, peaking in August. He decided to quit in September and take a break for one month. In terms of the destination, he had listed many choices, Chongqing, Qinghai, Xi'an, and Yunnan, and so on, but then he asked himself "Are these where I really want to go? Can I feel free there?" The answer was no. Then Tibet popped into his mind. "Yeah, I wanna experience freedom. Tibet is the place!"

He has obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) in regards to planning. He usually plans every detail in advance before he visits a place, but this time he did almost nothing. "Day after day passed. I neither looked at the travel tips nor prepared the necessary stuff. It's like there was a voice in my brain, saying I should try a very different way of life, a life full of sudden happenings and without plans." So with a backpack borrowed from a friend, and a round trip train ticket, he arrived at Tibet after 43 hours on the train. If Ai's history narrates like a collection of love stories, then Cun's story is like purple prose, or a group of fine photographs. He visits Tibet like a philosopher—walking around, appreciating every beauty he encounters. He looks forward to freedom in this trip. Furthermore, he believes that

stimulation, particularly, being stimulated to think deeply by a new environment, plays an important role in the benefits from travel.

It is Cun's first time to travel to a place with a 60L backpack instead of a trolley case. He seems very satisfied with his backpack for the reason that it has survived, being the only backpack that resisted the unexpected whole-room pilferage that happened in the hostel he stayed at the day before the interview. It is really hard to open. Also, he seriously recommends that one should not come to Tibet with trolley case, "or it would be no different to visiting other normal cities."

He was expecting the trip to be a very private journey, but he spends the most of time staying with a couple of friends he met on the train, even though he was reluctant to. He even thought about leaving Tibet earlier and go home. Fortunately, he finally did not:

I think it's the right decision to stay for another a couple of days. Now my friends have left and I am all by myself, and I need no longer to run here and there. I am very free to think deeply. You know, when one is thinking, even if he is walking on a noisy street, he feel separate from the environment and becomes a misfit." He said that this trip started not exactly as he expected but, in the end, he got what he wanted.

For Cun, "The time to explore a new place is when I find this city can no longer stimulate me." He likes walking and thinking. He thinks travel is a kind of autosuggestion. There may be something you can see both in Lhasa and Shenyang, but you tell yourself, 'It's Lhasa's...' you are self-implying that it's different. Then you will feel excited, a different stimulation.

Paradox

He uses the word "paradox" to describe Tibetans just like each coin has two sides. One side of Tibetans in his mind is religious and kind-hearted. "I know Tibetans are very religious, but I didn't know they are so religious!" Furthermore, "We met a Tibetan family along the

river connecting Yarlung Tsangpo Grand Canyon to Lulang County. We took their boat to the other side of the river. The whole family was so warm-hearted, especially the little girl. We took many pictures and spent a happy time with them. We asked for their address, and plan to call for a clothes donation for them. At that time, I thought Tibetans are really, really good.”

But the other side follows. “So I assume them to be kind-hearted, but something makes me feel they are not that so.” He once took some pictures with some passing Tibetan women. “They were really ardent and even allowed us to wear their hat to take pictures. I thought things were really going well. I though they are kind-hearted. Then I asked for their address so I could email them the pictures when the pictures come out. But they didn’t want their pictures and charged us 20 yuans for the taking pictures with them. This destroyed my good feeling, really.”

Freedom

One night in Lhasa, he couldn’t fall asleep until 1 o’clock in the morning. What is worse, he was longing for a cigarette but he did not have any in the pocket. Around two o’clock, after a long time of struggling, he finally decided to forget the possible results of getting high altitude sickness and got up to buy cigarettes. At that time, almost all the stores along both streets were closed. So he went by the Johkang temple and kept floating until he found a hotel. Luckily, he got a box of cigarettes from the little hotel. And then he walked back to Johkang temple and sat on the ground, smoking while watching the moon. It was close to the moon festival. The moon was almost full.

“At that time, there were only Tibetans and dogs. The Xueyudanjie pub was playing Tibetan music very loudly, with many Tibetans around the door. But except for the pub area, the rest of the street was very empty. Some drunken men occasionally passed by me. They laugh crazily or spoke Tibetan that I didn’t understand. Dogs ran here and

there in groups. God, you can't image how many Tibetan dogs are there in front of the Jokhang Temple at night! I saw two men eating and drinking, seated on the steps in front of a closed restaurant, with their top body naked. They looked happy, enjoying right the moment. Suddenly, I had a feeling that I am in a foreign country and everybody here look so light-hearted, so happy. ”

“I sat on the side of the street, watching everything happened in the street and looking up at the moon occasionally. The moon was almost full. It was so bright and beautiful. I felt...I felt so, so free, so peaceful. That was the freest moment I've had since I've been here. I felt neither pressure nor control. My feet were standing on a stretch of strange land. The moon was going to be full. That feeling is awesome, really!”

Another night he felt free is one night at Shigatse—

“It was so relaxing. But it's a different type of relaxation than that in Lhasa. Lhasa is full of travel business and waits to serve travellers anytime. The environment of relaxation there is designed by humans while that in Shigatse come from the natured life pace of the local people. I took a little walk along Shigatse streets. Everything is simple and crude. An old man was fluffing the cotton for use in quilts by using the typical tool popular in the 19th-century. The children ran around. A man drove a motorbike with a young lady seated on the back and they passed quickly. “It's a typical scene of the 80s or 90s.” “I can feel the connection with this place just like I am one part of it. This place is so low key and makes me feel free.”

Nature's Greatness

“Visiting Namtso (Lake Nam) is the first time that I've been completely shocked by the nature's beauty! And since I came to Tibet, only the gorgeous beauty of Namtso shocked me, only because of its nature greatness.” Before Cun went to Namutso, he had passed Baksum Tso Lake and the Yarlung Tsangpo River, but he was not allowed to get off the jeep. He was

very disappointed. So when he went to Namtso, as he got closer and closer to the destination, he worried this time would be the same. But after climbing a mountain, when the jeep was moving on wide grassland, his mood shifted to delight. “I started to look forward to seeing the lake. And then when I got there. Wow, it’s so beautiful. I took a lot of pictures but I felt it was never enough.” At the first it there were black clouds and I thought they would block out the sunset, but in the last minutes, the clouds thinned out. And after ten minutes, dark clouds hid the sun again. And as Cun and his friends just returned, it began to rain. “So in such a short time, our hearts went up and down, down and up. I felt so excited that even my scalp was numb.”

On the road heading to Nyingchi Prefecture from Lhasa, at the intersection of the Yarlung Tsangpo River and Nyang River, there is a sightseeing deck extending down to the rivers. “You can see a magic view of both rivers: on one side the river is muddy and yellow while the other side is so clean and green. The two sides have both started running as the same river. And if you look far, there are a lot of mountains with snow on the top just like ice cream. If you look a little bit further, you will find a family. That place is extremely quiet. It shields all the sound except the sound of running water. “I felt quiet stillness then”, he noted his feelings at the time as follows:

¹ “An extremely quiet still atmosphere. The clear Nying river and the muddy Yarlung Tsangpo River come together and join into one where they are quite distinct from each other. Down to the riverside, it’s completely silent. You can’t hear any noise. Even the sound of running water is quiet.” (Translated by Carrie)

Human Power

“I spend half a day searching for a word to name that beautiful golden picture. I was thinking of ‘plain’, but then I shift to ‘power’. Right! It’s a kind of power!” The golden

¹ Original in Chinese: “一种极为静谧的气氛，清澈的尼洋河与浑浊的雅鲁藏布江泾渭分明地交汇在一条河流里，下到河边，是一种特别安宁的气氛，一丁点儿响动都听不见，就连江

picture that impressed Cun is a scene with many Tibetan farmers working in the golden field, with endless white snow mountains standing not far away behind the fields. “That’s amazing. I can’t describe how beautiful the picture is. It’s exactly the way like some literary works describe.”

Not only the nature beauty, but also the human beauty impressed him, as he claimed, “even one behavior, or one word, is power.” His temporary driver, Nima, told Cun some stories. One year, he took a family of three to India, that is, a husband and a pregnant wife. The wife died on the road, and no drivers were willing to take them home except him. He put the corpse on the back seat, and drove alone from Ngari Prefecture to Lhasa, which usually took him three days driving. When he arrived, the corpse was rotten and there was fluid coming from the body. Nima has transported corpses twice. The other time was a dead Nepalese whose family was too poor to ship his body home. So the travel guide burned the body and brought the ashes to his family. Nima used to go forward and back between Ngari Prefecture and Lhasa with a drive team. But one day his car was broken and could not move, so he stayed by himself in Ngari Prefecture, where he could not find another live person within five square kilometers for three days and nights. “Those things he told me, and those I saw with my own eyes are real power. When I see the magnificent buildings, I picture them being built; some Tibetans dance in their traditional style; the monks have sutra-debates in temples; even when a single lay Tibetan concentrates himself in chanting sutras peacefully, I see the power! The power is attached to everything and it is just gushing!”

Cun’s Narrative Story two:

Cun took the train to his home the other day after our interview one. Therefore, until I interviewed him again by phone, it had been about five months. He said he could still feel the connection with Tibet in his life even though he had been away for such a long time. He said the trip to Tibet had changed angles of his view of some things. Furthermore, to some point,

the trip gave him integrity and principles back. In addition, recently he realized that he is more broad-minded in a new relationship. However, the conflicts between his real will and his family's still remain. At this point, the trip's help is limited.

Tibet is around

Cun said, "I know a journalist working for a newspaper in Tibet. He is planning to open a travel-themed bookstore at Zhangmu or nearby it and he hopes I will join the plan. In addition, my boss plans to self-drive to Tibet; furthermore, my sister's husband who is planning to go there in five years. I think it's very strange...it feels like... I have some connection to Tibet so that I hear of that place frequently in my life!" Or maybe it is just now he is more sensitive to news about Tibet.

"Once the bookstore is on the right track, the journalist is prepared to quit his job. I like his idea of a travel bookstore but I am not sure whether he will quit his job in the end. That's a decent plan anyway! "

Returned principles

After returning home from Tibet, Cun once had had worked as an assistant of the boss for a private old people's home. This experience only lasted for a few months. He told me the reason for quitting was that he was so sick of the arrogant boss. "I think my most important change is that Tibet makes one rethink things, such as what really matters for me and what my bottom line is. Yes. The bottom line! The boss reached beyond my bottom line so I left the nursing home without hesitation, although that was a nice job with decent payment."

Paradox still

Cun got a girlfriend recently. He took this relationship very seriously and was prepared to marry the girl in about one year, although, as he said, that girl is not his Miss Right. "I used to not want to get married because I think marriage would cost me too much time that I prefer to spend my time on exploring this world instead of family issues. This is such a big world, a

big planet and we only know such a little about it. I want to explore, to experience more...however; I have to consider my parents...so my marriage is not just for myself, (but also for my parents)...it's a paradox. ”

Cun's parents are very traditional Chinese. They care about Cun very much in their way: “you'd better work near home. It would be perfect if the company also supply one meal, so that we won't worry about your lunch and you can have dinner at home. Your work should be very relaxed. What? You want to do that? No no no, it's meaningless to work so hard. Don't make us worry about you! We are old!” In Cun's mind, his parents care only about his basic living, but not at all about his spiritual requirements.

For Cun, no matter how free he felt during the trip, when he went back to his routine life, he became hesitant again. “After I returning home, I thought I should have a stable job, like many of my peers, and move up year by year. But I do not want that. My real will is to have my own business, and settle down in a city away from my hometown. So I am still hesitating...” When Cun said hesitating, I think he was not hesitating about what to do, instead, he knew what he wanted to do but he was not brave enough to break through all the burdens or pressure to do as he wanted. The good thing is, as he described, during the trip he got to know some people who bravely led their lives following their heart, including those mainland Chinese youth working in Tibet; however, the inspiration by those people is still not strong enough to made Cun become one of them. That is to say, travelling to Tibet has changed Cun to some extent; still, the changes are now under the pressure of reality. Cun is struggling to balance the inside world and outside world.

v. Participant: Nana

Nana's Narrative Story one:

I encountered Nana one night at the Jokhong plaza, in front of the Jokhong Temple, around 11 o'clock. She was seated with her friends on the ground in a circle. The weak yellow light coming from the streetlamps made the scene so beautiful that it made me a little guilty to interrupt their conversation. I asked them if they were solo backpackers and some other conditions for my study. A tall man was assumed to be a potential participant, but it turned out he was not. He pointed to a girl sitting opposite to him, saying, "Interview her. That girl biked to Tibet! She's amazing!" Then, I turned around and saw a girl with black hair as short as a little boy's. She crossed her leg, looked very relaxed. She smiled and asked, "How can I help you?" This is Nana, a Shanxi girl, 28 years old, Tibetan Buddhist. She made a six-month travel plan covering almost all the western provinces of China, including Yunnan, Tibet, Gansu, Ningxia, Qinghai, and Xinjiang. The way she chooses to travel is by biking and hitchhiking. She started by herself from Chengdu, Sichuan Province, but of course, she met a lot of new friends on the road. Two main metaphors wove through Nana's story. She said, "Everything is in an endless chain." And her backpacking was also defined in terms of the journey uphill. She describes her eventual goal as being the opening of her own hostel.

