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A JOURNEY TO THE WORLD AND A ROUTE TO THE FUTURE: THE EXPERIENCES OF CHINESE TRAVELERS ON THE CAMINO DE SANTIAGO

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Acknowledgements

When I walked the Camino de Santiago Pilgrimage Route for the first time in 2014, I fell deeply in love with the way. It was like discovering a hidden treasure and opening a new world. Something has touched me deeply, inspired me and given me a sense of meaning. I knew that the journey is more than a new experience to me and many other Chinese travelers. I would like to unveil what the experience really means to us and why. Together with a few Chinese travelers who shared the same profound experience and the same passion, we together founded an organization for the service of Chinese Camino friends - Beijing Camino International Cultural Exchange Center (BCC) in 2017. The mission is to 'promote the Camino de Santiago, serve Chinese pilgrims, and enhance China-West cultural exchange'. As one of the outreach initiatives, I came to Spain to seek opportunities to advance in the mission. Besides collaborating with the Xunta de Galicia on promoting the Camino in China, working as a doctoral student and as a member of the research group 'Global Cultural Route and Sustainability' at Comillas is a way to promote the Camino among Chinese travelers and enhancing cross-cultural exchange because it can give scientific interpretation of Chinese travelers' Camino experiences and reliable insights in future promotion endeavors.

Here I am, at the last steps in this specific phase along the path of the mission, I felt very lucky that I met Dr. Vicky Labajo my supervisor who shared the research interest in the Camino and trusted me, guided me patiently and supported our research firmly in the often demanding process; Dr. Carmen Valor our program coordinator who is always very supportive to the CETIS students, which has given me much confidence in the completion of my study; Dr. Almudena González and Dr. Ignacio Ramos who both shared research interests and joined effort in the research group projects. I am also very grateful for the

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The Camino de Santiago and the values it represents are eventually for all times and all humanity. This research is a small step in an ongoing journey. I'm grateful to be part of it. *Ultreia y suseia!*

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Part I. Introduction

Chapter 1. Purpose and Objective

1.1 Purpose and Contextualization

Preservation of cultural and natural heritage has been identified as one of the 17 sustainable development goals (goal 11.4) and heritage tourism is closely related to the achievement of the sustainable goals and objectives proposed by the UN in its 2030 agenda (UN, 2015; UNWTO, 2015). Cultural route heritage or heritage route is a new category of cultural heritage, it is featured by its often-large scale, long history, multiple functions, and most of all, its witness to the reciprocal exchange across peoples and regions and its potential to enhance collaboration, unity, and sustainable development (ICOMOS, 2008). The Santiago Pilgrimage Routes, also known as the Camino de Santiago, a UNESCO world heritage site, is the first cultural route heritage inscribed by the UNESCO, is the most known and successful one among all cultural route world heritage projects. The Camino de Santiago is still in use today. It has attracted millions of travelers a year since a revitalization in the late 20th century, its evolving and diversifying traveler profile indicates a changing identity of the route and a changing need of the contemporary tourists (Cova et al., 2018; Graham & Murray, 1997; Herrero, 2008; Lois-González & Santos, 2015; Murray, 2014). The growing multinational representation among Camino travelers reveals the internationalization of this unique heritage tourism phenomenon as it marches into the new millennium (d'Entremont & Tanco Lerga, 2019; Lois-González & Santos, 2015; Sánchez y Sánchez & Hesp, 2016). In 2019 alone, it received more than 340,000 pilgrims from 190 different countries and regions (Oficina de Acogida al Peregrino Catedral de Santiago de Compostela, 2020). How contemporary travelers experience this millenary pilgrimage route has been capturing the attention of many scholars for over two decades from

disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, geography, religious studies and psychology. In this study, the author intended to focus on the flagship of cultural route heritage - the Camino de Santiago as a heritage project and a tourist destination, through the in-depth investigation of how Chinese travelers experience the Camino, to discover the trans-cultural part of the Camino tourist experience and to explore the best strategies for sustainable management and development of cultural route heritage projects like the Camino.

1.2 Rationale

The inscription of the Santiago de Compostela Pilgrimage Routes in 1993 initiated the discussion of a new category of cultural heritage around the world (UNESCO, 1994; Li & Yu, 2005). Cultural route heritage is the most comprehensive, complicated type of heritage in terms of management and tourist development. The study of how consumers/users around the world are enjoying the benefits of the Camino de Santiago as a touristic product in the 21st century can provide first-hand and innovative information on the sustainable management of this new category of world heritage. Scholars of the Camino de Santiago Pilgrimage routes have identified the political, cultural and economic aspects that have contributed to its revitalization in recent decades: the unification process of the European Union, the 'Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe' sustainable tourism and regional development program, the world heritage program of cultural route heritage, the tourism planning strategies of the Spanish and Galician government, the rise of 'alternative tourism' such as wellness tourism, the influence of New Age spirituality all play a part in the growing popularity of the Camino has gained as a heritage project and a tourism destination (Bowers & Cheer, 2017; Herrero, 2008; Ivakhiv, 2003; Murray & Graham, 1997; Tilson, 2005; Trauer, 2006). The successful model of the Camino has already

been applied elsewhere in culture heritage development, particularly pilgrimage routes around the world, which is termed as the phenomenon of 'Caminonization' (Gusmán et al., 2017; Lois-González et al., 2014; Magry, 2015). The lessons learned from the Camino de Santiago can inspire heritage management practice on other world cultural route heritage, which is common memory and treasure of the entire humanity. The pitfalls and challenges that the Camino had to face in its rapid development and massive use can also bring lessons for practitioners to learn.

The tourist experience can be understood as the subjective interpretation of the meanings and memories created during travel-related events or while consuming tourism-related services (Nash & Smith, 1991; Uriely, 2005). It leaves a profound mark on the tourist's memory, wellbeing, identity, meaning-making, destination perception, satisfaction, and intention to revisit (Ali et al., 2016; Moscardo, 2010). Given that the conceptualization of the tourist experience is highly subjective and shaped by sociocultural contexts (Collins-Kreiner, 2010; Nash & Smith, 1991; Uriely, 2005), the non-Western tourist experience should be interpreted through different cultural lenses, taking a critical distance from Anglo-Western sociological theories (Cohen & Cohen, 2012; Jensen et al., 2015; Nash & Smith, 1991; Winter, 2009). Most current studies focus on pilgrims from parts of the Western world, such as Europe, North America, and Oceania. The past studies on pilgrim experience of the Camino involve the study of pilgrim motivation, their experience with the environment and the people, their physical and inner experience, whether they have experienced transformation in their perception, behavior, or attitudes (Amaro et al., 2018; Farias et al., 2019; Fernández et al., 2012; Luik, 2012; Nilsson & Tesfahuney, 2016; Oviedo et al., 2014). Experience in the spiritual realm of Chinese Camino travelers will be examined in the light of the theoretical frameworks of spiritual transformation and quantum change

by Pargament (2006) and Miller (2004). The changing motivational landscape and its impact on the identity of the Camino heritage route and its travelers have provoked debate among scholars (Carbone et al., 2016; Cazaux, 2011; Lois-González & Santos, 2015; López, 2013; Luik, 2012; Norman, 2009; Oviedo et al., 2014). The internal process of the pilgrim individuals is also widely studied to draw a road map of personal transformation and community formation on the Camino (Balar, 2018; Blom et al., 2016; Genoni, 2011; Husemann & Eckhardt, 2019; Kim et al., 2016; Luik, 2012; Nilsson & Tesfahuney, 2016). A close look at how the Camino is experienced by travelers from a non-Western background contributes to a more complete picture of the phenomena of the tourist experience on the Santiago Pilgrimage Routes, and of the tourist experience in general (Blom et al., 2016; Overall, 2019; Sánchez y Sánchez & Hesp, 2019).

As Spain is one of the most-visited tourist destinations in the world, the entities responsible for tourism promotion in this country are striving to offer innovative and diversified tourist products to attract more high-spending tourist markets, such as China, Russia, and the USA, as one of the measures to compensate for the limitations of seasonality (Lojo, 2016; Medina-Muñoz et al., 2013). The growing importance of Chinese outbound tourism, combined with the interest in cultural and alternative tourism activities, makes China one of the places with the greatest potential for outbound tourism (UNWTO, 2019; Xiang, 2013). The global context is transforming at an unprecedented speed, weakening traditional outbound markets, with a strong and keen interest in capturing the attention of emerging markets. The world is currently recovering from the interruptions caused by a global pandemic. According to a series of surveys by the McKinsey in the last two years, Chinese tourists' desires to travel remain strong, both domestically and internationally, and destinations of culture/history has gained more popularity than before

(Zhao & Liu, 2020; Chen et al., 2022). The international tourist market will take more time to fully recover, bringing Chinese tourists back is the aim of many international destinations including Spain (Casa Asia, 2022; Cuesta-Valiño et al., 2021; Saunokonoko & Blancato, 2022). Adaptation to the world's largest market - China, therefore, is becoming necessary. In this context, marketing plays an essential role, beyond its promotional role, as an effective tool for tourism territorial management (Majdoub, 2010). To that end, understanding the travel experiences and preferences of Chinese travelers on the Camino can provide more first-hand information for local tourist sectors in Spain and, thus, can help them to improve their management and service in a more responsive way to this group of customers, increase the attractiveness of the Camino, and enhance their chances of success as an emerging destination among Chinese travelers who currently have little awareness of the Camino de Santiago.

1.3 Objectives and Contribution

The main objectives of the current study are two-fold: firstly to investigate the overall experience of Chinese travelers on the Camino to add the knowledge of non-Western traveler experience of the Santiago heritage route and to get in touch with the changing interests and needs of contemporary travelers from China; secondly to learn from their experience and that of the Western Camino travelers about the evolved identity and key attractions of the Santiago heritage route as a global cultural route in the 21st century, to inform the best strategy for the sustainable management of cultural route heritage including the Camino itself. Specifically, the research intends to answer the following questions:

1. What are the factors that motivated Chinese travelers to do the Camino? Where did they learn about the Camino for the first time? How did they plan for the

journey? What are their travel preferences in relation to the Camino, such as the routes they chose, the length of journey, the mode of traveling? What is the demographic profile of the Chinese Camino tourists, who among Chinese travelers are attracted to the Camino?

2. What are the experiences of the body, food, accommodation, nature, culture, people met on the way, internal experience such as attitude, perception, affectivity and spirituality of Chinese travelers of the Camino?
3. How do Chinese travelers evaluate the Camino de Santiago as a heritage project and as a tourist destination? What features or qualities of the Camino attracted Chinese travelers the most?
4. To what extent are the experiences of the Chinese tourists similar to that of the Western tourists? What are the underlying socio-cultural factors?
5. What would be the effective marketing strategies to promote the Camino de Santiago among Chinese tourists?
6. What implications can be drawn from the how Chinese and Western travelers experienced the Camino, for the sustainable development of the Camino itself and for other cultural route heritage projects and destinations?

Keeping in mind the investigative interests in answering the above questions, this research hopes to fill in the gap in the relevant literature on the tourist experience of the Camino de Santiago by contributing the cross-cultural experience of the destination to the existing knowledge about the topic. The research also intends to provide further, innovative thoughts on the sustainable management and tourist development strategies of worldly-known and consumed, large and complex cultural route heritage from the lessons and examples of the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage routes.

1.4 Methodological Approach

The phenomenological approach was adopted for the purpose of this research. The best way to understand subjectively constructed social reality is to learn about it in its historical, social context and from the individuals who have experienced the phenomena themselves (Black, 2006; Creswell, 2009; Patton, 1990; 2008). The research methods for studying experience are rich, which may include participant observation, document analysis and interview (Creswell, 2009; Gray, 2004). But the total size of Chinese travelers of the Camino is small and this population is not easy to reach, so participant observation is not a practical option. But the user-generated content (UGC) by Chinese Camino travelers is relatively rich and available, as some Chinese travelers have shared their travel experience of the Camino online in the form of blogs. Given the usefulness of UGC in tourism research and its non-intrusive, accessible, and cost-effective advantages (Carson, 2008; Chen et al., 2014; Olson, 2008), ninety-four travel blogs posted by Chinese Camino travelers on popular Chinese travel websites were identified and carefully selected as the main source of data in this research. Besides the ninety-four travel blogs, twelve interview respondents were recruited to participate in semi-structured in-depth interviews to investigate their Camino experience, and particularly to elaborate their responses to some specific themes that have been observed from the travel blog data but lack sufficient information for a clearer understanding.

Content analysis was the main tool for analyzing the data collected from travel blogs and in-depth interviews in order to describe the experience of Chinese Camino travelers in its fullness and depth, to capture the key thematic variables such as motivation, travel pattern, precursors to decision-making, cognitive-affective perceptions, transformation, identify formation interpersonal interactions, impressions of the place and the people,

nature and culture, uncovering the contributing factors to those experiences, with attention paid to the dynamic relationships among those variables so that the traveler experiences can be understood in the rich socio-cultural context (Berelson, 1952; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Lindgren et al., 2020).

1.5 Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is organized in the following structure (Table 1):

1. Part one is an introduction of the research problem in the context of cultural route as an innovative category of heritage and a tool for sustainable tourism and regional development, to justify the purpose and objective of this study.
2. Part two consists of a review of the previous literature to introduce the state-of-the-art knowledge about the topic and to identify the existing gap which the current study intends to fill.
3. That is followed by a description of the research design, approach, sampling, data collection and analysis strategies used in the investigative process in part three.
4. In part four research findings are provided in details and it's followed by a thorough discussion in the light of the previously identified theoretical frameworks and research findings about Camino traveler experience, about the Camino de Santiago heritage route and about Chinese tourists. New frameworks to better understand traveler transformative experience and trans-cultural experience of the Camino and to better manage cultural route heritage to achieve sustainable development goals of heritage projects and tourist destinations of this kind were discussed and proposed.
5. In the concluding part of the thesis, the main findings and contribution of this research were summarized and implications on marketing, management of the

Camino de Santiago, future development of global cultural routes were elaborated.

The limitations of the research were pointed, with future research directions proposed at the end of the thesis.

6. At the end of the thesis, a list of references of the cited works, a list of tables and figures, the interview guide, the structure of codes, and the two published articles (co-authored with other research members of the ‘Global Cultural Route and Sustainability’ research group) are attached.

Table 1

The Structure of the Thesis

Section	Content
Part I	Introduction
Part II	Contextual and Conceptual Framework
Part III	Methodology
Part IV	Results and Findings
Part V	Conclusions
References	References
Index	List of Tables
	List of Figures
Appendix	Interview Guide
	List of Codes
	Article ‘A guest at home: The experience of Chinese pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago’
	Article ‘Ancient routes, new gateways: A systematic literature review of China’s cultural route heritage’

Source: author’s elaboration

Part II. Contextual and Conceptual Framework

Chapter 2. The Camino de Santiago: Identity and Conceptualization as Cultural Route

Heritage

2.1 The Conceptual Development of Cultural Route Heritage

Cultural heritage represents the shared memory of people in a community, a region, a nation, or among nations. It bears witness to the formation of history and socio-cultural identity (Dumcke & Gnedovsky, 2013; Timothy & Byod, 2015). Modern societies are increasingly aware of the importance of preserving their cultural and natural heritage, so that future generations can also have access to the common memories of our humanity that have shaped identity and reality for present-day people. This awareness led the UNESCO to adopt the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (UNESCO, 1972). By the year 2021, there were 1,154 heritages inscribed in the World Heritage List, distributed among 167 countries around the world (UNESCO, 2021). The heritage project has acquired global momentum as one of the greatest collective human achievements of the past decades.

The understanding of the essence of cultural heritage has deepened through decades of multi-disciplinary research and practical experience in the implementation of the Convention (UNESCO, 1972). In the 1980s, the development of the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe (COE) program contributed to a significant evolution in the field of heritage conservation and utilization. Since the notion of 'cultural route' first appeared in Europe with the Santiago de Compostela Declaration (COE, 1987) and the subsequent inscription of the Santiago Pilgrimage Routes into the World Heritage list in 1993, the concept of cultural route heritage has attracted a great deal of scholarly attention and discussion in the field of cultural heritage research and practice, with the Camino de

Santiago as the inspiration in mind (Ruiz et al., 2017). Immediately following 1993 inscription of the Santiago pilgrimage routes in the List of World Heritage Sites (UNESCO, 1993), the Spanish government initiated an in-depth investigation on 'cultural routes' and called for scholars and heritage experts to assemble in Madrid, Spain in 1994, to hold a conference under the title of 'Routes as Part of Our Cultural Heritage'. The experts from this meeting reached an agreement in identifying heritage routes as a 'rich and fertile' concept, a new framework that allows 'mutual understanding, a plural approach to history and culture of peace', a type of heritage that is based on and highlights dynamic 'population movement, encounters and dialogue, cultural exchanges and cross-fertilization, taking place both in space and time' (UNESCO, 1994). In this meeting, experts have listed some key defining elements as well as delimitation criteria about heritage routes along spatial, temporal and cultural dimensions. In conclusion, the meeting recommended to add a new paragraph in the Operational Guidelines of the World Heritage Convention (1972):

A heritage route is composed of tangible elements of which the cultural significance comes from exchanges and a multi-dimensional dialogue across countries or regions, and that illustrate the interaction of movement, along the route, in space and time (UNESCO, 1994).

With further discussion and refinement, in February of 2005, the World Heritage Center of UNESCO, following the conceptualization and proposal of the meeting in Madrid 1994, started to include 'heritage route' as an emerging heritage category in its updated version of operational guidelines, together with another new category 'canal heritage', in addition to the existing categories, namely, monuments, groups of buildings, sites, historical towns and town centers, cultural landscape. The definition of heritage routes in the following versions of the Operational Guidelines (UNESCO, 2019) retained in essence

the original conceptualization from the meeting in 1994:

22. The concept of heritage routes is shown to be a rich and fertile one, offering a privileged framework in which mutual understanding, a plural approach to history and a culture of peace can all operate.

23. A heritage route is composed of tangible elements of which the cultural significance comes from exchanges and a multi-dimensional dialogue across countries or regions, and that illustrate the interaction of movement, along the route, in space and time (UNESCO, 2019).

A milestone in the conceptual development of cultural route was reached when the advisory body of UNESCO's world heritage program, the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), through one of its scientific committees dedicated for cultural route heritage, i.e. International Scientific Committee on Cultural Routes (CIIC) which was founded in 1998, defined this form of comprehensive and holistic heritage in the ICOMOS Charter on Cultural Routes (ICOMOS, 2008) during the 16th general assembly in Quebec, Canada. In the Charter, a cultural route is defined as:

“Any route of communication, be it land, water, or some other type, which is physically delimited and characterized by having its own specific dynamic and historic functionality, which must fulfil the following conditions: It must arise from and reflect interactive movements of people as well as multi-dimensional, continuous, and reciprocal exchanges of goods, ideas, knowledge and values between peoples, countries, regions or continents over significant periods of time. It must have thereby promoted a cross-fertilization of the affected cultures in space and time, as reflected both in their tangible and intangible heritage; it must have integrated into a dynamic the historic relations and cultural properties associated with its existence.” (ICOMOS, 2008).

The Charter on Cultural Routes defined the fundamental, essential characteristics of the heritage:

1. being a route of communication
2. being physically delimited
3. with specific dynamic and historic functionality over significant period of time
4. being a reflection of interactive movements of people
5. reciprocal exchanges between peoples, regions are reflected in tangible and intangible heritage
6. being integrated into a dynamic system

The Charter also defines the typology, identification, purpose, research and management aspects of cultural route heritage. This definition helps the research of many historical routes that came into existence as a result of dynamic human communication around the world from a totally new and holistic perspective.

Cultural routes can be classified according to different dimensions of their characteristics, such as spatial, temporal, functional or cultural features of the routes (ICOMOS, 2008). Here are some examples:

7. Temporal dimension: those routes that are still in use (e.g., the Santiago Pilgrimage Routes) and those that are no longer in use (e.g., Qhapaq Ñan Andean Road System)
8. Spatial dimension:
 - a. Structural configuration: linear, circular, cruciform, radial (the Santiago Pilgrimage Routes) or network (the Silk Road)
 - b. Territorial scope: local (the pilgrimage route to Church of Nativity), national (the Incense Route), regional: (the Tea and Horse Ancient Road), continental (the Camino Real de Tierra Adentro), intercontinental (the Silk Road)

- c. Natural environment: land (the Frankincense Route), water (the Grand Canal, the Maritime Silk Road), mixed or other physical setting.
- 9. Functional dimension: economic (the Silk Road), political (the Grand Canal), cultural (the Silk Road), social (the Santiago Pilgrimage Routes, migration routes). But often times, cultural routes have evolved to be multi-functional.
- 10. Cultural scope: within a given cultural region (the Incense Route), crossing cultural regions (the Silk Road, the Tea and Horse Ancient Roads).

From the descriptions above of the charter on cultural route heritage (ICOMOS, 2008) we can see that this is indeed conceptualized a new category of heritage, an evolutionary step forward in the conceptualization of cultural heritage, originally from the protection of monuments, buildings and sites to the inclusion of their contexts such as in historical towns and cultural landscape, and now to cultural routes/heritage routes and heritage canals. This latest expansion of heritage categories incorporates the connections among rich heritage resources in continuous spaces into an integrative whole. As compared to other forms of cultural heritage, the ICOMOS 2008 definition highlights some distinctive features of cultural route heritage along spatial, temporal, cultural, purposeful dimensions, besides the outstanding universal values it possesses. For example, it emphasizes temporal and spatial continuity, for some routes can be significantly large in scale, traversing vast geographical regions, sometimes crossing continents; it includes great diversity in heritage forms and in landscape; it forms an integrative system itself, inseparable from its context and environment, and the value of the route as a whole is greater than the sum of its individual parts; it reflects the interactive, dynamic historical process of human communication and connection; the purpose of cultural routes as heritage projects has an overarching diachronical significance: it helps to the understanding and preservation of the

reciprocal exchanges and ties among peoples and cultures in history, it serves as an instrument for sustainable territorial development today, and it constitutes a platform for fostering cross-cultural understanding, collaboration and cohesion in the future (Ceballos-Santamaría et al., 2021; Gao, 2017; ICOMOS, 2008; Majdoub, 2010; Wang & Ruan, 2009).

The ICOMOS definition of cultural route heritage (ICOMOS, 2008) is essentially the same of the definition described in the Madrid declaration in 1994 about cultural routes, which is still adopted by the World Heritage Center of UNESCO under the name 'heritage route'. Following the current version of operational guidelines for world heritage application, certification and management, the definition of cultural route or heritage route has helped the identification and certification of several cultural route world heritage, which is illustrated in table 2. As we can find, there are not as many cultural route heritages as one may think, when all the temporal, spatial, cultural criteria are applied. Some of them are primarily trade routes that cross vast regions and have lasted for a long time in history, others are pilgrimage routes or transportation networks by origin but gradually served other purposes of trade, religion, communication, and have left many heritages of cross-fertilizing, dynamic cultural exchange of different peoples in history. There are also some heritage canals in the world heritage list but not in the list here, such as the Grand Canal in China, inscribed in 2014. Those canals have also played a role of a cultural route and thus can be identified as cultural route heritage according to the ICOMOS definition. Of course, there are more cultural route heritage to be identified, investigated, and preserved, just like cleaning and polishing a precious ancient gem that has been covered with dust so that it can shine again before the people today.