Before the trip

(Summer 2011)

It was the last term of Nana's Master's studies. She had almost finished all the school stuff, so she worked temporarily as a translator to make some extra money. She went travelling with an old American gentleman, and his wife and a friend. Her responsibility was to translate for and take care of them. Departing from Beijing, they went to Xi'an, Chengdu, Chongqing, Shanghai, Guangxi and Gansu. They lived in hostels. Before that, she had never heard of hostels. But then she fell in love to the hostel culture very quickly. When she reviewed this trip, she said, "It opened a door to a broader world." Therefore, for Nana, this trip sowed a seed of her hostel dream.

(January 2013)

Nana's mother visited her in Beijing. She was working there.

“Mother, I have a plan. I will travel for half a year after Spring Festival. Do you agree or not?” “No! [was the mother's answer]” “Whatever, I will go!”

She decided to go to the western provinces of China, including Yunnan, Tibet, Gansu, Ningxia, Qinghai, and Xinjiang

(February 2013)

Chinese Spring Festival. She stayed with her family during the holiday and then did not go back to work. At the same time, she started to familiarize herself the local cultures of the destinations by watching documentaries.

(March 2013)

Preparing for the travel plan. She bought all the necessary travel gears and searched for helpful travel tips. In this process, she found a lot of tips about bicycle travel, so she decided to travel by bike.

(April 2013)

She trained for bicycling for one week, 50 km per day. On the 15th of April, she found all the necessary gear was ready. Then she packed all into a big backpack and then with the backpack she headed on to the way to Chengdu, the first stop on the long journey. She did not inform her parents, except by sending a message to her older sister, saying: “I am travelling to Chengdu.” “I didn't lie. I was indeed travelling to Chengdu, but they did not know that Chengdu was just the first stop, nor that I was going to travel by bike”, she added seriously in the interview and then laughed.

Starting the way—“A hostel or not?”

Asked why she started the trip, she answered, “First, I want to experience the western provinces before I got married. It must be my own journey, with my true heart, instead of

distraction from others. Second, I want to figure out whether a hostel is a career that I want to commit myself to. So even in my trips, I am exposing myself to the local culture and looking for any market shortage.”

“Before I started the trip, I was working, but I was always very torn. Should I live my life as my parents or most others’ expect, be a teacher and marry someone? Or should I follow my own will? ”

Like many peers, she has been pushed to get married every now and then. “Everyone around is pushing me to marriage.” “I am 28 years old, I just quit my job to travel. In their eyes, I don’t have any ‘progress’. Most of my classmates have married, and got kids. They think that’s the normal pace. They can’t understand me. I am already very isolated now. We have little in common to talk about. Whenever we come together, they keep talking about their husbands or wives, and kids. But I am still on the road, (with nothing).”

Even though she was not sure whether opening a hostel is exactly what she wants to do, she refused to be assimilated and copy others’ lives as many peers do. She was torn between following the will of her parents or most people, and following her true heart to open a hostel. With this in mind, she quit her job and started on her way.

On the way—friends

“They usually ask me, ‘Oh, Nana, now you are already 28 years old. You don’t have a job nor a husband. You don’t even have a dating guy. Don’t you worry about that nobody will marry you?’”, “ I am so glad that I met some foreigners in Nepal. It’s them that broaden my horizon. They have given me a lot of inspiration.” For example, she met a female nurse in Nepal who loves travelling alone and had been to more than 40 countries by the year 2011. That girl usually works for one year and use the money to travel in the following two years. Also, she had volunteered for many organizations all around the world. Another inspiring story comes from an Australian. He leads a normal life pace. That is, he has a normal job and

uses his spare time for hiking. After 30 years, starting from nineteen, he has almost hiked all the famous hills in the world.

Unlike most Chinese, who live a similar life from person to person, those foreigners have a unique and wonderful life. That makes Nana believe she can live her life in a different way. “I am not doing bad things. It’s good that I have a dream and I am willing to fight for this. I don’t want to give it up just because my dream is different than most people’s”, she said.

On the way—an uphill journey

Another thing that encourages her dream is climbing uphill. It is 1340 miles from Chengdu to Tibet, and she measured the distance with the wheels of her bike. The altitude climbed from 500 meters to over 5500 meters. She can’t remember how many “uphills” she met on the way. “Some of them are relatively easy, and some of them are really hard, so you have to make all efforts to climb over”, she said. “The uphills won’t scare me anymore because I have overcome the hardest one!” Getting through all the uphills has made her learn to persevere. When she reviewed it, she said, “you just need to be clear about your goal and know how to reach it, the direction, and then what you need to do is to keep running toward the goal! ”

In terms of persevering, she was also moved by how Tibetans keep their beliefs. “I used to lack persistence, but those Tibetans...those pilgrims...when I see them doing full body prostrations, I think it’s really touching. Their belief is so pure. No matter how young or how old they are, they keep praying from day to night. That’s the power of belief. That’s the power of persistence!”

“Everything is in an endless chain!”

“Yeah, a door, or you can say a window. It’s a start, and all things that happen are in the next is in an endless chain” This sentence popped into Nana’s head when I asked her

whether the trip in 2011 opened a window for her. Her face looked so excited when she said it, just like when a little girl suddenly finds her beloved toy in a corner.

“Since then, I have always been torn between going after my hostel and obeying the regulation life. I collected some information. Based on the trend of Chinese tourism, it (hostel) is a newly emerging market but it’s the future trend. It’s getting better and better! So the plan of my hostel is always in my mind. To be honest, before I left home, my grad school classmate introduced me to a decent guy. He’s reliable. My initial plan was to stabilize with him after my six-month-plan, but later I found myself unwilling to resign myself to this kind of life. Yeah, it might be a good way to live a life, but...am I really willing to take this even if I don’t really like it? Then, now in the sixth month of my trip, I have made my decision. I choose the life I love. I will stick to my dream and my heart.”

If Nana had not travelled in 2011, she might still not know what hostel is. The door to the outside world would still be closed. So there was probably no way that the outside would have seduced her. Without the attachment to the different way of life and the knowledge of hostels, she maybe won’t feel any discomfort with leading the life like many others do, that is, to get a job as a teacher and marry a decent guy. And then everything that happened next would have been very different than her current life.

She said, “You know, it’s two different kinds of value systems. And there is no intersection point between the two. You can only get rid of the other value system by throwing yourself into travelling the road.” Asked whether she would have learned these things if this trip had not happened, she said, “I think I could still learn these somehow, but it would take me much, much, much longer, because there are not so many shocking things in your daily life. But when you are on the road, you meet new people and new difficulties every day. They intensely and frequently refresh your spirit or even shake your heart. This

stimulation can't occur so intensely and frequently in ordinary life, so it will take you much longer.”

If the travel experience in 2011 with the American couple and their friend created her little dream of opening her own hostel, the stories from others help her confirm it. Furthermore, getting through tons of uphill taught her how to stick to the goal. Now she is pretty sure that she won't give up her dream of a hotel even if it's not easy. Her hostel dream started in a past journey and is ongoing in the current trip. Right now, she is discussing with the details the other two partners. In fact, she is making the proposal. Good luck to her.

Other experience

Nana hopes young Tibetans will inherit their culture instead of being captured by Mainland China's culture. She is unwilling to see some of the youths here who are trying to follow the “latest trendy” dress as though they came from the last century of the Mainland, and also listen to music by connecting to their mobile phones playing 1980s popular music. Even though borrowing this earlier culture proves the economic development and the progress of improvement, she is happy to see more youth wearing traditional Tibetan robes and singing loudly in their own language.

Except for the mixed feeling when she saw Tibetan youths becoming more and more modernized, she now has a complex impression of Tibetans. In her eyes, based on the areas of Tibetan culture she has visited, people there are very kind and religious. So she used to think all Tibetans are very good people. But now she is not one hundred percent sure. Two things that happened on this trip led to the uncertainty. One is about the Tibetan kids. When she was riding near Markam County together with her biking team, the local kids followed them and asked for money. These kids kicked her bike and attempt to rob her of her bag when their demands were refused. Meanwhile, the local adults just stood aside, watching their kids behaving like robbers.

Another thing happened in a small restaurant in Lhasa. She was alone, sitting in the little traditional restaurant, surrounded all by local Tibetans. She was expecting a bowl of Tibetan noodles and a bottle of Tibetan milk tea. But what the Tibetan waiter served her was an unexpected little mishap. When the waiter carried her order in, he incautiously upset everything in his hands. The very hot milk tea and soup of noodles spilled over her pants. Nana said several “it’s ok, no worries”, but the waiter didn’t say sorry. Moreover, he looked very unhappy just like it was her fault. Not only the waiter, but also the female boss of the little restaurant were nasty. She ran out of the kitchen, looking displeased exactly the same as the waiter. Although this was an accident and it is hard to say whose fault it should be, Nana said, “at least I think they should have been so indifferent. Probably he should say ‘sorry’, or show the basic care and ask ‘are you ok’, right? But no, nothing. No sorry, and no concern, just silence. What’s more funny is the waiter even asked me to pay for the broken bottle that has been filled with the milk tea. At that time, the other Tibetans in this restaurant, all of them just looked at me, eyes widened with a little consternation, and no one cared about whether I was hurt by the damn hot soup and tea. I felt sad. I didn’t argue with the waiter too much, although I felt wronged. I left 20 yuans on the table and left the restaurant. But it’s mentionable that only one young Tibetan in the restaurant told the waiter that he would pay for the broken bottle for me. He looked well-educated. I appreciated his offer, although I didn’t take it. It’s an interesting contrast that only one stood out and the others just kept silence, as well as the displeased waiter and the boss. Anyway, I felt wronged. When I came out of the restaurant and walked for a while, I cried. Because it’s like the thing you used to believe just became broken. Nevertheless, after this unhappy experience, she still thinks the main tone of her impression of Tibetans is very good.

Furthermore, she said she learned a lot from Tibet. As she described it, “I think Tibet gives me many benefits.” Specifically, she said, “The way I look at everything has changed a

lot since I started to believe in Tibetan Buddhism. There are three poisons in Buddhism—aversion, attachment, and ignorance. The ignorance is, for example, one does not let go past relationships. I use this to comfort myself when things were going wrong in a relationship. And it works. Now I am much more peaceful.”

She also mentioned about passing on the goodness received from strangers all the way to other people who are in need in the future.

Nana’s Narrative Story two:

Nana had left home for more than half a year and spent five months in Nepal after we met in Tibet. When I interviewed her again, she had finished her journey for only about one week. She divided the journey into two sessions: domestic trip and Nepali trip. The former one that covers most of western provinces of China, is an mind-broadening journey, because it help her add knowledge about the home country, become acquaint with many like-minded persons, and go through fresh experience; the latter one is more like a mental journey of undergoing bad things and then making her confirm the good ones.

Nana mentioned the mountain climbing scenarios again, like she said in story 1, and emphasized that her learning insistence from the difficulties was a very important reward.

She planned the Nepali trip to learn baking, read English books, and make some money as a tour guide, but the plan turned out to become a sheer “making-money journey.” Nana only guided twice and then focused on supplying purchase services—to buy and sell some Nepali-made stuff. Because most of her customers were her friends, she was not willing to make great profit from them. That was why she always struggled to maintain her business, and eventually she did not make much money. What made her unhappy or even hurt is that, during that time she saw a lot people exchanging their integrity for fast money. Of course she did not follow them, but she still felt uncomfortable about their behaviors. So she referred to her Nepal trip as a lesson. “That was the most unhappy period since I was born. Everyday my

heart was sheer purgatory. Finally I said goodbye to that kind of life, and I swear I won't live like that ever again! ”

She viewed her Nepali session as a mental journey not only because of what she underwent but also because of what she gained. Another important thing she did in Nepal is to attend a 10-day meditation class—to observe one's inner world through *zazen*-- a meditative discipline in Buddhism. By that, she gained a kind of complete peace. Experiencing all of that, now she is more broad-minded. “I handled a lot of Kashmir people in Nepal. I disliked them so much! I felt shame about them because they abandon all their integrity for money, including my ex-boyfriend. Some of his behaviors I think were unforgivable. Even so, I miss him from time to time, and I still like to learn things about Kashmir. I watched a documentary the other day. It turns out that there are a lot of conflicts in Kashmir and people there have no choice but to run out of their country and make lives by some small business. This lets me understand them more, and now I dislike them less” She believes that the Buddhism, as well as the mountains along the road were catalysts for her broad-mindedness.