Table 2

Cultural Route World Heritage

No.	Name of the cultural route world heritage	Year of inscription
1	Routes of Santiago de Compostela: Camino Francés and Routes of Northern Spain	1993, 2015
2	Incense Route – Desert Cities in the Negev	2005
3	Camino Real de Tierra Adentro	2010
4	Silk Roads: The Routes Network of Chang’an-Tianshan Corridor	2014
5	Qhapaq Ñan, Andean Road System	2014

Source: CIIC (2021)

2.2 The Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe

The term ‘cultural route’ was first used in 1987 by the Council of Europe in recognizing the Santiago Pilgrimage routes as the ‘first cultural route of the Council of Europe’ because ‘Today the Council of Europe is proposing the revitalization of one of those roads, the one that led to the shrine of Santiago de Compostela. That route, highly symbolic in the process of European unification, will serve as a reference and example for future projects.’ (COE, 1987). The cultural route program that is formalized in the ‘Enlarged Partial Agreement on Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe’ or EPA in short (COE, 2010) aims at celebrating the common memory, values and identity of Europe today, and promoting sustainable tourism (Herrero-Perez, 2008; Schrire, 2006). In 1998 the Council of Europe established the European Institute of Cultural Routes as an advisory board in the process of certification of European cultural routes. To be certified as a cultural route of the Council of Europe, it must fulfill the following criteria (COE, 2010):

1. involves a theme that is representative of European values and common to at least three countries in Europe
2. is the subject of transnational, multidisciplinary scientific research
3. enhances European memory, history and heritage and contribute to interpretation of Europe’s present-day diversity
4. supports cultural and educational exchanges for young people

5. develops exemplary and innovative projects in the field of cultural tourism and sustainable cultural development
6. develops tourist products and services aimed at different groups

The certification standards of the Council of Europe can be better understood from the 45 cultural routes of the Council of Europe till 2021 since the recognition of the first European cultural route – the Camino de Santiago in 1987. All the 45 routes are listed below in table 3.

Table 3

Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe.

No.	Name of the Route	Year of certification
1	Santiago de Compostela Pilgrim Routes	1987
2	The Hansa	1991
3	Viking Routes	1993
4	Via Francigena	1994
5	Routes of El legado andalusí	1997
6	Phoenician's Route	2003
7	Pyrenean Iron Route	2003
8	European Mozart Ways	2004
9	European Route of Jewish Heritage	2004
10	Saint Martin de Tours Route	2005
11	Cluniac Sites in Europe	2005
12	Routes of the Olive Tree	2005
13	Via Regia	2005
14	TRANSROMANICA – The Romanesque Routes of European Heritage	2007
15	Iter Vitis Route	2009
16	European Route of Cistercian abbeys	2010
17	European Cemeteries Route	2010
18	Prehistoric Rock Art Trails	2010
19	European Route of Historic Thermal Towns	2010
20	Route of Saint Olav Ways	2010
21	European Route of Ceramics	2012
22	European Route of Megalithic Culture	2013
23	Huguenot and Waldensian trail	2013
24	ATRIUM – Architecture of Totalitarian Regimes of the 20th century in Europe's Urban Memory	2014
25	Réseau Art Nouveau Network	2014

26	Via Habsburg	2014
27	Roman Emperors and Danube Wine Route	2015
28	European Routes of Emperor Charles V	2015
29	Destination Napoleon	2015
30	In the Footsteps of Robert Louis Stevenson	2015
31	Fortified towns of the Grande Region	2016
32	Impressionisms Routes	2018
33	Via Charlemagne	2018
34	Liberation Route Europe	2019
35	European Route of Industrial Heritage	2019
36	Le Corbusier Destinations : Architectural Promenades	2019
37	Iron Curtain Trail	2019
38	Routes of Reformation	2019
39	Via Romea Germanica	2020
40	European Route of Historic Gardens	2020
41	Aeneas Route	2021
42	Alvar Aalto Route – 20th Century Architecture and Design	2021
43	Dyril and Methodius Route	2021
44	The European Route d’Artagnan	2021
45	Iron Age Danube Route	2021

Source: Council of Europe (COE), 2021

Although referring to the same terminology of ‘cultural route’, there are some similarities as well as differences of the conceptual frameworks adopted by the two institutions, i.e., COE and ICOMOS. One common feature of the definitions of the two institutions about cultural route heritage is that both adopt a holistic approach towards heritage conceptualization by taking into consideration the temporal, spacial and social contexts of the heritage, incorporating both tangible and intangible elements. Both definitions emphasize the historical and cultural aspects of a given cultural route, which differentiate a route from other cultural heritage of linear form that is featured more by its natural environment landscapes, e.g., heritage trails, landscape corridor, cultural corridor or greenways (Timothy & Boyd, 2015; Xu et al., 2019). What’s more, as a highlighted and common theme, both cultural route heritage by COE and ICOMOS put high value in the historical as well as political-social functions of the heritage, that is to say, the

contemporary value of cultural route heritage is to establish a dialogue between the past and the present (Schrire, 2006) and serve as an instrument of communication and connection, i.e. for enhancing inter-group, cross-regional understanding, collaboration and solidarity (COE, 2010; ICOMOS, 2008).

Differences can be observed in the conceptualization of cultural route by the ICOMOS and by the COE. The former conceptualizes a cultural route concerning primarily for heritage identification and conservation, not its economic nor social development. This is also the case with the 'heritage routes' defined by the World Heritage Center of the UNESCO. The conceptualization of cultural routes of the COE program also strategically aims at the promotion of education, tourism, and rural development in the regions of Europe, especially in eastern Europe, so it purposively certifies cultural routes with these targets in vision, as reflected in the routes certified starting 2019 onward. The ICOMOS definition of cultural route also points to a physical delimitation as one of the criteria for identifying this type of cultural heritage, whereas definition of cultural routes under the Council of Europe framework does not specify this feature (Guo & Yang 2015; Liu & Shen 2017).

2.3 The Santiago Pilgrimage Routes

The pilgrimage routes that lead to Santiago de Compostela in today's Autonomous Region of Galicia, northwestern Spain, known as the Camino the Santiago, or St. James' Way in English, is the first cultural route claimed both by the Council of Europe (COE, 1987) and in the World Heritage List (UNESCO, 1993). The Santiago pilgrimage routes as a heritage route, is an exemplar cultural route heritage in the world. It deserves to be thoroughly investigated for a deeper understanding of cultural route heritage and the

application in the conservation, management, and utilization of this special and complex form of cultural heritage.

2.3.1 Early History, Golden Age, and Its Decline

The pilgrimage route is named after St. James the Great (Sant'Iago), one of Jesus' twelve apostles, who said to be beheaded by King Herod Agrippa I in 44 A.D. in Jerusalem. In accordance with Christian tradition, after his martyrdom his body was transferred by his two disciples on a boat, crossing the Mediterranean Sea and up to the ria Arousa at Iria Flavia (today's El Padrón) of the northwestern part of the Iberian Peninsula, the Atlantic coast of today's region of Galicia, where St. James used to preach the Gospel (although without much success, according to the legends). The disciples buried the relics of St. James in the hill of Libredón, which is about 40 km away from the port. Today's city of Santiago de Compostela is in the location of Libredón. After some time, nobody remembered where exactly the tomb of St. James was, although this part of the territory eventually turned Christianized. All this changed in the early 9th century, when reportedly a hermit named Pelayo living in the area was attracted by strange light from the forest and he informed the local bishop Theodomir, who led a group of people to investigate. They discovered an ancient tomb complex or 'sarcophagus' (Stone, 1927), and two stone coffins nearby. From the documents found in the tomb the relics in the bigger tomb were attributed to St James and that from other two tombs to the two disciples of St. James. The bishop immediately informed King of Asturias and Galicia Alfonso II, who upon learning of the discovery of the Apostle's tomb, went to pay his visit. After his pilgrimage, the king commanded the construction of a shrine to preserve the tomb and honor the saint. This is the primitive form of what is known as the Cathedral of the Santiago de Compostela. The king notified the Pope and the Emperor Charlemagne, and he declared St James the Great the patron of

Spain, which is till the case today. From then on, kings and nobles, the religious and clergy, the lay people started to walk to the tomb of St. James the Great from all parts of Europe. The pilgrimage way, known as the Way of St. James, started to take form (Chemin, 2016; Dunn & Davidson, 1996; Schrire, 2006; Tilson, 2005).

As more nobles and church leaders endorsed and promoted the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela, the shrine gained the fame to be one the of three best known pilgrimage destinations in the 12th century, among the Christian world, next to that of Jerusalem and Rome. The religious institutions, the kings and nobles sponsored the infrastructure construction such as landmarks, roads, bridges, springs, hospitals to facilitate and promote the pilgrimage and attend to the needs of pilgrims. Many religious organizations especially the Cluny are responsible for construction of new churches, convents, pilgrim refuges. More and more pilgrims walked on the way to Santiago, which led to rise of several towns and cities and of commercial activities along various Jacobean routes. The pilgrimage road to Santiago enjoyed hits golden times during the 11th – 12th century. It was believed there were around 500,000 pilgrims who traveled on the Camino annually in the medieval times. The most popular route is the French way, in which pilgrims started their journey from four different points in France, walked down to points in today's Aragon and Navarra and turned westward to Santiago. The itineraries, the landscape, culture and people of the French way were well documented in the 12th century book *Codex Calixtinus*, the first complete guidebook about the way of St. James. As pilgrims and medieval travelers traveled to these territories, they brought with them information, ideas, skills, materials, which all contributed to the formation of the territory and beyond – in the Christian world (Chemin, 2016; Herrero-Perez, 2008; Lois-González, 2013; Murray & Graham, 1997; Schrire, 2006; Tilson, 2005)

From the 15th to the 19th century, the Santiago mass pilgrimage phenomenon entered a decline due to several factors such as the rise of the Protestant denominations who is against the concept of sainthood, pilgrimage, and the worship of their relics, which discouraged those pilgrims from the protestant countries to come to Santiago. Another factor is the war affairs between Castilla and Francia, which led to the loss of pilgrims of France. The pandemics also played a part. As the number of pilgrims declined, the roads were not well maintained, they gradually got damaged and became difficult or impossible to travel through. Even though the Catholic church continues to encourage pilgrims to walk the St. James Way, the pilgrimage roads fell into decline, till a re-amination of the Camino in the 20th century, when this millennial pilgrimage route experienced a new birth. Till then, the Way of St. James were traveled by very few people each year. Based on the records from the Pilgrim Office of the Santiago Cathedral, there were only some 50 pilgrims who claimed the Compostela, a certificate issued to the pilgrim upon their completion of the pilgrimage (Gusmán et al., 2017; Herrero-Perez, 2008; Lois-González, 2013; Santos, 1999; Schrire, 2006).

2.3.2 The Rise of the Camino de Santiago in the 20th Century

The Santiago pilgrimage way began to witness a steady return of its pilgrims back on the road in the 1980s (Herrero-Perez, 2008; Schrire, 2006). The registered number of pilgrims claiming a pilgrim certificate at the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela has grown up to more than 300,000 a year before the pandemic (Oficina de Acogida al Peregrino Catedral de Santiago de Compostela, 2020) from less than 100 before 1980s. with a pattern that there are greater numbers in the Compostela year than other years. The Compostela year or the holy year of the Way of St. James is the year when July 25th falls on a Sunday. It's said that the remains of St. James were excavated on July 25th in the 9th century, and

during medieval times the Catholic church announced the holy year of St. James Way to promote the pilgrimage (Tilson, 2005).

What is behind the rise of the Camino in the 20th century after hundreds of years of silence, why this time, why this way? Many scholars attempted to find an answer for those questions. This author thinks that all the factors behind the regained popularity of the Camino de Santiago can be understood from three closely inter-related aspects: economic, political, and sociocultural. These factors have been present now and then, but only when they played a synergy the Jacobean routes were brought back to a new life.

For example, as early as the 2nd half of the 19th century, the Catholic Church attempted to bring pilgrims back to the Camino as an effort to preserve Catholic faith against the influence of the Protestants. The highlighted moment of this campaign is the rediscovery of the Apostle's tomb which the Church immediately approved the discovery (Lois-González, 2013). But this didn't make much difference in terms of the number of visitors to the pilgrimage way. It's also mentioned that the interest in history of the Camino that has attracted some interests of the Way from 1950-60s, as reflected by the founding of the French association of 'the friends of St. Jame's Way' and the profile of those who traveled on the Camino pilgrimage route being mainly historians, teachers, scholars, and clergies (Herrero-Perez, 2008; Lois-Gonzalez, 2013; Lois-González et al., 2014). The institutionalization campaign in Spain during Franco's time in which St. James was patronized for national unity and many historical buildings were renovated in Santiago (Gusmán et al., 2017). This may have raised awareness of the importance of the religious devotion to the saint, but it has little impact in terms of number of pilgrims doing the Camino – there were less than 100 pilgrims each year during the 70s and early 80s (Santiago, 2017).