In terms of the hostel dream that she decided to persist in in the first interview, at present she has more concern: “Back home, I saw my parents' white hair. That makes me sad. They were worrying about me so much and their hair was getting white, while I was having fun apart from them. They are really getting old. I have to do something for them.” I asked her what kinds of job she is looking for now. She said, “I still love hostel, and baking. But I may take a regular job first, such as a teacher, an interpreter, or an external-trade-related jobs. I need to conduct regular works first and then get into my real interest generally...(sigh)...it's like one kind of life I really love but it's hard to get, and the other is a piece of cake but I'm not much into it... a tricky choice, huh? I have to include my parents into consideration. ”

Compared many Chinese youth, Nana is lucky because she has one older sister and one older brother, and they help her share a lot of pressure.

Except for parents, safety is another concern coming to her after the trip. “I had been threatened with death for twice during the trip. The first time is in board when I was climbing. The other time is on the way from Xinjiang to Lhasa, we were passing the death valley that was over 5150 meters high, and the van I rode was broke down, it was snowing, so we had to stop there for over ten hours and I got altitude sickness. You know that place is famous for how dangerous it is. Many people died there in the past, because of high-altitude sickness. So I was so dangerous that almost died. I was so close to death. Getting through these, I feel I am really luck.” This experience educated Nana a lesson about life, she told herself: “ Cherish your life! But keep safe!”

Nowadays, Nana has been thinking about settle down where she likes such as Xinjiang, getting a stable job there, and working hard. She said, “My half-a-year travel plan, more than half a year actually, is almost perfect. And now it is time to settle down and move to the next stage of life.” Yet as she posted on an online community a few days ago, “my travel would never end.”

In the end, she added, “It’s very possible that I would never have another chance to wander such a long time in my whole life. But I will travel once I have time. I think travelling, not visiting, is an upcoming tendency. Everyone should go travel. It opens one’s horizon, and benefits to one’s personal growth. Every trip has different meaning to different person on one’s different stages, so I believe that traveling and the changes from travel will never stop.”

vi. Participant: Han

Han’s Narrative Story one:

Han was born in 1989. He visited Ningxia, Gansu, Chengdu, Chongqing, before Tibet. Prior to the trip, he quit his job and stayed at home for a couple of days. I found Han in the most famous room of Pingcuo Hostel, a gender-mixed room capable of holding 10 persons, and well known as “Cuckoo’s Nest” owing to how crazy travelers here are. It was an afternoon, and before long a heavy rainfall began, so we stayed in and talked for almost three hours, just Han and me. The voluntary warden dropped by and checked the beds every now and then. Han told me almost every detail of how he was spending his days in Lhasa, in this room specifically. I could tell it from his narratives that he was really enjoying the time here, but when he disclosed that the reason he came here was to escape the difficulty his family currently facing, he became very down, even he tried his best to control his emotions. To cover up his tears, he closed his eyes and pretended he was rubbing them. In his words, he came to Tibet searching for “strength,” and he found it.

Han was experiencing a family financial crisis. He was living a rich and light-hearted life based on his family fortune. His parents made money by practicing usury. At that time, 2400-3600 yuans was allowed for him each month for pocket money from his parents, while some of his friends got only 300 yuans per month. Nevertheless, the good times ended in late 2012, the year that he finished his army service. He realized something was wrong based on the more and more frequent quarrels of his parents. Then he found out owing to the worldwide financial crisis, his family was involved in a big financial crisis. They could get back very little of the money they had lent out. What’s worse, they had total a debt of 5 million yuans. Facing the situation that they were going to lose everything, his parents were struggling to hold something for his future. So they came up with a solution. They planned to get divorced not because their relationship had broke up but to save a house for him. Because all houses are not under his mother’s name but all the debt was, so if they divorced, all the debt would belong his mother and houses would not. In that case, his parents could still keep

at least one house for Han' marriage in the future. It looked like a good way in this case, but he disagreed with the idea strongly, so one day when his father tried again to persuade him, he left home without even a goodbye. He said he just wanted to get away from all of these problems. Furthermore, he would face the situation and accept his responsibility but he needed calm down first and figure out a solution.

Most of the time here he played with the new friends he met in Pingcuo Hostel. As expected, he met many different types of people. What most impressed him was what happened in the little gender-mixed room, "the cuckoo's nest." It was different than the other hostels he had stayed in before. Most people living in this room come for its reputation known. They are really openhearted, even crazy sometimes.

But Han knew nothing about the "cuckoo's nest" before he moved in. "I chose this room only because when I arrived at the Pingcuo Hostel and was waiting in the line to check in, the three persons in front of me all asked the receptionist to stay in that room. So I thought it might be a good place, and paid for three days." Han soon learn what this place is like: "I nearly couldn't breath when I came up the steps. It's on the fifth floor and I am with my 80L pack! Even on the flatlands it's not easy, let alone it's on the highlands, Tibet! I went up really slowly but I still felt a little high altitude sickness. When I finally got to the room, I saw all beds were totally in a mess; the old wall was full of scrawls and graffiti, the public washroom was so...uh... I fetched my bedclothes, and I had to make the bed by myself..." Even the room was beyond of his imagination; he chose to stay because he was too exhausted to go down the stairs. So, he spent the rest of his days in Lhasa in this hostel room. And in his narrative, his experience of Tibet is focusing on the people he met here.

For about two hours, he kept talking about the stories of his roommates, including Wudi, Xing, little Yueyue, Andrea, little Hei, and Miss Candy. At that time, the hostel room I lived in was held only myself even though actually is capable of sleeping over 10 persons.

But the Cuckoo's Nest was full. Han and his roommates drank a lot of beers and play the game of true and dare, they were frank to each other. He talked about the drama happening in this little room for about two hours until I finally shifted the topic. "I got to know different types of people along the road. They differed in their characteristics, and you can feel the distinction. Even though we usually hide our true selves in our normal lives, we release our true selves unconsciously when we are on the road, though. So no matter how meaningful or how bad one is, people can feel it. And we don't need to cover up our drawbacks, because we may never see each other again after we met."

One day, he climbed the mountain behind the Sera Monastery: "I was by myself. There were many fragile stones on the way. So it's not easy. I climbed using both my hands and feet. That was the second day I arrived here. I was still adjusting to the high altitude environment. What's more, I started smoking after I'd climbed for two hundred meters. And then the cigarettes ran out. The sun at noon felt scorching. I felt so hot and so sick. I had to stop for a while every a few steps. My headache was killing me. And then when I finally reached the top, I looked down and I was afraid that I couldn't get down. At that time, I was thinking 'Oh, my god!' I thought of death at that moment. But none of my family knew where I was. And my insurance was probably expired." Of course in the end he safely came down. When he reviewed this experience, he said, "The most important thing is that I dared to climb it. I dared to overcome the difficulty. It kind of convinced me that I could get through the situation at home as well."

Han's Narrative Story two:

"I felt you are kind of family-oriented?" "Now I am definitely family-oriented!" Han answered my question in a firm tone, without any hesitation. Like many other young people, Han used to believe in material success, but now he cherishes his family, and friendship more. As he said, he is turning from a self-oriented person to a family-oriented one.

After the trip, Han went back home. With his family's help, he got a job working for an institution. Actually, his family gave him a few choices, and when he decided which one to go with, he considered a lot on the side of his parents. "I want to go to a less busy position, so that I have time to help with my mom, she has a new business plan this year."

"My life used to be in a mess since I quit the army. I went here and there, having fun with friends, drinking...and I barely cared about my parents. But the trip taught me what is most important—my family. My family has been very stressed since that thing [debt] happened. My mother is not very well. These days she has a sleep problem. I usually hear her and my father talking and sighing at mid-night", "During the spring festival, it was very upsetting that some creditors came to my home and asked for money. My older sister and I handled them. Later, we decided to share the debt together. Now I just hope we can get through this as soon as possible. I wish my life quiet and ordinary."

Furthermore, he used to have a short temper toward his parents, but now he has become much more patient. Will he follow his own will when facing choices in the future? He said he would first take his family's comments into consideration.

He summarized his change into one word, "put it in a easy way, my trip has made me broad-minded." He thought the reasons for the change are multiple, including the mountains and lakes he saw along the road, and more importantly, the people he met and talked with in the hostel. "Especially the Moon Festival night on the open balcony, we opened ourselves and told our stories about why we came to Lhasa. Everybody has a story. When someone was talking, others were listening. That was very silent. Some people were smoking and some were sighing. Some had tears running down. That night was the most touching one. That night was....really... the most worthy one."

Han also thinks young people around 20 years old are the best age to travel. Younger than 18 is purely escaping, while those older than 30 have to undertake too much.

Ai's Narrative Story one:

FADE IN—

(WIDE ANGLE) The forecourt of the Jokhong Temple is crowded with people wearing traditional Tibetan robes; they are practicing full-body prostration. Kneeling and pushing their bodies prone, using wooden blocks to protect their hands, they rub their heads along the cobblestones while murmuring sacred mantras. There is the sound of bells coming from the Temple every once in a while.

(ANGLE ON) A girl with middle-short black hair, whose top is covered by a red cotton-linen wrap with flower patterns, is sitting on the ground with her knees drawn up toward her chest and surrounded by her arms. With headphones on the ears, she is listening to a song

(INSERT) music: <I will>, by Faye Wang²

(CLOSE ANGLE) As the song playing her tears keep running down. Her shoulders are shaking; her arms are shaking; her body rises and falls with the wave of her shaking...

—FADE OUT

Ai was born in Shanghai, and is 28 years old. She is independent, smart, and strong. She usually smiles, and is emotional sometimes. She tried to compromise to make her parents less worried: live a life as most peers do—find a man and get married. But she just couldn't make it. She reflected that this trip is a journey to come closer to her heart:

"I know people should follow their heart. I know the principle, but I believe there is a long way to go from knowing something superficially to really understanding it deeply. I like telling my friends to follow our hearts, but I don't really understand it until this

² Faye Wang is a Chinese/Hong Kong singer-songwriter and actress, who is usually referred to in the media as a diva (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Faye_Wong, 14/1/2014). She posted a Weibo message in September 13 of the year of 2013, implying the end of her marriage and it is confirmed to be true soon.

trip. The trip makes me realize that I used to forget my setting point (personal inclinations) because I was too hurried. Now I won't. I think I am returning to who I truly am."

At that time, Ai was without both boyfriend and jobs, leaving a real gap in her life. She had broke up with her ex-boyfriend three month before she started this trip because she had fallen in love with another man, the husband of a good friend; almost at the same time, she quit her job. So she packed up her stuff, came and traveled to Tibet and Nepal. She was not travelling by herself in the first two weeks but with a friend. "Those two weeks were painful. I don't like traveling with others, even with a friend. The chance of getting a good travel partner is much less than getting a good man!" So after they shared one week in Tibet, Ai spent two weeks in Nepal, hiking, and then came back to Tibet where had stayed for another week. That is to say, she was all by herself the previous three weeks. "I can't separate my travelling experience in Tibet and Nepal because it's consistent."

Ai used to have a serious relationship with her ex-boyfriend. In her words, "he bought a house in Shanghai and had just started decorating it. Maybe one or two years later, we could move into the house and have a little baby. Everything looked so right. You know? I could see the future! But...but I just ended it. Maybe it's because I am just not ready to settle down or maybe he is just not the right person."