But things started to change in the 1980s. The rapid economic recovery and urbanization in the post-war western Europe allowed the rise of many middle-class urban population. Increased personal income, mobility and free time allowed individuals to start to look for leisure and travel opportunities (Herrero-Perez, 2008; Tilson, 2005). The 1960-70s also witnessed the growth of tourism industry in Western Europe especially in the country of Spain. As leisure, sport and mass tourism become part of life in western Europe, the tourism market grew more diversified and the need for alternative. But not until 1980s after Galicia and other regions along the Camino de Santiago became autonomous regions, the northern part of Spain didn't utilize much of its resources for tourism development (Lois-González, 2013; Tilson, 2015). As Galicia became an autonomous region in 1978, the local government – Xunta de Galicia – set tourism a key economic development strategy to increase employment, income, rural vitalization. The strategies to combine heritage and tourism with the Camino de Santiago the number one out of its four 'brand products' (the other three are natural landscape, gastronomy and historical art heritage) in its tourism development, especially in the capital city Santiago de Compostela. The city invested a lot in heritage restoration and promotion, in the infrastructure such as construction of public pilgrim hostels, renovation of historical building, restoration of roads during the 1990s. The two 'años santos' (holy years), i.e., year 1993 and 1999, were two milestone moments for the revitalization of the Santiago pilgrimage way, for which the Xunta de Galicia spent a great amount of public fund to promote the Camino de Santiago through all channels. The tourism department of the Xunta created 'Plan Xacobeo', - a section that is responsible for the management of the Camino and promotion of the Jacobean culture, in collaboration with the governments and private sector such as the airlines, hospitality business, TV, publication, websites and new media, etc. The Xunta also supported many activities of

academic institutions, the Church, civil organizations such as the various fraternity associations of the Camino (Murray, 2014; Santos, 2016; Tilson, 2005).

To the Xunta de Galicia, which just gained autonomous status in 1978, the promotion of the Camino de Santiago is not only a prioritized economic development strategy that utilizes its rich tourism resources, but also a political agenda that fosters a distinctive identity of the Galician territory, together with other elements such as its ancient Celtic traditions, culture related to the Atlantic Ocean and green, peaceful land (Herrero-Perez, 2008; Sexto & Vázquez, 2012). During the 1987, the signing of Single European Act marked a big step ahead for the economic-political integration of Europe. In the same year, the Council of Europe declared the Camino de Santiago the first cultural route of Europe (COE, 1987). As the flagship project of the cultural route program of the Council of Europe – an economic-cultural-political agenda of the European Union that aims at the promotion of political unity and ideals through shared heritage and memory, through tourism and education (COE, 2010), the Camino de Santiago is considered the best representation of the European political ideals and agenda that symbolizes a unifying Europe. Under the political narratives of a unifying European identity and a host of such traditions in the land of Galicia, public funding in heritage conservation and renovation, tourism development, and in infrastructure construction poured in during the 1990s from EU, Spanish State and Galician government (Grabow, 2010; Lois-González et al., 2014; Gusmán et al., 2017).

The 1980s also is a time of sociocultural prosperity worldwide, such as in the field of world heritage preservation, in which Europe has been taking a leading role in theory development and in management of its rich historical cultural heritage. In 1985 the historic center of the city of Santiago was inscribed in the World Heritage List, and in 1993, the

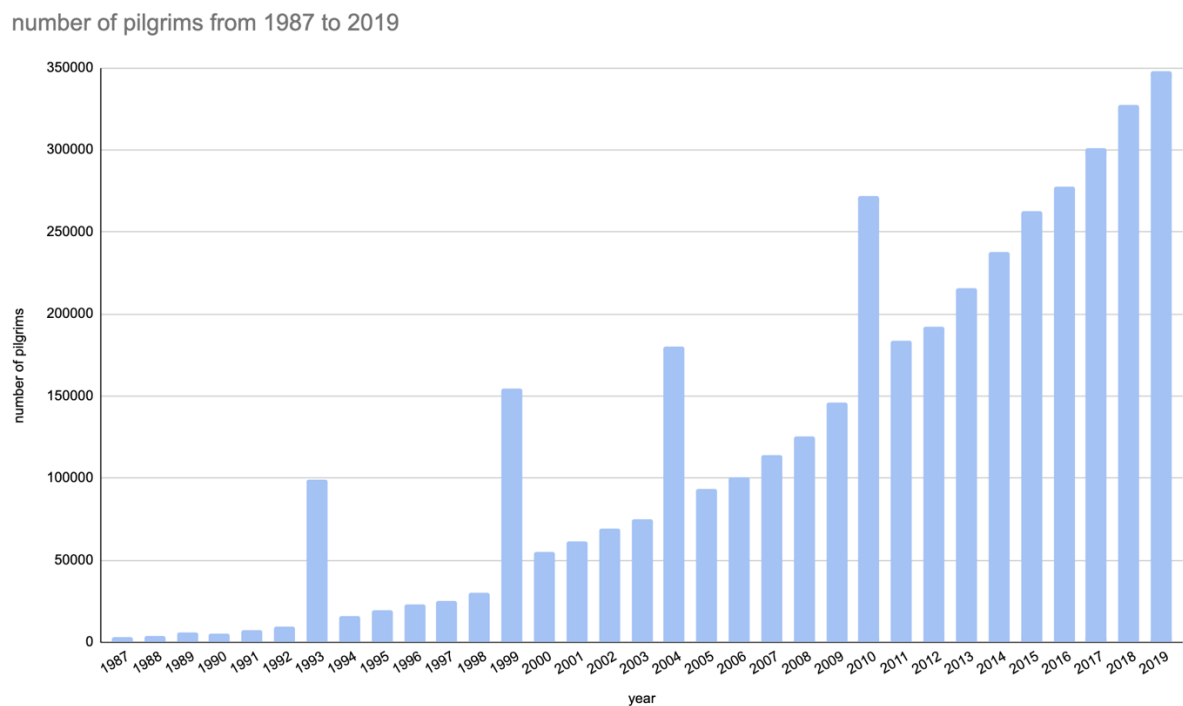
sections in the Spanish territory of the Camino French way obtained its fame as a world heritage (UNESCO, 1993). Public effort from all administrative levels has been made to the investigation and research of the Camino de Santiago pilgrim routes, heritage protection and renovation, documentation of intangible heritage resources, particularly the French way. By 2016, Xunta de Galicia has identified and restored 10 official routes of the Jacobean pilgrimage network (Gusmán et al., 2017; Lois-González, 2013; Santos-Solla & Lois-González, 2011). As a response to the rapid, often-stressful modern life, many people are looking for a rebalance, an escape from urban, industrial lifestyle, closeness with nature, authenticity, return to one's own cultural origins, nostalgia, a quest for spiritual growth, alternatives from homogeneous mass-tourism destinations, all boosted the growth of neo-tourism market, and the Camino de Santiago, a perfect combination of heritage tourism, nature tourism, leisure and sport, gastronomy and hospitality has so much to offer to the tourist market that is in need for such all-round, high-quality products. Together with the public promotion effort and collaborative work between Government and private sectors, the Camino de Santiago successfully attracted people back to the road (Frey, 1998; Lois-González et al., 2014; Santos-Solla & Lois-González, 2011; Tilson, 2005).

In conclusion, the rapid economic development in western Europe, the political endorsement and investment at the level of European Union (particularly through the coordination of the Council of Europe), Spanish state government and regional government (Xunta de Galicia) in the heritage preservation, infrastructure planning and construction, promotion of the Camino de Santiago (such as providing financial grants to public and private institutions in promoting the Xacobeo culture), the sociocultural development in Europe and the world, heritage recognition of the Camino in Europe and in the world through the UNESCO world heritage program, a rising public interest in heritage and nature

tourism, the promotion of the Jacobean pilgrimage by the Catholic Church following two papal visit in the 1980s, altogether played a symphony that brought the millennium-old cultural route back to a renewed life at the end of the 20th century. This revitalization of the Way of St. James is reflected in the steady increase of the number of pilgrims year by year since the 1987 till 2019, according to the official statistics of the International Pilgrim Office located in Santiago de Compostela, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Number of Pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago (1987-2019)



Source: Oficina de Acogida al Peregrino, Catedral de Santiago de Compostela (2020)

2.4 The New Identify of the Camino

2.4.1 Pilgrim Profile

As the number of people making the Camino de Santiago grew significantly in the 90s of the 20th century, especially during the two holy years of the Camino (1993 and 1999),

scholars started to pay attention to the Jacobean phenomenon, such as who are doing the Camino and why, what does the pilgrimage journey mean to those individuals?

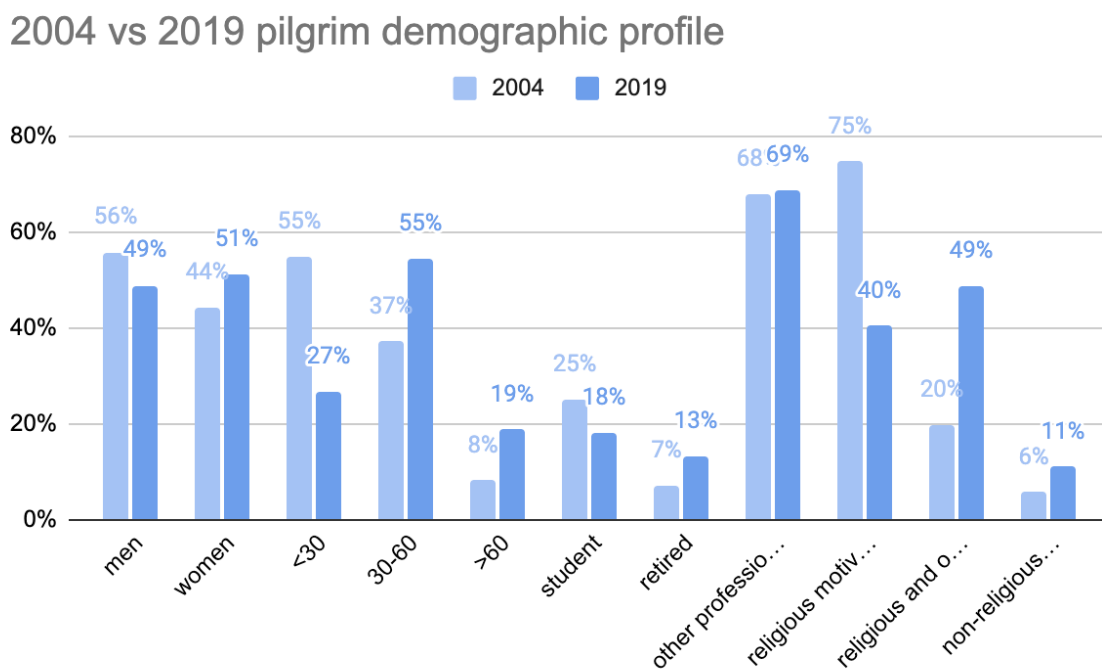
The statistics of the Pilgrims' Office provides a relatively good source of the pilgrim profile, i.e., their demographic information (gender, age, occupation, city/country of origin) and pilgrimage trip organization patterns (route, distance, starting point, travel means). A comparison is made of pilgrim information of 2004 and 2019, the earlier and the latest year with more complete pilgrim statistics available (Oficina de Acogida al Peregrino, Catedral de Santiago, several years).

As figure 2 shows, the percentages of men and women participating in the pilgrimage to Santiago are similar, with slightly more women doing the Camino today than before. Young people less than 30 years old used to be the main group among the pilgrims, about 55% of the total in 2004, but in 2019 it's the 'middle-age' people between 30-60 being the main cohort, also 55% of the total. There are also more and more senior pilgrims joining the pilgrim group, from 8% in 2004 up to 19% in 2019. The changes in age cohort show that the Camino is being enjoyed by more than just young people, it has become more physically possible and accessible to a much wider population, including senior people over age 60, which has doubled in the past 15 years. What remains the same is that the majority of the pilgrims all over the years are the working population, e.g., 68% in 2004 and 69% in 2019. Spanish pilgrims count for 76% of total pilgrims in 2004 but in 2019, this percentage dropped to 42%, which means 58% of the pilgrims in 2019 are of other nationalities. This can be reflected by the change in the number of countries or regions from where the pilgrims come from, from 114 countries and regions in 2004 to 190 in 2019. Indeed, the pilgrim profile in the 21st century has become more diverse, but the absolute majority, like about 90% of the pilgrims are from Europe, North and South America (Amaro

et al., 2018; Nilsson & Tesfahuney, 2016). A few studies indicated other features of the travelers who were attracted to world heritage route – the Camino de Santiago in the new century, for example, most of the Camino pilgrims are of middle-class background, urban origin and are well-educated individuals (Chemin, 2016; Kim et al., 2016).

Figure 2

Pilgrim Profile in 2004 vs 2019



Source: Oficina de Acogida al Peregrino, Catedral de Santiago de Compostela (2020)

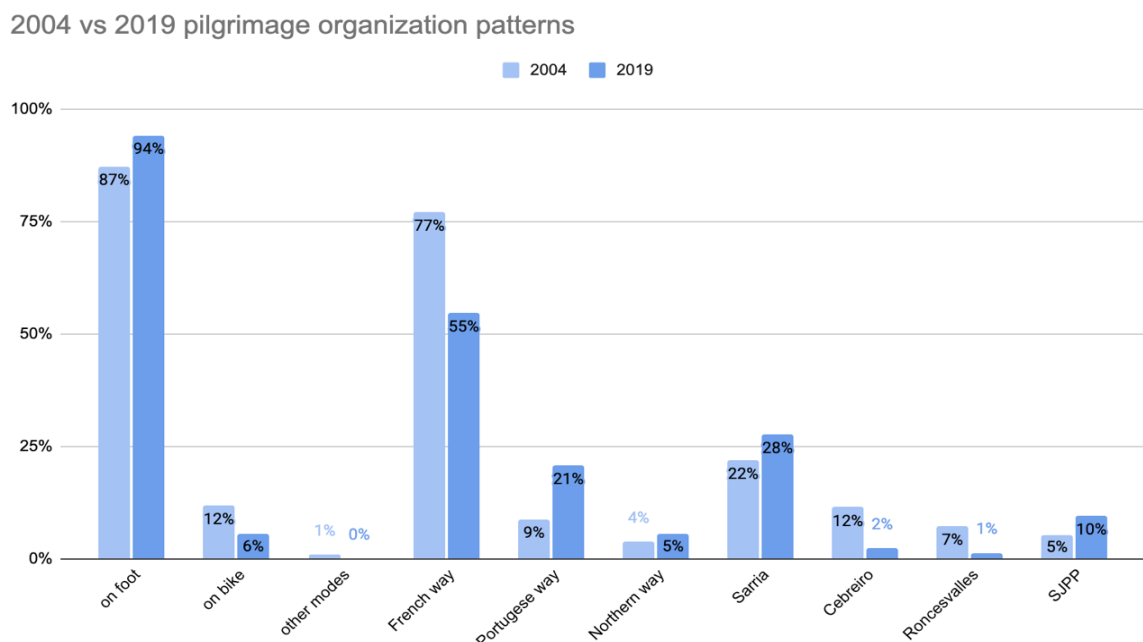
2.4.2 Pilgrimage Organization Patterns

The pilgrims traveling on the Santiago pilgrimage routes like to organize their journeys in particular ways (see Figure 3). For instance, majority of people chose to experience this millennium-old heritage route by walking it. There are 10 officially recognized itineraries by 2016 (Xunta de Galicia, 2016), but the French Way has been the most walked one, chosen by more than half of all the pilgrims. The Portuguese Way has been the second most popular route. Among other routes the route along the coast – the Northern Way has been attractive to many pilgrims, but in recent years another costal

route – the Portuguese Coastal Way has gained rapid popularity. In the past two decades, Sarria, a small town in Galicia (about 112 kilometers to Santiago) has been chosen by more than one fourth of all pilgrims as the starting point of their Camino. That is because from there a walking pilgrim can fulfill the minimum requirement of getting a pilgrim certificate or a ‘Compostela’ by completing the last 100 kilometers. Cebreiro, a mountain village (about 160 kilometers to Santiago) used to be the second most popular starting point, but now that has changed to Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port (SJPP), a small town at the foot of the Pyrenees, the beginning place of the French Way, about 10% of all pilgrims chose to start from Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port in 2019, taking the challenge of climbing the Pyrenees on the first day of their month-long trek to Santiago. As the routes passing through Portugal become more popular, Porto (about 230 kilometers to Santiago) is also one of the most popular starting point nowadays, about 11% of all pilgrims started in Porto in 2019.

Figure 3

Pilgrimage Organization Patterns in 2004 and 2019



Source: Oficina de Acogida al Peregrino, Catedral de Santiago de Compostela (2020)

2.4.3 The New Route Identity

The identity of the Camino de Santiago heritage route has evolved as time enters the 21st century, departing from what it used to be at its birth. The Camino today is different from the Camino of history in two major aspects: diversification and secularization (Cova et al., 2018; Gusmán et al., 2017; Lois-González, 2013; López & Santos, 2019; Murray & Graham, 1997). This can be observed from the changes in pilgrim motivation and profile, as well as the identify interpretation of the route.

The Santiago pilgrimage routes were born from a religious devotion to a Christian saint. They were walked by millions of faithful Christians for strengthening their faith and seeking penance. This tradition has given an identity of the territories it traverses and has left many tangible and intangible heritage behind. But those who walk the Camino de Santiago today chose to do so for many reasons than religious motivation: interest in nature and culture, in health and sport, leisure and relaxation, in a quest for authentic life or spiritual pursuit (Amaro et al., 2018; Frey, 1998; Lois-González, 2013; Murray & Graham, 1997). Besides the motivational landscape, the demographic background and way of traveling of the pilgrims on the Camino today are also becoming more diversified today than the middle age.

The various parties who are involved in the day-to-day realities of the Camino de Santiago this day also hold different and sometimes competing interpretations of what the Camino means or is today. To the Catholic Church, the Camino is the same traditional Christian pilgrimage way dedicated to St. James the Great; but to the European Union the Camino embodies the concept of a unified Europe; to the local and national government and the business sector it is a cultural tourism route that brings jobs and income to both cities and countryside; to the UNESCO the Camino is an exemplar of cultural route heritage

that expresses outstanding universal values of humanity; to the pilgrims and travelers on the way to Santiago, the space of the Camino stands for an authentic, simplified, and diverse life (Cova et al., 2018; Herrero-Perez, 2008; Lois-González, 2013; Schrire, 2006).

With so many narratives and interpretations about the identity of the Camino today, it's not surprising that there are disagreements among the different parties involved, for example, both the government and many Associations of the Friends of the Camino welcome the diversity of motivations with which modern pilgrims travel the Camino for, but the Catholic Church endorses only the religious motivation to do the Camino. But on the other hand, both the Church and the Associations of the Camino emphasizes the protection of the original way of experiencing the Camino, therefore both are against the trend or effort of commercialization of the Camino (Herrero-Perez, 2008; Schrire, 2006). As to the image of the Camino representing European ideals of solidarity and diversity, some scholars argued that in history the Camino stands for a fact of conflict (Christians against Muslims) and exclusion (only Christian faith only Christian religion), which means the traditional identity of the Camino does not represent the EU values of today, today's Camino being an example of unity and inclusion is merely a re-invention, re-animation by political institutions such as the EU and the Council of Europe (Chemin, 2016; Grabow, 2010; Gusmán et al., 2017). In short, the Camino in the 21st century is a diverse, polysemic space (Cova et al., 2018; Gusmán et al., 2017; Lois-González, 2013; Murray & Graham, 1997).

2.5 Challenges of the Camino in the 21st Century

Some scholars examined the fast growth of the Camino as a popular tourist destination. The recent popularity of the Camino among so many travelers has brought both income and problems to the regions it crosses. The biggest challenge that the Camino is facing nowadays however, comes from tourism overload, especially in the last 100

kilometers of the French Way in summer (Martín-Duque, 2017; Pérez-Guilarte & Lois-González, 2018). Tourism overload has threatened the authenticity and uniqueness of the heritage, compromised tourist experience as well. This must be addressed to guarantee the sustainability of the Camino both as a heritage and a tourist project (Gusmán et al., 2017; Tilson, 2005).

Another factor worth noting for the heritage and tourism management along the Santiago pilgrimage routes as well as other cultural route heritage is about the tourist planning in urban spots along the route. Such planning must integrate the route heritage resources into the holistic property of the place to balance heritage authenticity, integrity and sustainable economic local economy. A good example of such holistic planning is Astorga, a small town along the French way of the Camino, which mapped its cultural-tourist resources into four categories: the Roman heritage, the Camino, traditions and gastronomy, quality of life (Lois-González, 2003). All tourism or heritage resources under the four themes were integrated for tourism development in Astorga, with designed visitor itineraries and information on tourist maps available in pilgrims albergues as well as in tourism offices. It offers to both pilgrims and other type of visitors a holistic image of Astorga. Thus, one hand the Camino pilgrims who pass by Astorga can enjoy the rich and diverse attractions and delights of the city in a well-organized, clearly informed way. The local community can also enjoy the benefit of pilgrims passing their city without sacrificing their identity and quality of life.

Chapter 3: The Camino de Santiago as A Tourist Experience

3.1 Development of Alternative Tourism

3.1.1 The Emerging Trends in Tourism

The issue of sustainability has been placed at the center of tourism development worldwide as a response to the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda proposed by the United Nations (UNWTO, 2015). Tourism is one of the fastest growing industries in the 20th century, its expansion has brought great economic gains but also has brought challenges to the sustainability of the destination natural environment and the socio-cultural development of host communities (Neto, 2002). The tourism industry proposed a set of criteria for sustainable tourism practice, which aims to maximize the economic, natural and socio-cultural benefit and minimize negative impact to local communities in tourist destinations (Alfaro Navarro et al., 2020; GSTC, 2022). Nature-based or ecotourism, pro-poor tourism, rural tourism, cultural tourism, heritage tourism, slow tourism, etc. are brought to public and academic realm and have witnessed growth in the last two decades, following the sustainable imperative in the tourism sector (Antón & Almeida, 2009; Dickinson et al., 2011; Godtman Kling et al., 2017; Neto, 2002).

From the tourists' end, Trauer (2006) identified a cluster of a few new trends in tourism development as 'special interest tourism', which includes what are often referred to as 'alternative', 'sustainable', 'responsible' tourism. What sets such special interest tourism aside from mass tourism is its non-commercialized, individualized features when compared to other forms of tourism, and it is perceived as a reaction to the increasing social tendency of depersonalization and commodification when people entered the 21st century (Beck, 1999; Trauer, 2006; Wang, 1999). Indeed, desires to seek fulfillment and wellbeing, to promote the sense of self, to gain social approval are found behind the

motivations for the increasingly experience-seeking tourists (Opaschowski, 2001). From both sides of demand and supply, tourism has experienced an 'alternative' turn in the new century, in response to the negative consequences of fast modernization – environmental deterioration, over-commercialization and depersonalization in everyday life.

3.1.2 Walking for Personal Wellbeing and Sustainable Destination Development

Tourist activities that manifest a clear interest in promoting personal wellness in the fast-paced modern society are classified by some scholars as wellness tourism, a general umbrella of several forms of tourism themes, for example spiritual tourism, yoga tourism, meditation retreat tourism, health tourism, walking tourism (Barton et al., 2009; Bowers & Cheers, 2017; Fredrickson & Anderson, 1999; Lehto et al., 2006; Norman, 2012). Wellness tourism refers to journeys that are motivated by pursuits of health and wellbeing, at all dimensions including the physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual, and environmental (Mueller & Kaufmann, 2001; Voigt et al., 2011). Under this umbrella and focus, spiritual tourism is conceptualized by Norman (2012, p.21) as tourist activities that contribute to 'to meaning and identity, and/or beneficial for the individual's health and wellbeing', and may be but not necessarily be 'coupled with those of religious movements and institutions'. A distinction is made between spiritual and religious tourism, in which the former is featured by travels made for self-exploration and spiritual betterment and the later by travels made to institutionally sanctioned destinations in the institutionally sanctioned way (Collins-Kreiner, 2010; Timothy & Olsen, 2006).