She knew a married man when she was with her ex and they fell in love with each other. In the very beginning, she dodged her feeling because she thought, "it's immoral", but then later, her dodging changed into a strong passion to seize this man from her friend. So Ai broke up with her ex-boyfriend without letting him know why. The man also told his wife about things that had happened between him and Ai, "Well, his wife was crying and screaming, brewing trouble and threatening to commit suicide." This affair ended with the man staying with his marriage. In the interview, when Ai reflected on this affair, she said: "I

realized that I didn't want him to divorce but his is willing to divorce for me. Looking back, I didn't know why I was so desperate. Anyway, he and his wife made it up. My ex-boyfriend came to me and wanted to fix our relationship. Then I told him the full story of the married man because I think he is deserved to know. He was so hurt. He said he really loves me but because of the affair he couldn't stay with me any more." At that time, Ai thought he was her last straw to clutch at and she couldn't let him go. In the end, he agreed to reconsider during the three months that she is out of Shanghai. "So, with this story, I started my trip."

Along the road, Ai met some guys she had some feeling for, including one she had a crush on, a newly divorced middle-aged man, and "some navy boys." She hiked by herself along a five-days hiking route in Nepal, but she finished it one day in advance. That surprised her because she realized how strong and independent she is. She said, "Well, I didn't realize I could rely on myself so much that I don't even need a man." She has figured out something:

"I asked myself, do I really want my ex-boyfriend back? I don't think he fits me, even though we are match in the traditional way because we are equal in many sorts of background. Well, how about the married man? Do I really want him divorce? Maybe no, my attachment to him is based on how he was taking care of me; he treat me very well, but what if one day he doesn't treat me well anymore? Will I...? I won't. He is not I truly want as well. My first boyfriend and I were classmates in middle school for seven years, and then he became my boyfriend. I went to my university just for him. And then he became the boyfriend of my best friend. After a period of pain, I finally let it go. They got married in the last Autumn Festival. Do I still want to be together with him? NO! It's thirteen years ! It's thirteen years since I first fell in love with someone. Frustratingly, I feel I have come back to the person of thirteen years ago. That is why I cried in the forecourt of Johkang Temple the other day."

“These years, I kept niggling about how they treat me. Do they treat me well? Or not? Why don’t they take good care of me? Now I know I was totally wrong. I am not looking for a person to love me; instead, I am looking for a person that I love. The person I love with my heart and soul. The person I love desperately, like an insect flying towards the fire. Crush! Yeah, crush is so important. These days, I have found it’s more pathetic having nobody to share your laughter with than being left alone in need. You know? Whenever I am in trouble, I believe I can handle it all by myself and I do. But when I watched the sunrise, listened to the song of birds, or looked at the shining stars in the sky (when I was on the road), those beauties... I have no one to share them with. There is no one in my heart....And suddenly I understand what is loneliness. That is the strongest feeling of my journey.”

She now believes that having a person to share happiness with is better than having a person to undertake unhappiness together. When she was on the way back to Lhasa from Nam Lake, she felt free and happy. She looked at the cloud in the sky. The clouds were so beautiful that the sight almost made her numb. She said that was the most beautiful cloud formation she had ever seen in her whole life.

“We gave every cloud a name. We sang and laughed loudly. My crush had sent me a message in that morning saying he really missed me. So, yeah, it’s so good, I had the sky and clouds, as well as a man missing me. I forgot all the worries. I think my mood has changed. Things are clearing now. I am pretty sure of what kind of relationship I am looking for. Also, I am not worried about my job because I have confidence to get a new job. So, it’s clear. I cried in the forecourt of the Jokhang temple because I thought I hadn’t gone forward in 13 years. I had come back to my starting point without any progress. That makes me so frustrated. But afterwards, I realized it’s not true. Ten years ago when I loved someone I would have a lot of concerns about balancing the

gains and losses, but today I won't. After getting through all of this, I will let the one I love know my feelings no matter whether he loves me or not. That's my important discovery ...and now I am closer to my heart. "

At the end of the interview, Ai said she planned to live a new life and get a new job after going back to Shanghai.

Ai's Narrative Story two:

Ai does not talk about the trip to Tibet very much with her friends. Also, she barely recalls her journey, except that one day she thought of the skies of blue and clouds of white. She enjoys her current life very much. "These are my good days. I believe these are rewards for my bad days before. Maybe I will need to do another round of practice when these rewards run out. But at least I am very happy at this moment. I love my job, and I am not that guilty about stealing my girlfriends' guy any more. I have never been so happy before." She plans to hike around Mount Kailash (a holy mountain in Tibet) this year.

Jump Out

Ai went to Tibet with both her career and relationship-free. She viewed her life before the trip, including her career status and her choice of lover as "deviant" because of all the dramas happened on her. As she stepped out on the way to Tibet, she got some room to think: "I think travel is a very good way to adjust ourselves and to reach the inside peace. I am not saying that you will turn into another person after every single trip. No, not like that... I mean... if you stay still in a bad status, you will keep meeting with bad people and encountering with bad things, because you and others have similar energy. So you can only attract the good ones by improving yourself to be a better person. So you have to jump out of the bad things. It is very important. When you have difficult, at some point, don't stick to it; go travel, empty yourself, and jump out!"

Let It Go

Ai emphasized that she needed a real passion in a relationship in the first interview, so I asked her whether she has a lot of crush on her new boyfriend. She thought about one second and said, “to be strict, it’s not the crush like falling in love on the first sight, but I believe there were some reactions. At least when I first time heard he saying that he liked me, I was happy. These days, I find I tend to accept every moment of my life, looking at many things more peacefully. “Let it go.” I knew it long before, but the trip made me believe it. I thought I had gone through a lot, but after I heard a series of up-and-down life stories on the trip, I realized that what I had experiences was nothing. It might be not good to say, but you know, the best way to comfort one is not to encourage him, but to tell him a worse story. Compared to those sad stories I heard on the road, I feel mine is a good one”, she said, laughing, “Anyway, someone look very admiring, but you will never know what he or she is suffering. So it’s not necessary to admire others. Just be yourself and let the pains go.”

Closer to the Close, and Away From the Far

Another change Ai mentioned is that she realized that people’ energy is limited. So she should use her energy on caring for those important people: “Be closer to the close ones, and keep a safe distance from to far ones.” “I was always hot-hearted. My pet phrase is ‘hey, anything I can help with?’ But now I want to save my energy for taking care of my parents, my work, and my boyfriend, because those are what I own.”

Travel is Only an Accelerator

If Ai had not gone to Tibet, would she have changed anyway? Ai believed that she would get through her problems eventually, but that would take her much longer. She noted, “I think travel is an accelerator of those changes, because when I was on the road, I had nothing to work on and my mind was so free, so what I could do only was to think, think harder, think deeper.

I met some foreign people talking, which showed to me their unfamiliar points of view, and then suddenly my mind was changed. If I had gone, I could not feel the sense of loneliness, sense of uncertainty... And these senses were key to motivate my protection system and arouse my true feelings. They made me learn what I really want. That's how we become closer to our hearts in travelling, in my understanding.

I think Tibet is kind of overly used by those *xiaozis*³. Going to Tibet becomes a sense of ceremony. People go there sometimes just to escape very little problems. I think travel itself is a process of horizon opening. It's not necessary to expect a trip will cause dramatic change. You have to believe that changing in quantity leads to changing in quality, right? Of course you might meet one of great wisdom that makes you enlightened in a flash... Anyway, I hope if you would interview me ten years later, I could still tell you that 'Carrie, I am still full of hope toward life. I am still mindful of each trip I experienced.' And when I climbed a very tough mountain in my forties, I hope I would still be full of passion and courage like I was in my twenties."

viii. Participant: Hao

Hao's Narrative Story one:

Hao is currently working for Qyer.com which is a Chinese most popular independent travel website. He is now spending his vacation in Tibet. He saw my participant-wanted poster in Pingcuo Hostel, "I think maybe I can help you. I can tell you how Tibet is changing my life. This is the third time I have been here. Lhasa is a place where I can always recover

³ Xiaozis (Chinese: 小资; pinyin: xiǎozī), is a Chinese cultural term describing a lifestyle chasing modern taste, living standards, and arts. Originally the term was a Chinese translation of petite bourgeoisie. After the economic reform in the People's Republic of China, some urban Chinese who had been immersed in Marxist ideas of class conflict found they were not as poor as the proletariat but not as rich as the bourgeoisie. They regarded themselves as petite bourgeoisie to distinguish themselves from ordinary city dwellers. (Resource from Wikipedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xiaozis>)

my sprites. I wish every time I come back here, I could be like the person three years ago. The person had nothing, but after one year, got everything.”

One night in the summer of 2011, Hao was sleeping on the floor of the train from Chengdu to Lhasa. Because all the seat tickets to Lhasa were sold out, he came on the train with a non-seat ticket, supposed to take him to only the nearest stop. “I usually find ways to get a seat ticket when I get onto a seat-sold-out train, but this time I failed. None of my strategies worked. I had to hide under the seat because the train police don’t allow the non-seat travellers during the Golmud-Lhasa section due to the safety consideration that in some cases the potential high altitude sick could be very serious. But I was so determined to go. Even though I might die from hypoxia, I didn’t want to get off. Afterwards, I knew in fact that all the trains to Tibet have a special oxygen supply system to keep all the travellers safe and healthy. But at that time, I didn’t know. So I hide myself under seats. I felt headache, sick and sleepy. I didn’t know whether I could wake up tomorrow.” Anyway, Hao successfully got a seat ticket the next day and arrived at Lhasa in the end. There, he lived in a bar that had a strange name: 5238.

The 5238 bar

There used to be a bar called 5238 on the second floor of Pingcuo Hostel. This bar opened in 2007 and closed in May of 2013, owned by “Rabbit Mommy” and “Dog Daddy”. Hao’s story unfolded around the bar. Rabbit Mommy and Dog Daddy had “Yigong” working for them for free or very low payment and offer them free accommodation and food. A Yigong in Chinese literally means a volunteer. But in my interpretation, Yigong is kind of between a part-time worker and a volunteer, more inclined to the former. Although both Yigongs and volunteers usually work with no payment or very little payment, they are fairly different because the purpose of Yigong work is not to help others but to travel cheaply. The “boss couple” have a very strict selection process for Yigong. All the successful candidates had to

work for more than two months, and when they left they have to write a story to reflect on these two month. They call the story, a “thesis.” Like a school, 5238 offered every official accepted Yigong a student ID. Those Yigong who came back and worked again for another two more months are called repeating/returning students.

When Hao first traveled to Tibet in 2011, in his words, “I had nothing. I was poor and single. I had only a few hundreds yuans in my pocket then. ” On one hand, he need to save money; on the other hand, he was attracted by this strange bar. Therefore, he joined 5238 as a Yigong.

“That bar has an impressive impact on me. I used to have a very traditional value. I believed grades stood for everything. But 5238 made my eyes open. I saw all kinds of different types of people and things. My life became full of. uh...full of drama. I was 18 years then, I wandered to Tibet and met a lot of things like affairs, and romantic stories and so on. Those things and those people...I could have never met those dramas in my normal life. Furthermore, many Yigong in that bar are awesome people, full of character. They are outstanding students studying at the top domestic universities. One of the Yigongs in the same year with me was in Beijing University then. He is doing an exchange program in Dutch now. Moreover, they decide their lives not follow the regular rules. For example, a guy was able to choose a very good university but he chose another one, which is not that good, only because the latter one has a better location. The life goal of that guy is to go to Spain. He knew it, so he just wanted to be closer to downtown of Beijing. Now he is in Spain. Besides, those guys are crazy participants in bar events...haha...the bar used to hold various parties. For example, on Chinese Valentine's Day, it held a “Boy Auction.” The final buyer can ask the boy who have been bought to do anything except sex. And money collected will be donated

to the orphanage. We also have costume parties. Once a time I dressed as a little red cap. That's a lot of fun."

The bar itself, the bar owner, the rules, the things that daily happened in the bar, the funny parties, the other Yigongs here, and the customers, and so on, these were like colorful patterns in a kaleidoscope and they constituted the most unforgettable experiences of Hao. I guess Hao still misses that period very much. Even in the interview, whenever Hao talked about things that happened then, his face appeared excited and his speaking speed up unconsciously.

He showed me some picture on his Samsung phone:

"Look at this guy. He is not eye candy, but you know what? He has dozens of casual girlfriends and organizes all of them in the same chat room, just like a king who owns an inner palace of women. Every time he goes travelling, he picks up one of them as a companion. The chosen girl feels proud of it and the rest of them feel jealous. Even if he already has almost twenty girls in that group, he still hunts for other girls he encountered on the road."