Walking as a daily life experience and a common tourist activity has been investigated by several scholars from perspectives of sport and leisure, physical and mental health, tourism, and landscape planning. Study findings proved the positive effect of walking to one's health and wellbeing such as self-integration and positive tourist

experience such as sense connection to the place (Dihingia et al., 2022; Quinlan Cutler et al., 2014). As a form of slow tourism, walking allows people to engage more in physical exercise, personal development, closeness to nature, meaningful interactions between tourists and hosts, appreciation to host produce and culture, all this can help contribute to the sustainable development of destinations. Walking therefore is perceived as an antidote to modern, stressful industrialized lifestyle and mental health issues, and it's the most natural, accessible, and convenient way of leisure to all. Walking on pilgrimage routes is a good example of a synergy between tourism, leisure, spirituality, wellness, and sustainability as it combines all the above-mentioned elements (Caffyn, 2012; Dihingia et al., 2022; Hill et al., 2009; Kato & Prozano, 2017; Roberson & Babic, 2009).

3.2 Typology of Travel Mode and Tourist Experience

In tourist studies tourist experience has been in the central position. Among many scholars of the tourist experience, Cohen (1979) proposes a typology that encompasses conflicting views on the nature of the tourist experience and conceptualizes it as one phenomenon with varying degrees of motivations, needs, and patterns of behavior. According to the author, the tourist experience can be understood as the experience of traveling between 'centers'. The concept of a 'center' was first raised by Eliade (1971) to refer to 'the zone of the sacred and absolute reality' (p. 17). It was then highlighted by Turner (1973) to conceptualize pilgrimage as a sacred journey towards 'the center out there', which is not necessarily in strict geographical or religious terms. The idea of such a 'center' can be multiple: it can be religious, cultural, political, or spiritual. In Cohen's conceptualization, such a 'center' is more of a spiritual locus that symbolizes ultimate meanings and values for the individual (Cohen, 1979).

One key element in Cohen's conceptual framework of tourist experience is the spiritual center, which symbolizes values or beliefs that are fundamental to the individual who travels, such as authenticity and ultimate meaning. An individual's relationship with a spiritual center, home or foreign to him or her, defines the travel experience.

Each place has its 'center' of spiritual significance. When individuals travel from one place to another, they are also encountering the 'centers' of those places, it's just that sometimes the center of the destination is similar with that of the place the traveler comes from, for instance if someone travels from Madrid to Lisbon, or from London to New York, the lifestyles, cultural values, even political ideologies between origins and destinations are not very far from each other. But other times the center of the destination can be very different from that of the place the traveler lives in his everyday life, for instance if a traveler goes to east Africa from east Europe, where big contrast in the lifestyle, cultural values, social norms, let alone language, people, food, landscape, etc., the 'otherness' of the center of destination can be experienced right away. Cohen (1979) argued that, when tourists make a travel, they tend to either walk away from their original center in which life is often stressful, inauthentic, meaningless, or they make a trip to move away from one center and consciously towards another one, or they approach a new center in the destination without denying the center of their origin in their journeys.

Depending on how a tourist moves around different 'spiritual centers', Cohen identified five modes in which an individual travels. The five modes are: 1) recreational mode, in which tourists desire to run away from stressful modern life and look for recreation and refreshment so that they can return to their original society with renewed energy, individual traveling in this mode are not searching for a new center, they are just running away from the original one, get recharged, and go back to it after the trip; 2)

diversionary mode, in which tourists simply want to leave behind the meaninglessness in their everyday society by doing something different; 3) experiential mode, in which individuals experience and explore about a spiritual center in their travels; 4) experimental mode, in which individuals are not sure of their own spiritual center, and are trying out new lifestyles that represent new centers, ones that are more meaningful, more profound, where life is more authentic, the individuals are experimenting what is like to be in a different spiritual center; 5) existential mode, in which individuals consciously, intentionally commit themselves to a new spiritual center which they believe that is more meaningful, more authentic. This alternative spiritual center is often distant and different from their original one. When tourists travel in various modes, their travel experiences also vary because what the tourists look for are different.

This typology focuses on the tourists' personal drives or needs that are generated from one's values, reflected in dynamic forms and degrees. Cohen's conceptual framework on tourist experience allows us to link the desires and motivations of tourists and their behaviors. For example, tourists traveling in recreational and diversionary modes in general want to escape and relax, they look for a break time, a pause, they want to experience relaxation, distraction from everyday routine, pleasure, and fun, therefore they are more likely than others to behave like leisure and holiday tourists, who often engage in hedonic or adventure tourism activities, which is commonly what mass tourism industries offer. The experiential and experimental tourists are those who travel as cultural explorers or pilgrims. They are out on the way for authentic experience, which is missing in their everyday life or society. They seek authenticity in their travels, they are in search of an authentic way of life and of meaning in other places, in the life of others (MacCannell, 1973; Smith, 1992); existential tourists, however, are the ones who seek higher meaning such as human

communion, peace in nature, meaning of life, outside their original socio-cultural environment. When they find it in the places they travel to, they are like new members of a culture or a religion in the new spiritual center (Cohen, 1979).

According to Cohen in his modes of travels, he argued that a tourist may travel in more than one mode in the same travel. For instance, a tourist might be traveling for fun and relaxation, but at the same times he or she is also exploring the culture of the destination, in which he or she experiences authenticity and meaning. Such a tourist travels in both a recreational mode and an experiential mode. Or a tourist may start the travel in one mode but change into another mode as the journey unwinds.

3.3 Pilgrim Experience of the Camino de Santiago

Since the rise of religious tourism and the revitalization of St. James' Way at the end of the 20th century, scholars started to investigate the motivations, perceptions, experiences of the individuals making the journey on the Camino. The studies indicate an increasingly diversified and secularized interest of the pilgrims and the liminal quality of their experiences.

3.3.1 Motivations

The most researched theme in the articles of Camino pilgrim experience is what motivated them to do the pilgrimage way. The Pilgrims Office in Santiago de Compostela, where pilgrims claim their pilgrim certificate, often asks the pilgrim to fill a form that states their motivations of the pilgrimage, being either religious motivation, religious and other motivation, or non-religious motivation. From Figure 2 in the previous chapter, we can see that over the last 15 years, the pilgrims who claimed religious motivation to be the only motivation of the Camino has dropped from 75% in 2004 to 40% in 2019, however those who walked the Camino for more than religious reasons or no religious reasons doubled in

the percentage, respectively from 20% to 49%, and from 6% to 11%. The tricky point is, if an applicant wants to be issued a certificate with traditional Latin text, he or she must choose either 'religious' or 'religious and others' as his motivation, or he or she will be issued a different certificate. Suppose if an applicant does the Camino for non-religious reasons but still wants to have a classical certificate, he or she has to end up choosing 'religious and other'. Perhaps therefore some scholars argued that the current classification of motivation by the Pilgrims Office only yields 'statistical pilgrims' who claim so to get a more desirable certificate (Balar, 2018; Kurrat, 2019). In my opinion, if the Pilgrims' Office, as an office in affiliation to the Church authorities of Santiago de Compostela, wants to make a distinction between religious and non-religious motivations as the proof to decide whether a pilgrim certificate should be issued to the applicant, a question such as 'is religious motivation one of the reasons that you did the Camino?' shall be sufficient, since having religious intention as one of the motivations but not necessarily the only motivation of the pilgrimage is sufficiently legitimate to be issued a classical certificate according to the Pilgrims' Office. If the Pilgrims' Office is truly interested in knowing why a pilgrim does the Camino, it would be more scientifically valuable to allow the applicants to write down their motivations, without limiting the number or type of motivations by which the pilgrims are inspired. The statistical analysis such as classification of motivations and the relationships among motivational types and the demographic variables can be conducted after the data is collected to yield more informing results.

The motivational patterns discovered by scholars of the Camino revealed much more information about why the tens of thousands of people started their journey. In their studies however, spiritual motivation is listed as the most important, other reasons such as clarifications/life directions, leisure/sensation-seeking, religion, culture, nature are also

frequently confessed motivations (Amaro et al., 2018; Cazaux, 2011; Farias et al., 2019; Fernández et al., 2012; López, 2013; Oviedo, 2014; Schnell & Pali, 2013). Not more than one third of the pilgrims in those studies indicated that religious motivation is why they did the pilgrimage, consistently lower than the number registered in the Pilgrims' Office. This tendency, being described by some scholars as indicating the feature of 'New Age' religiosity, i.e., 'spiritual but not religious', an interest in personal spiritual growth, life meaning other than religious requirements or institutional commitments (Digance, 2006). The return of pilgrims on the St. James' way is not a revival of religion, but the rise of interest in history, cultural tourism, and a new form of spirituality (Lois-González & Santos-Solla, 2015; Nilsson & Tesfahuney, 2016). The various studies of the motivational landscape of today's St. James' Way indicated a heterogeneity in the motivations of pilgrimage in the 21st century.

3.3.2 The Reconceptualization of Pilgrim Identity

The research interest on pilgrim motivation is closely related to the on-going debate over the pilgrim-tourist dichotomy, which is key to tourist typology applied to the St. James Way and many other pilgrimage/religious tourism destinations of today. The identity of travelers on pilgrimage journeys has long been a topic in academic research. The research on pilgrimage has transformed into a post-modern paradigm, from the understanding of pilgrimage as a religious journey with pilgrims having religious motivations and generic experience, to the argument that pilgrimage is a journey mixing religious and secular motivations and resulting in subjective, diverse experience (Cohen, 1979, 1992; Graburn, 1977; Graham & Murray, 1997; MacCannell, 1973; Smith, 1992). Under this gradual paradigm change, the dichotomy between pilgrims and tourists has become more and more blurred, because both identities share similar dynamics such as demonstrating plural

motivations including both religious ones and secular ones (e.g. authenticity and meanings), both engage in tourist activities during trip planning and after arriving the destination and utilize the same space, and both groups share similar but diverse travel experience such as religious, spiritual, transformative, social and cultural experience (Collins-Kreiner, 2010; López, 2013; Nilsson & Tesfahuney, 2016; Oviedo et al., 2014).

3.3.3 Liminality, Communitas and Transformation

Turner (1973), Turner and Turner (1978) have contributed some fundamental concepts to understand pilgrimage experience. In their conceptualization, people on a pilgrimage journey depart from their homes, leave their familiar socio-cultural environment, and walk toward a 'center out there'. By doing so they enter a new space with a quality of 'liminality', which is to say, in such a space the pilgrims can be detached from their everyday routine and lifestyle, and they can be open-minded to new experience, new ideas, new values, new encounters, or be creative and explorative to new lifestyles, be contemplative over their old life realities, priorities or beliefs, re-evaluate them and reformulate them.

While engaging in a pilgrimage, pilgrims often experience a sense of 'communitas', in which their regular social identities and features temporarily disappear, there are no more rich or poor people on a pilgrimage road, no more CEOs, professors, scientists, doctors on the way, everyone is equal, and individuals associate with each other all as peer pilgrims. Pilgrims form 'communitas' by sharing the same travel destination, same itinerary, same purpose of deepening faith and pursuing spiritual growth, same physical experience, sometimes even by eating and sleeping together as a group. Such experience helps pilgrims feel a sense of belonging, unity, and a universal communion (Turner, 2012; Turner & Turner, 1978). It is through such a liminal process, in an atmosphere of communitas, that

individuals experience a kind of transformation, a sense of meaning, clarity, authenticity, faith, love, unity is experienced, as some of pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago claimed (López, 2013; Luik, 2012; Nilsson & Tesfahuney, 2016).

Collins-Kreiner (2010) argued that since both pilgrims and tourists have multiple motivations that range from religious to secular reasons, especially among post-modern travelers, the typology of individuals who engage in pilgrimage activities by their reported motivations can no longer capture the characteristics and differences of those individuals. He suggested that a closer look at how pilgrimage journeys transform individuals, i.e., how their travel experience change their perceptions, behaviors and attitudes, especially those who travel outside their culture and societies, such as Westerners traveling to the East, experience transformations in attitudes and behaviors, and such changes vary across different age and gender (Collins-Kreiner & Sagi-Tueta, 2010; Sharpley & Sundaram, 2005).