He laughed, and went on: *"I have never met this type of drama or people. He changed my value of life at a certain point. LOL."* We did not go too much to this topic. But after the interview, in our casual chatting, he abruptly mentioned his encounter with romantic stories in Tibet. His opinion is that all the romantic things that happened here should end here. I guess his romantic story is a beautiful memory of his own. I did not dig out the full story because he looked hesitant. But he is very sure that what happened here will not impact on his routine life. *"Tibet is like a dream."*

He emphasized a lot of times how influential the experience of the bar was to his later change. The reason for the strong impact is that place makes him recognize tolerance and diversity in the world by approaching diverse people and the stories behind them. People

incline to fear the unknown. Although willingness to live a life in a different way awakens at some point, many of us are afraid of taking the risk to seek a life full of uncertainty. Lucky for Hao, what he found in the kaleidoscope—the 5238 bar—helped him overcome fear by showing him dozens of patterns that are “weirdoes” in many people’s eyes but in fact are very interesting and outstanding life stories. He used to have a sense of inferiority because he did not go to a good university, but the experience in 5238, staying with outstanding and crazy people was mind-broadening, and more importantly, it has give him the confidence to think and live like them. This explains why in the interview he described Tibet so: “It’s my spiritual home. I was nothing, having no money or lover, but within one year after left, I have both.” The seeming development on his finance and relationship status is literally rooted from his inner growth.

In the next year, when Hao came back Tibet, he was going ahead to 5238 bar. Just like 5238 is his Tibet. “I spent most of my time in Tibet in this bar. Sometimes I go to Nam Lake. I have been to Nam Lake for a few times. It is awesome. I love to watch the sunrise there. But instead of running here and there like many visitors, normally I just stay in Lhasa, in the bar. In 2012, when I back here, that was a good time! The bar people all know our business is successful in Taiwan. They often help us mailing Tibetan raw materials, so I treat them good as well. But this year, the bar is closed. I feel kind of empty.”

Karma

Hao began yearning for Tibet because of a girl who was at the same campus. The girl was well-known on the campus because she biked to Tibet by herself while others were preparing for the final exams. Of course she made up the exams later. “ Although today I won’t surprised by this kind of story because I have seen too many similar things, but at that time that was amazing! I didn’t know her personally; I worshipped her then, though. I saw her sometimes on campus when she was back. She dressed totally differently than us and

looked like a Tibetan. That's so cool!" So that girl pulled Hao to there at some point. What is interesting is that Hao met this girl in Tibet when he visited Tibet the second time in 2012. The girl was registered as a Yigong of 5238. Furthermore, the girl and Hao's boyfriend were high school classmates. "It really knocked their socks off when they two met in the little bar!"

Hao has his own business brand "藏台北", literally "Tibet and Taipei" (TT). It basically focuses on adding Tibetan elements to plain T-shirts and accessories. He created this brand when he was studying in Taiwan, right after visiting Tibet in 2011. He became acquainted with two Taiwanese in the bar. Many accommodations in Tibet are not allowed to accept non-Chinese, including foreigners, Taiwanese, Macanese and Hong Kong people. Hao helped them to stay, so they became friends. These two people later helped Hao with the brand publication, and pushed Hao into a group conversation with Yingjiu Ma.

In 2012, Hao visited Tibet for the second time and then went west to Nepal, India and west. A passer-by thought he was working for Qyer.com because he was wearing a Qyer logo card on his waist. The passer-by showed great admiration because he thought, "working for Qyer.com is so cool!" In fact, Hao did not know Qyer.com much, and certainly was not working for it. A friend in Lhasa gave the Qyer logo card. He hung it on his waist only to tell people he was a Chinese because the logo is a Chinese character, "穷" (*qiong* in Chinese, literally means tight budget). Hao explained to the passer-by the truth but the passer-by did not believe him: "I know you Qyer people are always very low-key. No worries. I won't tell others!" The passer-by's reaction made Hao think: "It's so ridiculous! I was thinking how could a job be so charming? It would make me very proud to really work for Qyer.com" Unexpectedly, this year, his little expectation becomes true. He happened to have a gap of about one year between finishing his study at Taiwan and moving to the next stage of his business. "I won't have thought about apply for Qyer if I hadn't been to Tibet."

In summary, since 2011 when he went to Tibet for the first time, every big change over the next two years was related to this place. “I think it’s so-called karma. You can have my story. I would like to share it with people because I think Tibet has changed me.” Asked why he came to Lhasa this time, he said “I have been not happy recently. Partly because I am living in Beijing all by myself” (maybe he is implying he is lonely without his boyfriend’s company because I know he is waiting for his boyfriend by working in Qyer.com. They want to go into business together but his boyfriend has something to deal with at home for one year); moreover, life with boyfriend and I is not going smoothly. You know Faye Wang divorced after being in Tibet. I think she must have figured out some problems here. Going to Tibet by oneself will help one to figure out something, I think. When I leave, I may know what I want...to end something or come up with s solution.”

5.0 Analysis of Narrative

As documented in many previous studies, a lack of a religious faith but a sense of something missing in one's life led many individuals to choose secular pilgrimage to search for meaning, and self-knowledge (Giddens, 1991; Margry, 2008; Schau & Gilly, 2003; Hyde & Harman, 2011). Compared to other demographics, young people in their twenties and thirties are the most active group taking such a secular pilgrimage, because they may be in a special period of life full of social transitions. The particular reason for starting the journey varies from person to person. In general, the main factors driving them to this travel are what bothered or confused them recently, or the sad things that happened in the past that are still causing pain. Therefore, travellers' feelings about a destination are closely associated with their characteristics and the personal histories which are considerable different, but still, there are some common phenomenon emerging across their different experiences. For instance, the experience of awe, mindfulness, the feeling of limits, and the inspiration from others' stories, and so forth. They worded the gains of the trip in a similar way, such as feeling "close to myself", "self-purified", and having the opportunity to "find myself" that are also found in the keywords in how media describe Tibet. Thus, media plays an important role in travellers' expectation and experience, and their intention of visiting Tibet.

This section summarizes the common phenomena emerging across narrates of all participants. The first part shows that young people aging from 20 to 30 believe that they are more likely to get transformed by a trip; comparing with individuals over 30, married ones or even have had kids, and people under 20 years old; they think they are more likely to encounter enlightening moments in travelling. The second part discusses that people's choices of destination associate with their unique personal histories. Many Tibetan travellers go there with some troublesome issues, or inner confusion about self or the world. Then why did they choose Tibet? The next part discusses what facts affect individuals' decision that

Tibet would be a right choice to go. It's mainly about the match between the image of Tibet and individuals' self-congruity which makes individuals prefer a brand image associated with a set of personality traits congruent with their own. The forth part demonstrates various feelings of openness and opening common across all participants: opening to environment, opening awareness, opening to illness and death, opening to the experience of scared, and openness to the stories of others. However, no matter how beautiful a trip is, it is only a temporary escape. As revealed in the last part, travel itself can not directly solve any real problems. All the personal issues are still there that individuals have to face after their trips. It is found that many of them confront paradox of their idea life and real life when they return home.

5.1 When a young soul decide to journey to Tibet

The Chinese government recently has paid increasing attention to the travel industry, as can be proved by its release of a series of supportive tourism policies such as *Tourism Law of the People's Republic of China* and *Guidebook for Civilized Tourism* in 2013. Tourism continues contributing to the growth of the GDP. "In 2012 the Chinese overtook Americans and Germans as the world's top international tourism spenders, heading off on 83m foreign trips and spending \$102bn" (Abigail, 2013, theguardian.com). The UNWTO states that Chinese tourists saw an increase in travel expenditure of 28 percent in the first three quarters of 2013. It is reported by the China Tourism Academy in the *Blue book of China's Tourism Economy No.6* that individual's travel consumption is growing dramatically. The total number of domestic travellers reached 0.33 billion, which is 11.6% more than last year, while the total revenue of travel industry is about 260 billion yuans, 14% higher than last year. (China Tourism Academy, 2014). Therefore, China is enjoying a skyrocketing travel industry, and travel has become a hot trend among Chinese people. Many types of travel,

including backpacking, have never been more popular than now.

The media in promoting and branding is undoubtedly significant, as supported by previous research. In the area of tourism, it is evident that various resources for reference, including information obtained from friends, relatives, and media sources, affect a tourist's choice of destination (Ekinici, 2003; Roodurmun & Juwaheer, 2010). The slogans and other promotional information, on purpose of attracting travellers, convince travellers that they would have spiritual growth by visiting a certain destination; meanwhile, they also arouse travellers' desire of escaping from their daily routine life (Alex, 2011). In short, no matter whether traditional mass media like television, or untraditional media like novels and movies, or more recent social media, the media is very important for destination branding. (Julien, 2005) explored the effect of media, including the visual and written content of movies, guidebooks and magazines, on the imagination that tourists have of the case destination of Lhasa. She summarized the expectation (before arrival) of western tourists to Tibet, that based on a survey on 397 participants. The result shows that the people of Tibet, and the nature and environment are what tourists most look forward to. Particularly, they imagine Tibetan people to be religious (41%) and friendly (32%), and the environment to be cold (30%), mountainous (26%) and beautiful (26%). Also, she examined the Tibet-related pictures in *the Lonely Planet*⁴ and *National Geographic*^{5*}. The most frequently represented themes are religion (relatively 68%, 34% of two resources) Tibetans doing non-religious activity (5%, 43%), and mountains (32%, 23%) (Julien, 2005).

To assess Tibet through the eyes of Chinese domestic tourists, Yang and his colleagues

⁴ *The Lonely Planet*, published in 1999, written by Mayhew, Bellezza, Wheeler and Taylor is a 350-page guidebook giving detailed information about Tibet

⁵ *National Geographic*, formerly *The National Geographic Magazine*, is the official magazine of the National Geographic Society. It primarily contains articles about geography, history, and world culture. The magazine is known for its thick square-bound glossy format with a yellow rectangular border and its extensive use of dramatic photographs. (resource from Wikipedia)

analyzed the Tourism Destination Image of Tibet by content analysis, and summarized the most frequent keywords under the categories of routes, attraction, and activities and other related facilities. They found that most travellers are looking forward to experiencing a slow pace of life, religious belief, and breathtaking landscape. They tend to expect a spiritual experience that often described by words like “dream”, “holy”, and “heaven.” Therefore, it is proved that travellers usually have a positive attitude toward Tibet, and one of the most unique experiences there is to get spiritually purified. (Yang, Ji & Chen, 2013)

Thus, under such circumstance, as well as the effect of media promotion, travel is becoming a hot trend. This trend is also promoted by the birth and development of online travel websites such as Qyer.com, and mafengwo.cn. They are places for like-minded travellers to share travel tips and other related information such as how to use less money and go to more places. Not only functioning as public communities, they are also resources for original information about destination images; moreover, they encourage users to identify themselves in the concept of self-congruity to be coherent with the personality of a certain destination to a certain extent.

Previous research has proved that for each traveller, his or her self-congruity is related to the personality of the destination and a factor when deciding the destination. The personality of destination is a concept extended from “brand personality” in marketing research. Based on the definition of brand personality –“the set of human characteristics associated with a brand”, the personality of a destination is offering a destination with a human-liked personality. Studies on product consumption decision-making processes center on linking a brand’s personality to individual’s self-congruity. It is claimed that when deciding on a choice of product, an individual tends to match the product with his/her self-concept (Sirgy, 1982). Similarly, in tourism research, a tourist’s destination decision is influenced by level of the coherence between self-congruity and the destination personality

and his colleagues found that the greater the agreement between a destination's image and one's self-concept, the greater the tendency for the tourist to visit that place (Beerli, Meneses, & Gil, 2007).

Therefore, when young backpackers choose a destination to go to they tend to choose a place that agrees with their characteristics. And the travel websites mentioned before are helping them apply practical destination information and tips, connect with like-minded travel partners acquainted with each other, and share travel experience and so on. To some extent, those functions enlarge the effect of self-congruity in the decision-making process. Therefore, the hot trend of Tibetan travel is more easily spread today than when it originally became popular among arty young Chinese. Many young Chinese are lonely, confused, indifferent, or tired. For many of those, travel is the best way to find answers to their confusion, and a sense of direction for their life. They go to Tibet with confusion or uncertainty about some personal issues, such as the stress of marriage from others (parents, acquaintances, and society), career decision about what kind of job they are about to work at, and relationships with no clear future, and so on. Of the eight participants, only one went travelling purely for a lighthearted break: "that is the best time to travel like this. I just left a company; I have time, some money, and I am single! So, why not?" (Guo, see Chapter four) The other participants expressed their expectation of various gains from the trip, including self-searching, inspiration for art creation, healing old mental wounds, or even escaping from chaos. The reasons for their trips differ from person to person because of various personalities, traits, personal histories and backgrounds and their onsite experience and so on. For example, Nana was in her late twenties and her parents wanted her to get married. Additionally, she had been torn between which sort of future she wanted, to pursue her dream of running a hostel or live the life as her parents wished?