3.4 Spiritual Transformation and Quantum Change

The topic of transformation in the spiritual realm has caught research attention in the field of psychology in early 20th century and underwent its initial theoretical development. Among some classic investigations, William James (1902) examined the phenomenon of ‘conversion’, or religious transformation (Miller, 2004). Later Sigmund Freud (1950) also reflected on the phenomenon of religious conversion and conceptualized it as a defense mechanism which resolves the repressed hostility against authority in the realm of religion (Scroggs & Douglas, 1967). Some scholars perceived religious conversion as a constructive and maturation process while others think it’s a regressive and pathological one, but most consider the phenomenon as much related to the subconscious mind, except for humanistic psychologists such as Maslow and Rogers who perceived conversion as a conscious decision (Freud, 1950; James, 1902; Scroggs & Douglas, 1967).

As the debate over the topic continued, it attracted researchers from other fields besides religion, such as medicine, psychology, sociology, and anthropology. The conceptualization also advanced, especially when Miller (2004) and with his colleagues (1994, 2001) brought the concept of 'quantum change' to describe the sudden, distinctive, constructive, and permanent change in one's identity and perception of self and reality. The phenomenon of quantum change goes beyond institutionalized religion. 'Quantum changes' tend to bring to those who have experienced them a settle peacefulness, a reorganization of values and priorities, a renewed perception and desire of interpersonal relationship, and a sense of connectedness with the entire humanity and universe (Miller & C'de Baca, 2001, Miller, 2004). Changes of such nature can be classified into two types, i.e., the mystical and insightful type and there is a gray area in between them. The mystical changes tend to be more fundamental and related to experiences with transcendence, whereas the insightful changes seem to be associated with reconfiguration of values about self and reality. Miller views quantum change phenomenon as a process of maturation, like what Maslow described as 'self-actualization' but is expanded to the realm of others (Miller, 2004).

In the 21st century scholars further developed the discussion in the field of psychology. Among those scholars Pargament and her colleagues explored and developed the concept when they focused on changes that occur in spiritual dimension of human experience. Inspired by Durkheim (1915) and Eliade (1958), spirituality is understood as a quest for the sacred (Pargament, 1999, p. 12), meaning and ultimate values, it's concerned with holistic life and thriving (Sheldrake, 2013). Spirituality provides stability, meaning, identity, inner peace, joy, strength, connections with others and with creations, and functions as a source of transcendent experience such as connection and spiritual

transformation (Cohen & Gruber, 2010; Pargament, 2006). The concept of the sacred is perceived to be inclusive of various phenomena, it's related but not limited to the divine (Rambo & Bauman, 2012), it also involves transcendent, profound aspects of human existence or the mysteries of the universe (Hill & Pargament, 2008; Pargament & Mahoney, 2002; Sheldrake, 2013). In other words, anything can be sacred (Durkheim, 1915), if it is regarded as something extraordinary because it's significant, extraordinary, worthy of veneration. Sacred things can be found in time, space, events, material, nature, people and their psychological or social attributes (Pargament, 2006; Sheldrake, 2013). Spiritual transformation is defined as a process of 'fundamental change in the place of the sacred in the life of the individual' (Pargament, 2006, p. 18). This definition attempts to capture the essentiality and inclusiveness of the phenomenon. Reorientations in one's relationship with the sacred, e.g., in the destination and the pathways to sacredness consist of two categories of spiritual changes (Mahoney & Pargament, 2004; Pargament, 2006).

A study on transformative spiritual experience among the American population indicated that about 50% of the population have undergone spiritual transformation (Smith, 2006), also common among groups with clinical conditions (Cole et al., 2008; Forcehimes, 2004; Garrett, 1996; Ironson & Kremer, 2009; Miller, 2004). This finding somehow showed that the spiritual transformation is a type of human experience that is both real and common (Miller, 2004). Such experience tends to take place at a relatively early age, average of seventeen years old (Scroggs & Douglas, 1967) or before age twenty-nine (Smith, 2006), it could happen in their middle age (Scroggs & Douglas, 1967).

Much academic effort has been dedicated to the process of spiritual transformation, which generally involve the contexts that are likely to cause such transformation, the

nature and the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral characteristics in the process, and consequences of the changes.

Miller commented in his observation of 'quantum change' that among the individuals who reported their fundamental transformative experiences, half of them have encountered significant crisis when the transformation occurred, while the other half were not in such context (Miller, 2004). The context for spiritual transformation to take place indicates both an individual dimension and a socio-cultural dimension. To early psychologist on religious conversion, i.e., William James, the pain and suffering that have pushed a person to a threshold, or the state of being a 'sick soul' are believed to prelude the sudden profound changes, whereas to Freud it's associated with the hatred to the father and to authority (Scroggs & Douglas, 1967). Many investigations have shown a frequent association between spiritual transformation and near-death experience (Cohen & Gruber, 2010; Greyson, 2006; Ironson & Kremer, 2009; Smith, 2006), recovery of substance abuse (Forcehimes, 2004; Ironson & Kremer, 2009), diagnosis of HIV or other severe illness (Cole et al, 2008; Garrett, 1996; Ironson & Kremer, 2009; Smith, 2006), death of loved ones (Cohen & Gruber, 2010; Smith, 2006). It seems common that a life crisis or trauma, a 'hit-the-bottom' situation, which has caused the individual unbearable suffering and thus a desire to change. Religious belief and practice, collective spiritual activity and cultural factors, social communication were also reported to be associated with the experience of spiritual transformation (Mahoney & Pargament, 2004; Smith, 2006).

Compared to the reports about what happened before and after the transformative experience, little is reported about what takes place or what has been experienced during the transformation process (Smith, 2006). Some scholars tried to investigate the nature of spiritual transformation by classifying transformative experiences into groups. Pargament

(2006) identified two types of spiritual transformation, i.e., primary transformation and secondary transformation. Primary transformation is similar to 'quantum changes' which is fundamental in the area related to sacredness in an individual's life, a 'born-again' experience such as a shift from an egocentric orientation to an other-centered orientation, from an atheist belief to religious believer; whereas the secondary transformation involves the changes in the pathways to sacredness such as change of religious affiliation or engagement in fortune telling or meditation or even drugs to approach the sacred. Koss-Chioino (2006) believed that spiritual transformation is a phenomenon with a dramatic 'born-again' experience at one end, and a gradual but profound inner adjustment at the other end, and the area in between.

Scholars were able to identify the fundamental changes along cognitive, emotional and behavioral dimensions that characterize the phenomenon, which can be described as an understanding of self and the world, a sense of meaning, an revelation of the highest value and ultimate truth, a feeling of connection with others, humanity, the creation and universe or with divinity, deepening of religious faith (Cohen & Gruber, 2010; Ironson & Kremer, 2009; Koss-Chioino, 2006; Smith, 2006); positive feelings of joy, peace, gratitude, sense of awe, or sometimes negative feelings such as confusion, regret, helplessness (Cohen & Gruber, 2010; Ironson & Kremer, 2009); some reported that the transformative experience had little influence in one's everyday behavior except for but showed growing interests in a more spiritual life and taking care of relationship with others (Miller, 2004; Smith, 2006).

Spiritual transformation is believed to have a significant, enduring, and extensive impact on individuals who have experienced it (Ironson & Kremer 2009; Smith, 2006). The most profound impact is the change in the perception of self and reality, such as a more

stable mind, a positive attitude towards a life of spirituality or religious faith, towards others, and a renewed goal and meaning in life (Cohen & Gruber, 2010; Cole et al., 2008; Miller, 2004; Smith, 2006). Spiritual transformation also changed an individual's relationship with others or with divinity which is then appreciated, valued, or desired more than before (Cohen & Gruber, 2010; Cole et al., 2008; Koss-Chioino, 2006; Mahoney & Pargament, 2004). Studies did not find significant relationship between spiritual transformation and improved health among general population (Smith, 2006) but find positive relationship between spiritual transformation and survival, recovery among specific population with cancer or alcoholic and drug abusers (Cole et al., 2008; Forcehimes, 2004; Ironson & Kremer, 2009).

Both theoretical frameworks engage in describing the precursors and catalysts that lead to profound changes, and in identifying key dimensions of deep transformations in which individuals change their relationship with themselves, others and the world. Generally, such changes are positive and contribute to improved personal wellbeing, life perspectives, connectedness with others and with the transcendent. However, the theory of spiritual transformation refers to changes which affect the relation to the sacred, whereas that of quantum change describes phenomena of personal evolution. The key elements of the two theoretical frameworks are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4

Theoretical Frameworks of Spiritual Transformation and Quantum Change

	Spiritual transformation	Quantum change
Nature of transformation	a fundamental change in the place or the characteristics of the sacred in one's life	a transformation in what people perceive to be of ultimate significance in the self and reality
Precursors to transformation	long-term stress acute stressful events interpersonal conflict	life crisis

Catalysts to transformation	religious practice community communion music, nature, intense exercise	pain and suffering
Dimensions of transformation	understanding in the relationship with self- understanding in the relationship with others understanding in the relationship with the sacred	positive affectivity values and life priorities relationship worldview
Effect of transformation	personal satisfaction low anxiety and depression, inner peace, forgiveness deeper relationship with the sacred	positive emotions more settled more mature

Source: Mahoney & Pargament (2004), Pargament (2006), Miller (2004).

3.5 Chinese Tourists

3.5.1 Chinese Outbound Tourists

Due to the effective ‘reform and open-up’ policy, China’s tourism industry has embraced rapid growth in the last few decades. China has formed the largest domestic tourism market and became the largest international tourist source market by 2019 – by 2014 the number of China’s outbound tourists was beyond 100 million, and by 2019 this number was 155 million, and China’s tourism industry contributed to 11.05% of the GDP and 10.31% of employment in 2019 (China Tourism Academy, 2020; Jin & Wang, 2016; Zhao & Liu, 2020). The outbound tourism development went through several phases and so did the Chinese outbound tourists. For instance, the main body of Chinese tourists has become younger (25 – 44 years old), more balanced across gender, better educated, more affluent, and mainly come from large cities – especially the Chinese tourists traveling to Western destinations are mainly residents from the first-tier cities (UNWTO, 2019; Xiang, 2013). The main purposes of travel are sight-seeing and holiday/leisure, including those independent travelers – those who plan their trips without referring to any travel agencies. The number of independent Chinese tourists grows rapidly in recent years up to more than half among all Chinese outbound tourists (UNWTO, 2019; Xiang, 2013; Zhao & Liu, 2020). The wide

application of internet and mobile technology penetrated travel practice of Chinese tourists. More than half of the outbound tourists search for destination information online, and the other half from relatives and friends; they make their bookings and shared their travel stories online as well (Liu et al., 2019; UNWTO, 2019). As Chinese tourists gained more travel experience, their interests also evolved to be more diversified and experience, self-enhancement-seeking (Bao et al., 2019; Jiang et al., 2018; Jin & Wang, 2016). Different from the first wave of Chinese outbound tourists who were eager to see the modern world outside China, the second wave tourists were looking for what was lacking in China, such as unpolluted natural environment and under-commercialized destination (Jin & Wang, 2016; Pearce et al., 2013; Xiang, 2013). The new sectors that have attracted most investment and welcomed the fastest growth in the last few years are cultural tourism and sport tourism, indicating a strong interest of culture, sport, and wellness among Chinese tourists (Zhao & Liu, 2020).

3.5.2 Walking Tourism in China

Walking tourism is one of the emerging phenomena that is gaining popularity among Chinese tourists in the last 20 years (Jocelyn & Signley, 2014; Witte, 2020). The relevant research literature focused on the motivations, behavioral patterns and experiences of the Chinese walking tourists. In terms of motivations, social interaction, self-actualization, destination experience and escape/relaxation were some primary drivers that motivated Chinese tourists to engage in walking as a leisure activity (Chen et al., 2014; Chen & Weiler, 2014).