Everyone around is pushing me to marriage... Most of my classmates have married, and got kids. They think that's the normal pace. They can't understand me. I am already very isolated now. We have little in common to talk about. Whenever we come together, they keep talking about their husbands or wives, and kids (Nana).

...first, I wanted to experience the western provinces before I got married. It must be my own journey, with my true heart, instead of distraction from others. Second, I want to figure out whether a hostel is a career that I want to commit myself to. So even in my trips, I am exposing myself to the local culture and looking for any market shortage (Nana).

Similar to Nana, Dan was considering whether to follow the will of parents to take a stable job, or to focus on the olive nut carving (ONC) art. Nevertheless, different from Nana who had a very structured plan, Dan went to Lhasa only because of an impromptu idea proposed by a new friend he met on the road.

Jane felt life was pushing her into a corner before the trip. She could no longer live in two cities she was most familiar with because they reminded her of two people—her father and her ex-boyfriend. A few months ago, her father died. Also, she broke up with her ex-boyfriend after many dramas that ended with them hurting each other very badly. When Jane was very little, she was sexually assaulted twice by two different uncles. Her father used to abuse her mother until he suddenly died a few months ago. Recently, she found out her mother had had an affair with her cousin. Also, rumor had it that her mother was involved in her father's death, although Jane thought it was ridiculous. Jane said she just wanted to run away to Lhasa, to get away from all of those stresses. "I can't stand things any further for one minute!"

Han was experiencing a sudden family financial crisis—his family was in a debt by over 5 million yuans because of the global financial crisis in 2012. Facing the situation that they were going to lose everything, his parents planned to get divorced, not because their relationship had broken up but to save a house for him. Not all their houses were under his mother's name but all the debt was, so if they divorced, all the debt would belong his mother and the houses would not. In that case, his parents could still keep at least one house for Han's marriage in the future. Han disagreed with the idea strongly, so one day when his father tried again to persuade him, he left home without even a goodbye. He said he just wanted to get away from all of these problems.

This year, Hao had some problems with his boyfriend. He said maybe he would figure out a solution after the trip, as the hot news then was that a superstar got divorced after visiting Tibet. He hoped he could absorb energy from Tibet as he used to.

You know Faye Wang divorced after being in Tibet. I think she must have figured out some problems here. Going to Tibet by oneself will help one to figure out something, I think. When I leave, I may know what I want...to end something or come up with a solution. (Hao)

Many people in the first five years after graduating from university or college are facing many changes in their social roles, such as working at a first job, deciding a career path, probably shifting to another job or even a different industry, getting into a serious relationship instead of dating partners without any plan of the future, getting married, and becoming parents. For many young people, they are not ready for such social transitions. They are still looking for selves and positions in the world, with questions and confusions.

Research has proved that “young adulthood is the most dynamic period of personality development” (Zimmermann & Neyer, 2013). Previous studies in personality theories and developmental psychology emphasized the influence on potential dynamic changes of

personality traits of young adults in the process of adapting to their changed social roles. (Robins, et al, 2001). The insightful TED talk—“Why 30 Is Not the New 20”, which has been viewed more than 6 million times, pointed that “Twenty-somethings are like airplanes just leaving LAX, bound for somewhere west. Right after takeoff, a slight change in course is the difference between landing in Alaska and Fiji. Likewise, at 20 to 25, even 29, one good conversation, one good break, one good TED talk, can have an enormous effect across years and even generations to come” (Meg Jay, 2013). Therefore, many psychologists consider this period as a very important stage of the lifespan.

Furthermore, many tourism researchers have realized that people’s motivation for travelling changes as they shift into new social roles (Swarbrooke & Horner, 2007). Participants in this study believe that there is a certain range of age that is appropriate for individuals to travel solo and or to encounter possible personal changes. In this case, the average age commonly accepted by most participants is 20 to 30 years. Life issues such as marriage and birth of kids are believed to have influence on individual’s travel motivation and experience. Yet, participants also accepted that for those marriage or kids-had individuals, they can still find the beauty of travel even they across through a different journey.

5.2 Opening awareness and expanding

One of the most important finding that emerges among all participants’ narratives about the change after the trip is “opening”, which means willingness or readiness to receive the connection between self and self, or self and nature, or self and the world.

i. Opening to environment- experiencing awe

The environment is significant to travellers’ on-trip experience. Nature’s beauty in a wild context, the sunrise, the sunset, and mountain climbing, and so forth, make it considerate possible of travellers to receive spiritual inspiration; in the other word, in the environment of

Tibet, travellers senses are easily aroused such as awe, mindfulness and sense of limitation. Besides, when travellers recall their trip later, the clear skies and clouds come to mind first when they think about Tibet. Thus, this finding mainly agrees with the tourist destination image (Yang, Ji & Chen), also, it is coherent with Tibet's media image.

When individual are shocked by nature's beauty and feel awe, the power of awe may cause them to rethink about the meaning for life and provide a new view, and then to reset the goals and priorities of their life (McDonald, etc., 2009; Koeeni, 2005; Pomfret, 2006). Thus, by experiencing awe, travellers might recall some moments on the road, such as epiphanies that make them changed or even transformed. For Jane, mountains made her feel the greatness and stillness of nature, and she emphasized the impact of the awe experienced on the mountains on her change. Stating "I am so small, so tiny" and:

Those mountains, they have lived for hundreds of years while we can only live for tens of years. I might die tomorrow, but those mountains would still be there. They won't disappear...I would,

Suddenly, I realized that life is already full of uncertainty. It is not necessary to add more drama. Maybe I am still longing to adventure in my heart, but now I just want a stable and quiet life", "...and the most important thing is I have been educated by the mountains to be steady and open-minded.(Jane)

The nature beauty of Tibet also impressed Cun. He worded what he saw as "nature greatness" (directly translated from Chinese "自然的伟力"), and he said, "*Visiting Namtso (Lake Nam) is the first time that I've been completely shocked by the nature's beauty! And since I came to Tibet, only the gorgeous beauty of Namtso shocked me, only because of its nature greatness...*

ii. Mindfulness- opening awareness

Mindfulness is referred to as “a state of mind that results from drawing novel distinctions, examining information from new perspectives, and being sensitive to context” (Langer, 1993, p. 44). It makes travellers actively experience the place and to keep awareness open to everything on going in a setting (Moscardo, 1996). When Cun reached at the intersection of the Yarlung Tsangpo River and Nyang River, there was a magic view of both rivers: on one side the river is muddy and yellow while the other side is so clean and green. The two sides have both started running as the same river. He wrote his feeling at that moment on his notebook:

An extremely quiet still atmosphere. The clear Nying River and the muddy Yarlung Tsangpo River come together and join into one where they are quite distinct from each other. Down to the riverside, it's completely silent. You can't hear any noise. Even the sound of running water is quiet.

Another midnight, he sat on the side of the street, watching everything happening in the street, he felt happiness and freedom.

At that time, there were only Tibetans and dogs. The Xueyudanjie pub was playing Tibetan music very loudly, with many Tibetans around the door. But except for the pub area, the rest of the street was very empty. Some drunken men occasionally passed by me. They laugh crazily or spoke Tibetan that I didn't understand. Dogs ran here and there in groups. God, you can't image how many Tibetan dogs are there in front of the Jokhang Temple at night! I saw two men eating and drinking, seated on the steps in front of a closed restaurant, with their top body naked. They looked happy, enjoying right the moment. Suddenly, I had a feeling that I am in a foreign country and everybody here look so light-hearted, so happy.

When Dan took a carpool to Yamdrok Lake, the dark cloudscapes were so low that they were almost driving in the clouds. When he arrived at the spot of watching the bird view of Yamdrok Lake, he was so disappointed because it was raining and he couldn't see anything but clouds. Frustrated, he moved back; however, the weather suddenly changed when they just passed the next corner of the lookout. The dark cloud disappeared, and the sky turned to be clear and blue again. Watching the unbelievable beautiful Yamdrok Lake, he was so surprised and happy at that moment, crazily yelling at the lake. He posted a online status regarding to this: *"Stepping on the top of the cloud, my soul gets lifted up"* (Dan)

iii. Opening to illness and death- feeling limits

Some participants talked about the experience of being threatened with death. After such experience, participants tend to pay more attention to their safety in travel and feel more grateful for their life and everything they own. For example:

...on the way from Xinjiang to Lhasa, we were passing the death valley that was over 5150 meters high, and the van I rode was broke down. It was snowing. So we had to stop there for over ten hours and I got high altitude sick finally. You know that place is famous for how dangerous it is because may people died there due to high-altitude sickness. So I was so dangerous that almost died. Getting through these, I feel I am really lucky." This experience taught her to that "Cherish your life! Do whatever you want to do, only if keep yourself safe." (Nana)

Moreover, many travellers reached Tibet by non-traditional ways such as cycling, and hitchhiking. These kinds of travelling required not only physical endurance but also mental perseverance; however, once those travellers overcame these difficulties along the journey, or got through threats and challenges, they felt more inspired, encouraged, and confident. Some of them were taught to persevere, to be brave and positive when facing the unevenness

no matter in travelling or in life, and insist on dreams. For instance, getting through all the uphill made Nana learn to persevere. When she reflected on it, she said, “*you just need to be clear about your goal and know how to reach it, the direction, and then what you need to do is to keep running toward the goal!*”

It is 1340 miles from Chengdu to Tibet, the altitude climbed from 500 meters to over 5500 meters...I can't remember how many uphill I met on the way. Some of them are relatively easy, and some of them are really hard, so I have to make all efforts to climb over...The uphill won't scare me any more because I have overcome the hardest one!

It is a feeling like pushing oneself against something bigger, when one is doing a serious challenge such as walking up a challenging mountain or cycling up (Richard, 2011). Dodson and Kinberly (1996) claimed that peak experiences are highly intense, significant, and fulfilling experiences for people and are often considered turning points, which lead to a change in self-concept and identity.

Also, for those travellers who were once in dangerous situation or even close to death in the trip, they were taught a lesson of safety or were inspired of new perception of life and self.

...the sun at noon felt scorching. I felt so hot and so sick. I had to stop for a while every a few steps. My headache was killing me. And then when I finally reached the top, I looked down and I was afraid that I couldn't get down! I thought of death at that moment. But none of my family knew where I was. And my insurance was probably expired...

iv. Experience of the sacred—a close look at religion

Mazumdar and Mazumdar claimed (2004) that religion could foster place attachment and for some people it could become an important component of the attachment they feel to particular places. It is noticeable that Tibet is a religious place. Beside the fact that many

places are attractive for travellers from far away, they are as sacred sites for religious use well, such as pray, prostration, and other religious activities. For instance, Lhasa is the holy center in the eyes of all Tibetan Buddhists; beyond doubt Jokhang Temple is a dominant temple in Tibetan Buddhism, and it has kept accepting believers' pray for thousands of years; the Mount Kailash is view by Tantric Buddhists believers as the home of the Buddha Demchok who represents supreme bliss, so that every year it attracts a large number of believers to prostrate around it to pray for happiness and merits. Tibetans believe that each mountain and lake has a spirit, offering protection for good people and punishing bad ones. They have many old stories about those spirits. Some Tibetan drivers pass those stories that they might hear from their grandparents on to travellers when they are taking customers to a destination.

When we arrived at Namtso, the driver said 'she's Namtso'. It was so breathtaking that it indeed looked like a beautiful lady", "We watched the sunrise the next morning. I stood on the top of a little hill. I saw the light moving little by little from the mount to the lake. That was gorgeous! (Guo)

Beside that, travellers underwent much hardship to view the Tibetan scene and what they saw made good telling (Robert, 1974). Many symbols are strange and eye-catching and they are an important part of their travel stories, such as architecture (temples), art (Thangka, Buddhists' beads), dressing (Tibetan robes), food (butter tea, traditional noodles), activities (scripture debating), patterns (pray flags, Marnyi stones/piles) and ceremony, even drama. Thus, it is no doubt that once travellers arrive Tibet, or even on the way of coming, an environment of religion and religion-dominated life will embrace them, even those non-religions.

...and those I saw with my own eyes are real power. When I see the magnificent buildings, I picture them being built; some Tibetans dance in their traditional style; the monks have sutra-debates in temples; even when a single lay Tibetan concentrates

himself in chanting sutras peacefully, I see the power! The power is attached to everything and it is just gushing! (Cun)

Many travellers expressed their respect for how religious Tibetans are. Besides religious, Tibetans are viewed as kind, plain, and contented, and it is interesting that travellers tend to believe that these characters of Tibetan are closely related to the religion on this land. For Nana, Buddhism helps her reach inside peaceful.

The way I look at everything has changed a lot since I started to believe in Tibetan Buddhism. There are three poisons in Buddhism—aversion, attachment, and ignorance. The ignorance is, for example, one does not let go past relationships. I use this to comfort myself when things were going wrong in a relationship. And it works. Now I am much more peaceful. (Nana)

Therefore, in short, the fact that Tibet is a religion city makes it coherent with its culture, people, and environment. This character is obviously expressed by its unique architecture, art, dressing, food, activities, patterns, and it is also hidden under the spirit of sacred mountains and lakes, the soul of local people and other ineffable atmosphere. And individuals' experiences in this place, as Mazumdar and Mazumdar (2004) said, "can be intensely gratifying leading to inner peace, serenity and tranquility, so much so that a person returns to these places over and over again for spiritual rejuvenation."

v. Openness to the Stories of Others

The fifth category of opening is the sequence of interactive communication of self and other people whom met on the road and in the destination, such as the Tibetan pilgrims, travellers, or the local Tibetan drivers. The relation with others travellers maintaining is part of travel memory. In a sense, human beings are moving destinations. Relationships with others help provide new insight into possibilities for self. For instance, Jane used to worship

her peers who posted their travel pictures on online communities to show how many places they have been to. Now she no longer worshiped them because she has a new opinion:

When I was staying in Pingcuo Hostel, I saw some travellers playing with their mobile phone or Ipad, instead of hanging out. I found out they were posting pictures to make others admire them. Aware of that, I realized that it is not necessary to worship others based on one piece of their lives. (Jane)

Cun was impressed by the life experience of his Tibetan driver (see chapter four, Cun's story one)–

One year, he took a family of three to India, that is, a husband and a pregnant wife. The wife died on the road, and no drivers were willing to take them home except him... (Cun)

In fact it is not only the people themselves but also those life stories that educated them in the journey and the influence lasted still upon they returned home. Two facets are involved in this result. On one hand, stories from others prove how diversified our lives could be and thus encouraged the stories-listeners to believe that their lives could hold the same diversity, for example, for Han, a night of chatting with friends on the open balcony of hostel in Lhasa was the most unforgettable memory and the most valuable experience; On the other hand, those stories also help them to comfort their pains, as Ai said, “the best way to comfort one is not to encourage him, but to tell him a worse story.”

I got to know different types of people along the road. They differed in their characteristics, and you can feel the distinction. Even though we usually hide our true selves in our normal lives, we release our true selves unconsciously when we are on the road, though. So no matter how meaningful or how bad one is, people can feel it. And we don't need to cover up our drawbacks, because we may never see each other again after we met. (Han)

Let it go. I knew it long before, but the trip makes me believe it. I thought I had went through a lot, but after hearing a series of up-and-down life stories in this trip, I realized what I had experienced is nothing”, “I met some strange people talking about their strange opinions, and then suddenly my mind was changed (Ai)

When asked what elements contribute most to their change, surprisingly, all participants chorused that it was the people they encountered on the road. For many travellers, especially young backpackers, travelling is not only visiting a place but also a process of encountering different kinds of people. It is also like a platform that makes very different people encountered with each other. They have different histories, various characteristics, and even their reasons for journeying Tibet are distinct. Sparked by the collision of difference, encourages new perceptions of self and life. Owing to such experience, travellers inclined to follow their heart when facing choices of life because they are no longer afraid of being different.

5.3 Confronting paradox on the return home

Although travel could give them courage and insight, it could not change who they are, and where they are from; it is unable to neither change the environment they grow up nor to help solve problems of their original lives. The conflicts between dream and reality, inside voice and outside stress, the will of self and parents, and other problems are still there and those would not end because of a trip. So there is a popular saying in Lhasa that “Tibet is a dream”, or “Lhasa is a dream.” Those backpackers who quit (their jobs) and went to Tibet, they wake up very quickly because the first thing they need to do when back in routine life is to find a new job. In this case, some of them have to face the reality and work for a job they do not really like to make lives. For example, Nana was torn before the trip between whether to open a hostel or to accept her parents’ arrangement to be a teacher, but the trip made her

determine to follow her heart because she thought the journey made her opening. After a few months when she finally finished the journey and got home, she became on the fence again: *“Back home, I saw my parents’ white hair. That makes me sad. They were worrying about me so much and their hair was getting white while I was having fun apart from them.”* She felt so guilty, so she decided to take a regular job first, *“such as a teacher, an interpreter...I need to conduct regular work first and then get into my real interest generally...(sigh).”* Similar with Nana, Cun has to sacrifice some of his freedom to make his parents happy. He is now in a serious relationship with a girl. Even though Cun thinks this girl is not his perfect tea, he plans to marry her for the consideration of his parents and the social stress. Cun said, *“I used to not want to get married because I think marriage would cost me too much time. I prefer to spend my time on exploring the world instead of family issues...however, I have to consider my parents...so my marriage is not just for myself (but also for my parents)...it’s a paradox.”*(Cun) Moreover, although the trip makes Han *“from self-oriented to family oriented”* (Han), he has to face the family financial crisis and make great effort to solve this problem—a debt of 3 million yuans.

It maybe looks frustrating, because it seems in the end, some people’s lives are not very different; however, when they were asked whether their lives would be different without journeying Tibet, their answers were yes, because they felt that their perspective on their view of life has changed and new possibilities have opened up. Once there is an opportunity to make their dream come true, they will make effort to make it happen. Cun is considering a bookstore, and Nana does not give up her dream of hostel.

Furthermore, perhaps unexpectedly, it is because of the challenges posed such paradoxes or conflicts makes routine life not as satisfying as they wish. As a result, many travellers come back to Tibet again and again. Yu’s story is a typical example. He created a fashion brand related to Tibet after his first Tibet visit (2011), and later he entered travel

industry because of an inspiration during his second visit (2012), and then a few months after he back left Tibet for the third time (2013), he opened a hostel in Dali, Yunnan province. He described Tibet as his spiritual home that every time he came back, he became full of energy and hope no matter how bad or well things went in this year. As mentioned in the beginning of this study, everyone has a reason for coming to Tibet. The beautiful landscape, great mountains or elegant lakes, the religious patterns, and people encountered on the road—Tibetans and other travellers, are passing a power of belief, simple, kind, pure, an openness and broadness. Waving from the power, the vibration reaches backpackers from all over who more or less have problems in their lives. Generally, travel is a lesson and it teaches its students different content based on who they are and the content also differs from lived space, lived time, and lived relation. And how much each student digests varies from person to person as well. As time passes by, the level of influence of the education will be clearer as life unfolds. In a way, we are not travelling to head to destinations, but for looking for the fragments of ourselves scattering in to corners of the world. Or life itself is such a process—find a fragment, fix self with it, and then continue searching for the next one, yet travel makes the pace speed up:

I think travel is an accelerator of those changes, because when I was on the road, I had nothing to work on and my mind was so free, so what I could do only was to think, think harder, think deep...if I didn't go out, I could not feel the sense of loneliness, sense of uncertainty...and these senses were key to motivate my protection system and arouse my true feelings. They made me learn what I really want. That's how we become closer to our hearts in travelling. (Ai)

5.4 Implication of the Study

This research reveals how travellers are transformed during and after travel in Tibet by providing a sequence of narrative stories from eight participants. It provides an exploratory study on the impact of travel experiences in Tibet on travellers' lives. It draws the common patterns of psychological and physical experience among young solo Chinese travellers in Tibet, and contributes to literature related to several areas, including ethnography of tourism, social psychology of leisure, environment psychology, and youth studies. Furthermore, it proposes a definition of transformation tourism that includes a certain group of people who start their trips searching for answers and eventually change their perspectives on life. This sheds light on the profile of travellers, especially young backpackers and independent travellers.

In relation to methodological implications, the thesis demonstrates that narrative is an important methodology for tourism studies. Narrative inquiry shows its advantages in the process of data connecting and understanding. As a methodology, narrative inquiry is a useful tool in exploratory tourism studies. Through the process of conducting this study, narrative inquiry shows its unique strengths in many aspects. It respects the difference among each participant of his or her personal history and issues that he or she was going through. It not only has participants' voice heard (directly quoted), but also includes my personal story that may impact on my understanding of this study. By that, it saves some space of open understanding for the public. Another advantage of narrative inquiry is that it is able to dig deeply and connect the flow of before, during and after the trip, and explore the reasons, the experience and the result of the trip for each participant.

Especially, it enriches the multiplicity of studies on Chinese tourism, because only a few of Chinese domestic tourism-studies conducted qualitative as methodologies while over ninety percent of them were in quantitative way. Moreover, it introduces an example of

qualitative research for Chinese researchers, an application of narrative inquiry to tourism studies.

The implications of this study expand further than the academic world. It gives the tourism sector a new understanding of travellers engaged in transformation tourism. These insights may help destinations target that type of travellers, design-focused travel products and develop appropriate marketing strategies. Also, it reveals a close observation on the development of the tourism-market in China, and the findings deserve attention from global destination management organizations (DMOs). Besides, similar as a consumer experience report, this study is valuable for DMOs to understand the requirement of consumers, especially for products of sacred places like Tibet. With this knowledge they may then create promotion strategies to satisfy their needs.

Last but not least, this study urges government and policymakers to create an open environment and flexible policies for young independent travellers. As described in participants' stories, there are some dangers (such as high-altitude sickness, hypoxia, and cold injury) in their staying in Tibet, thus local government could make sure of the safety of travellers by improving the related policies and facilities. Moreover, this study describes that what interests travellers in Tibet the most are its original and rural features, therefore, policymakers in Tibet, from tourism aspect of view, should carefully balance the modernization and reservation of original culture including the religions traditions and non-religions activities. The popularity of backpacking and the increase of backpackers coming to Tibet should arise enough attention on investigating and catering their special needs.

5.5 Suggestions for Future Research

This narrative study brings attention to Chinese young backpackers who are an emerging group of travellers with huge market potential, and their interrelationship between

travel experience and life. To explore the effect of journeying into Tibet on travellers' lives, I arranged a gap between two interviews aiming to make sure that they had enough time to reflect and feel any changes happened within themselves. The period ranges from three to five months, however, a future study asking the same participants after three or five years about the same questions—"how do you think journeying into Tibet change your life?"—would be very interesting. At that time, their answers may be different, so the comparison and contrasts of their answers in a longitudinal way, and the exploration of how and why these happen using narrative as the methodology would be a beautiful topic to which I will commit myself.

Another idea for research arises as a result of completing this study is to consolidate the results of this study in a quantitative way. Specifically, future research could capture the keywords of posts from travellers on Sina Weibo⁶ about their on-site experience in Tibet and recall of what they have learned from the trip upon they returning home. Using such data as the research object and quantitative analyzing tool such as SPSS will provide statistic insights into how they view and recall their Tibetan trips. Another possible theme is to look how backpackers are changing Tibet – the social impacts wrought by tourism there. Instead of investigating how individuals get transformed, how they are transforming Tibet is also an interesting and important topic to study in.

⁶ Sina Weibo: a Chinese microblogging (weibo) website.

6.0 The end

One day of September in 2013, I was standing in the middle of a crowd, feeling backpackers with backpackers over 50 liters brushing against me. Our life paths intersected in one second and then led to different ways. I looked at them; suddenly I had a feeling that I was in the intersection of paradise universe and those young faces were my past. I felt them brushing against me as feeling who I was in 2011 or in 2012 passing me, and after that second we could never meet each other again. And the woman, who visited Tibet for seven times, was like coming from my future and was assigned to clear up my doubt about my love to Tibet.

I remember the last night before the third time I leaving Tibet: I evaded friends' hospitality and could not wait to staying alone with him—the Jahkang Temple. I seated in “my spot”, talking to him in my heart, as talking to an old friend whom I visit once a year. I released myself, with tears, with smile, and he was just silent as if he understood. That made me safe and free. Thinking about my participants and our conversations, a thought came into my mind— “we journey here and there maybe just to encounter with ourselves. It's easy to live with eyes closed, but those who have already their eyes open realize that a person is not born to be entire, so our life may be a long journey of searching and encountering with the rest pieces of our selves in unexpected places.”

One hour after 3 o'clock in the morning, when the last religious pilgrim had already left, I stood up, walked to the temple, and fondled each inch of the antiquated wall. Saying goodbye to this place is harder than did the same thing to any lover, even though I knew I would come back for sure. It might be one year, or two years, or five years later when I came back again, and I wish I will have found more pieces of my self and become a better person at that time.

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Appendix A: Information Letter (English)

Thank you very much for participating this research project. This letter outlined information about the research.

- I am a first year master student studying in the tourism policy and planning of the University of Waterloo, Canada. I am collecting data for my thesis under the supervision of Professor Steve Smith. I would like to invite you to participate my research project. This study is called "transformation tourism: the example of backpackers in Tibet". It is aiming to explore themes of transformation travel found in backpackers' narratives of their visits to Tibet. It will focus on backpackers experience, so I am interested in having you share your travel stories.
- Participation is voluntary. You may decline to answer any of the interview questions if you wish. You may decide to withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences by advising me. Participation will involve an in-person interview and a follow up interview in one month that would be done online.
- The first interview would take you about two hours. The location could be any café or restaurant, or any other public places that are convenient for both of us. With your permission, the interview will be audio recorded to facilitate collection of information, and later transcribed for analysis. Shortly after the interview has been completed, I will send you a copy of the transcript to give you an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of our conversation and to add or clarify any points that you wish. After one month upon you return home, in the follow up interview, I will interview you online. Online video and audio chat are possible choices.
- All information you provide is considered completely confidential. Your name will not appear in any thesis or report resulting from this study; however, with your permission anonymous quotations may be used. Data collected during this study will be retained for two years in a locked office in my supervisor's office. Only researchers associated with this project will have access. There are no known or anticipated risks to you as a participant in this study.
- If you have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please contact me at 1-519-###-#### or by email at szhou@uwaterloo.ca You can also contact my supervisor, Professor Steve Smith at 519-888-4567 ext. 84045 or email slsmith@uwaterloo.ca
- I would like to assure you that this study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through a University of Waterloo Research Ethics Committee. The final decision about participation is yours. If you have any comments or concerns resulting from your participation in this study, please contact Dr. Maureen Nummelin in the Office of Research Ethics at 1-519-888-4567, Ext. 36005 or maureen.nummelin@uwaterloo.ca.

Keeping this information letter is recommended. I very much look forward to speaking with you and thank you in advance for your assistance in the second interview.

Yours Sincerely,

Carrie Zhou

Appendix B: Information Letter (Chinese)

UNIVERSITY OF
WATERLOO

200 University Avenue West, Waterloo, ON, Canada N2L 3G1
519-888-4567 | uwaterloo.ca

非常感谢您的参与！这封信是为了提醒您相关信息。

- 我是加拿大滑铁卢大学旅游政策与规划专业在读的一年级的研究生，我的导师是 Steve Smith 教授。我正在为我的论文采集数据，现诚意邀请您参加我的研究项目——“转变之旅：以西藏背包客为例”。本次研究的目的是通过背包客的故事探索背包客在西藏之行中的转变。我真挚地邀请您分享您的旅行故事。
- **您的参与是完全自愿的。**您可以拒绝回答任何问题。在任何时候您都可以无条件撤销您提供的任何信息。**参与采访包括接受一个面对面的采访和一个月跟进的网上采访。**
- 第一个采访需要花费您大约两个小时。地点可以是餐馆或咖啡厅，或者任何您觉得方便的公开场合。经过您的许可，采访将会通过电话录音来收集您提供的信息，采访记录稍后会被整理成文本并对其进行分析。在采访结束之后，我将会发给您一份采访记录的拷贝以方便您对采访进行补充和纠正。在你回家后的一个月，我将会通过网上视频或音频对您进行一个后续采访，时间约为两个小时。
- 您提供的所有信息都会被进行匿名处理。您的名字不会出现在任何论文或者研究结果的发表物上。如果您同意，我可能会匿名引用您说的话。在学习中采集的数据将会在我导师的办公室里被保存两年，只有研究相关人员才能够接触到。因此在本研究中您的参加不需要承担任何风险。
- 如果您对本学习有任何的问题，或者您有对参与研究有任何疑问，请联系我 1-519-###-#### 或者邮件 s#zhou@uwaterloo.ca 您也可以联系我的导师，Steve Smith 教授，电话 519-888-4567 转 84045 或者邮箱 slsmith@uwaterloo.ca
- 本学习已经通过了滑铁卢大学研究伦理办公室，如果您有任何问题，请联系 Maureen Nummelin 教授，研究伦理办公室，电话 1-519-888-4567，转 36005，或者邮箱 Maureen.Nummelin@uwaterloo.ca
- 推荐您保留这封信。我期待和您的交谈并提前感谢您参与一个月后的后续采访。

Carrie Zhou 敬

Appendix C: Feedback Letter (English)

**UNIVERSITY OF
WATERLOO**

200 University Avenue West, Waterloo, ON, Canada N2L 3G1
519-888-4567 | uwaterloo.ca

Recreation and Leisure Studies

University of Waterloo

October 15, 2013

Dear Participant,

I would like to thank you for your participation in this study entitled "*Transformation Tourism: The Example of Backpackers in Tibet*". As a reminder, the purpose of this study is to explore themes of transformation travel found in backpackers' narratives of their visits to Tibet. The data collected during interviews will contribute to a better understanding of the requirement of Chinese contemporary backpackers and provide a case of promotion to destination management organizations (DMOs)

As with all University of Waterloo projects involving human participants, this project was reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through a University of Waterloo Research Ethics Committee. Should you have any comments or concerns resulting from your participation in this study, please contact Dr. Maureen Nummelin, the Director, Office of Research Ethics, at 1-519-888-4567, Ext. 36005 or maureen.nummelin@uwaterloo.ca.

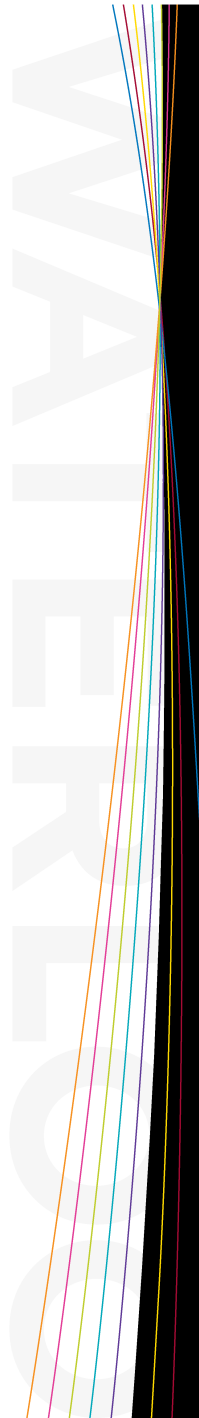
Please remember that any data pertaining to you as an individual participant will be kept confidential. Once all the data are collected and analyzed for this project, I plan on sharing this information with the research community through seminars, conferences, presentations, and journal articles. If you are interested in receiving more information regarding the results of this study, or would like a summary of the results, please provide your email address, and when the study is completed, anticipated by the August in the year of 2014. I will send you the information. In the meantime, if you have any questions about the study, please do not hesitate to contact me by email or telephone as noted below.

I look forward to the conversation with you in the follow-up interview!

Carrie S.S. Zhou

University of Waterloo
Recreation and Leisure Studies
519-###-####

s#zhou@uwaterloo.ca



Appendix D: Feedback Letter (Chinese)

**UNIVERSITY OF
WATERLOO**

200 University Avenue West, Waterloo, ON, Canada N2L 3G1
519-888-4567 | uwaterloo.ca

休闲与娱乐研究

滑铁卢大学

August 15, 2013

亲爱的参与者，

非常感谢您参与“转变之旅：以在西藏的背包客为例”的研究。本次研究的目的是通过背包客的故事探索背包客在西藏之行中的转变。希望研究数据及相应研究结果能有益于更好的理解中国现代背包客的需求，并且为相关旅游管理机构在推广旅游目的地时提供参考案例。

如滑铁卢大学其他所有的涉及有人类参与的项目一样，本次研究已经通过滑铁卢大学伦理检查办公室的核查。如果您对关于参与本次学习有任何意见或担心，请联系 Maureen Nummelin 博士，研究伦理办公室主任。联系电话 1-519-888-4567，转 36005，或者 maureen.nummelin@uwaterloo.ca。

为保护您的隐私，所有您提供的信息将被匿名处理。数据采集和分析之后，我计划在研讨会，会议，演讲和杂志期刊上分享本次研究结果，如果您有兴趣了解本次研究的相关信息或研究成果，请提供您的邮箱地址。当研究结束后，大概在 2014 年八月，我会把相关信息发给您。同时，如果您有关于本次研究的任何问题，欢迎您与我联系。邮箱和电话见下方。

期待与您在后续采访中再度交谈！

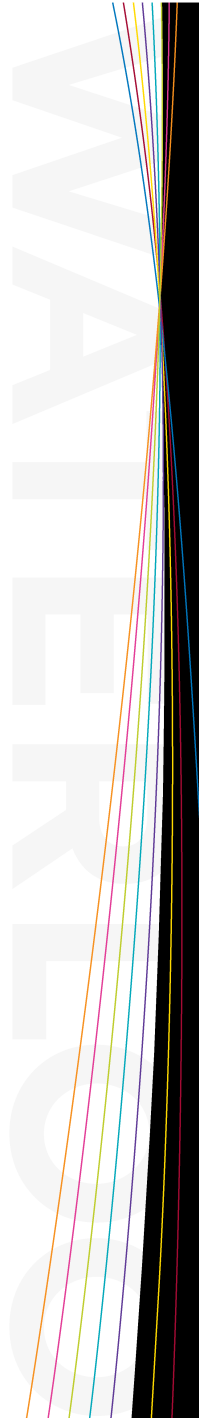
Carrie Zhou

滑铁卢大学

休闲与娱乐研究

519-####-#####

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Appendix E: Participant Recruitment Poster (Chinese)

==> 您好，我是加拿大滑铁卢大学大学休闲与娱乐研究专业的一名硕士研究生，来西藏做我的论文，我的项目课题为“转变之旅：以西藏背包客为例”。研究目的是通过背包客的故事探索背包客在西藏之行中的转变。我真诚地邀请您分享您的旅行故事。本人特别靠谱绝对靠谱，诚意邀请盆友们来找我唠嗑，放心吧，绝对不泄露隐私。

您要是觉得无聊了想找人扯淡，来找我吧；

觉得楼主不靠谱想看看真假，来找我吧；

您生来是一话痨不扯淡不舒服斯基，来找我吧；

您要是路过邦达仓想借个厕所啥的想找人引路，来找我吧；

另外我之前来过这儿几回，虽然比不上那些每年来一次一晃八九年或者那些一待就住下不走了的骨灰级西藏达人，但是如果您想了解一些免费的旅游咨询以及附近好吃的香晃地儿，本人一定知无不言，来找我吧.....

说了那么多，本人对论文的参与者也有一些限定区间。如果您恰好不在区间之内，不好意思啊，您千万别介.....楼主争取心一横牙一咬跟家人一闹翻跟全世界人翻白眼混个灭绝师太回到时候做论文一定再把您考虑进去啊.....

==> 区间是这样的：

1. **一个人来西藏**（意思是一个人出发并且出发前并没有和人越好会面，路上阴差阳错缘分来了挡不住结了好基友好姻缘神马的不算）。
2. **18-35岁**（这个不是年龄歧视啊，我可以当面跟您解释）。
3. **男女不限**。
4. **无小孩**（有木有联想到征婚神马神马的，千万别想歪了。楼主可是一本正经来搞学术的，真的真的）。
5. **来西藏超过一周**（因为会问到您在拉萨的体验，所以您至少得有所体验吧。一周是底线，多多益善，嗯.....）。
6. **在一个月内会回家**。（这条的原因我也还是当面给您解释吧）

那个，为了避免您报以没必要的希望，接受采访是没有报酬的。

不过您放心，楼主一定不会亏待您，要是您碰巧遇到楼主在喝肉粥，楼主就一定不会让您吃馒头。或者咱们可以去光明甜茶馆，几毛钱一杯，管饱。哇哈哈。。别说楼主抠门儿，呜呜呜，穷学生自己掏腰包做论文，来回机票就已经大放血了。。。请大伙儿体谅。

联系我联系我联系我联系我联系我联系我联系我联系我联系我联系我联系我我我我：