Although there seem no major differences on motivations between the Chinese walking tourists (hikers and most Chinese backpackers) and their Western counterparts, some contrasts were observed in their walking behavior, e.g., Chinese backpackers tend to

seek companionship and in-group interactions, rely more on the internet, enjoy mountain-hiking as their favorite activity, travel for shorter time, use less public transportation and make higher expenditure (Long, 2011; Luo et al., 2015).

The studies on the identity construction of Chinese walking tourists showed that they generally perceived themselves as distinct from the mass-tourists, as they actively choose to stay away from those tourist attractions and look particularly for authentic experience and self-improvement (Witte, 2020; Zhang et al., 2017).

In terms of destination experience, nature is the most highlighted pursuit among all Chinese walking tourists, but some showed a keen interest in getting connected with the history and culture embedded in the space they walked; it also can be said that further growth of this emerging tourist trend in China still requires more thoughtful trail design and infrastructure construction, such as signage, information, safety measures, environmental protection measures, accommodation, and most importantly, all the facilities and services should not compromise the authenticity of the nature and culture in the destination (Chen & Weiler, 2014; Li et al., 2017; Witte, 2020).

Part III. Methods

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1 Methodological Design

4.1.1 Research Paradigm

As Guba and Lincoln (1994) argued, 'paradigms are basic belief system or worldviews based on ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions, which guides the researcher in ontologically and epistemologically fundamental ways and in choices of method' (p. 107). Some major research paradigms include positivist, interpretivist, and critical theory (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Interpretivism holds that social reality is subjectively constructed by individuals. Under the interpretivist umbrella there are various epistemological perspectives that researchers take in their pursuit of knowledge, one of them is that of phenomenology. To those who perceive the world from a phenomenological point of view, the understanding of social reality can be reached only through the experience of the individuals who live out that reality in their historical social context which has formed their worldviews and values (Creswell, 2009; Gray, 2004; Scotland, 2012). In another word, the phenomenological approach enables researchers to obtain in-depth knowledge about a phenomenon, including its dynamic process and its historical/cultural context, through the testimony of those who experienced it (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Patton, 1990; Schwandt, 1998). The strength of this methodology lies in its capacity to tackle the complexity and subtlety of the research data, so that the phenomenon in focus is richly interpreted and profoundly understood (Black, 2006). The phenomenological method often involves an inductive process, seeks internal logics of the phenomenon, which means any theoretical models external to the phenomenon, including that held by the researcher needs to be kept away

or 'bracketed' so that the phenomenon being studied can 'speak for itself' (Gray, 2004, p.20).

This research adopted a qualitative design by employing a phenomenological approach to obtain in-depth understanding about the general and specific experiences of Chinese pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago. It also aimed to identify the specific factors influencing their experiences and explore the relationships among those experiential factors.

4.1.2 Research Tool

Content analysis is one of the most important tools used for qualitative inquiries for topics such as health and wellbeing, communication, consumer experience including tourist experience (Decrop, 1999; Krippendorff, 1989; Lindgren et al., 2020; Naab & Sehl, 2017; Picken, 2018). This research relied on qualitative information from both the travel blogs generated directly by tourists, i.e., by Chinese travelers who have made the Camino trip, as well as the interviews with recruited participants among Chinese Camino travelers. Content analysis was originally a quantitative research method that was often associated with positivist paradigms, but later under the influence of the hermeneutic paradigm, this approach integrated more interpretive procedures which allowed the method to tackle the multiple nature of subjective realities in their rich social contexts (Berelson, 1952; Graneheim et al., 2017; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Qualitative content analysis is suitable for various types of data, including interviews, diaries, blogs and other website information that recorded personal experience, handling such types of data require both description and interpretation in order to keep a good balance between sufficient de-contextualization and meaningful re-contextualization, thus increase trustworthiness of this method (Lindgren et al., 2020; Schreier, 2012).

4.2 Data Collection

4.2.1 Main Source of Data

To find out the experience of Chinese travellers on the Camino de Santiago, the ideal approach is to ask the Chinese pilgrims about the experience directly or to get access to their oral or written accounts that recorded their experience of the Camino. However, the direct approach is difficult to implement because in real life the researcher does not have contact with many such individuals. Even some of such individual can be identified through the internet, often such individuals would not like to be interviewed, due to privacy or time-related considerations. What's more, some questions such as inner experience, motivation, transcending, or spiritual experience are considered very personal and even sensitive in China. However, on the Chinese travel websites there lie much information on the topic, recorded in the form of travel blogs posted by Chinese travelers who made the Camino themselves, therefore travel blogs were used as primary data for the purpose of this study.

As the influence of the internet application in tourism marketing gets more and more academic attention, its potential in product promotion and distribution, management of quality, user satisfaction, communication, research and has been increasingly recognized (Carson, 2008; Olson, 2008; Schmallegger & Carson, 2008). The technological advances led to the wide application of websites, social media, and travel blogs, known as Web 2.0. The rise of Web 2.0 enables tourists form virtual communities, exchange information, share their travel experience, their opinions, recommendations, destination impression, stories of the trip, people they have met, food they have tasted, products they have consumed, by posting reviews and travel blogs. The generation of consumer information by the consumer themselves across the internet is commonly

referred to as User Generated Content or UGC in short. The UGC of tourist experience first appeared in the 1990s, in the form of texts, images, voices, and now in videos since 4G technology began to prevail. Such rich information generated by tourists online not only changed the game in tourism communication from B2C (business to consumer) to C2C (consumer to consumer), but also informed and empowered the tourists themselves. It's not surprising that referring to online tourist comments and stories of destination experience have become an important activity performed by many tourists in their trip planning and decision-making, thus the tourist UGC functions as a digital form of word-of-mouth (Chen et al., 2014; Llodra-Riera et al., 2015; Schmallegger & Carson, 2008).

Tourist-generated content can be classified according to the type of the content. Some are tourist blogs or travel blogs in which tourists post their personal travel stories, or travel tips. Most of the tourist blogs are posted in the form of travel diary, about travel experiences (Pan et al., 2007; Schmallegger & Carson, 2008). Some are short reviews, usually focusing on certain aspects of the trip (food, accommodation, hospitality, sightseeing, overall satisfaction, recommendation, or mixture) and are often accompanied by ratings in the form of number or stars. Other form of content are only ratings in which a destination or site, service, a tourist product, is rated. Many travel websites often offer their platforms to their users to post all forms of content, including ratings, structured reviews, as well as travel blogs for sharing personal travel stories.

The online tourist travel blogs have been found by researchers as effective materials to discover tourist motives, travel behaviour and experience, destination image, travel pattern, e-word-of-mouth, service quality because the tourists can freely express their feelings and thoughts more independently on the internet therefore are perceived as more authentic and reliable, and the data collection process is non-intrusive and the data

is readily available to the researcher (Akehurst, 2009; Banyai & Glover, 2012; Lu & Stepchenkova, 2015). Due to the richness and informativeness of the UGC from travel blogs and its easy accessibility, the current research focused on the travel blogs that are posted by Chinese travelers about their personal experience on the Way of St. James as primary source for research data.

4.2.2 Identification and Screening of Travel Blogs

Travel blogs on the Camino de Santiago were searched on the three most popular Chinese travel websites that are known for their services of hosting travel blogs as well as provide general travel information and services. The users are mainly independent tourists who wish to share their personal travel stories of a variety of destinations, both domestic and international. Some blogs attract tens of thousands of reads and will be marked and recommended as 'cover stories' by website content managers. Among such websites there are two major sites that usually attract most travel bloggers: Qyer.com, and Mafengwo.cn. Qyer.com is known for attracting tourists who distinguish themselves from mass tourism travelers. The users of this website are also known for the spirit of sharing travel tips that intent to help peer travelers, through detailed personal storytelling and information-sharing. Mafengwo.cn is another popular travel website where a large number of blogs with personal accounts of the Camino journey were found. This website is known for attracting young people who are keen to both mass tourism, world-known landmark destinations, and some fancy or high-end destinations or travel activities. Besides Qyer and Mafengwo, the No. 1 Chinese travel website Ctrip.com is known for hosting a variety of travel-related search and transactions to Chinese tourists including booking of accommodation and transportation. Ctrip also has blog service, but it came much later than the other two websites that dedicated primarily to virtual user communities, thus it's not

as much known to users as a tourist experience sharing platform like the other two. Lastly, the Chinese version of Tripadvisor.com, despite its global popularity, is known to Chinese domestic users basically for overseas destination information searching. Another two Chinese blog websites were also searched in 2020, and a few blogs were related to the topic, but some blogs were blocked and not accessible any more in 2021, therefore in this thesis only information from the four travel websites mentioned above were searched to identify travel blogs on the Camino de Santiago.

Three sets of Chinese key words that corresponds to 'The St. James Pilgrimage Way' and another three sets of Chinese key words corresponding 'The St. James Way' (without 'pilgrimage') were used to locate the blogs. The main difference of the three groups of key words lies in the translation of 'St. James' in Chinese, being 1) the translation of 'St. James' as a name of the city Santiago de Compostela, which is a sound translation of Santiago or 'shengdiyage' (圣地亚哥); 2) the translation of 'St. James' that follows the Protestant translation in Chinese or 'sheng yage' (圣雅各); 3) the translation of 'St. James' that follows the Catholic translation in Chinese or 'sheng yagebo' (圣雅各伯). All three possible translations, in combination with or without 'pilgrimage' were used in each of the four websites so that the query can be as productive as possible. The numbers of relevant travel blogs from different websites, the number of blogs with personal experience, and the number of blogs vary from website to website. In general, Qyer.com generated the largest number of travel blogs related to the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage route, among irrelevant blogs. The final selection for data analysis is listed below in Table 5.

Table 5

The Number of Travel Blogs Identified

Website	Key words (in Chinese)	Key words (in English)	number of initial results		number of relevant posts		number of relevant blogs		number of qualified blogs
Qyer.com 穷游网	圣地亚哥之路	The Santiago Way	233	83	62				
	圣地亚哥朝圣之路	The Santiago Pilgrimage Way	112	71	52				
	圣雅各之路	The St. James Way (the Protestant translation)	103	16	11				
	圣雅各朝圣之路	The St. James Pilgrimage Way (the Protestant translation)	54	13	10				
	圣雅各伯之路	The St. James Way (the Catholic translation)	66	1	0				
	圣雅各伯朝圣之路	The St. James Pilgrimage Way (the Catholic translation)	36	1	0				63
Mafengwo.CI	圣地亚哥之路	The Santiago Way	50	41	5				
马蜂窝网	圣地亚哥朝圣之路	The Santiago Pilgrimage Way	61	59	28				
	圣雅各之路	The St. James Way (the Protestant translation)	50	9	6				
	圣雅各朝圣之路	The St. James Pilgrimage Way (the Protestant translation)	90	1	0				
	圣雅各伯之路	The St. James Way (the Catholic translation)	56	21	5				
	圣雅各伯朝圣之路	The St. James Pilgrimage Way (the Catholic translation)	50	28	6				29
	Ctrip.com	圣地亚哥之路	The Santiago Way	39	15	2			
携程网	圣地亚哥朝圣之路	The Santiago Pilgrimage Way	31	13	2				
	圣雅各之路	The St. James Way (the Protestant translation)	18	3	1				
	圣雅各朝圣之路	The St. James Pilgrimage Way (the Protestant translation)	7	3	1				
	圣雅各伯之路	The St. James Way (the Catholic translation)	9	1	0				
	圣雅各伯朝圣之路	The St. James Pilgrimage Way (the Catholic translation)	3	1	0				2
Source: author's elaboration									total
									94

As shown in the table, the travel website that hosts the largest number of travel blogs related to the Camino de Santiago is Qyer.com. Mafengwo.cn is the second most popular site where Chinese Camino travelers like to post their Camino stories. Ctrip.com has generated some posts but most are not related to the Way of St. James or are not about personal experience. The Chinese version of TripAdvisor.com, has yielded zero blog about the Camino de Santiago in Chinese, and the results it has yielded in English are not posted by Chinese users.

As to the number of results by key words, it is obvious that the key words with the 'non-religious' translation, i.e., the sound translation of 'Santiago' has generated most valid results, which indicates that the most widely adopted translations of the Camino de Santiago in Chinese are 圣地亚哥朝圣之路 (The Santiago Pilgrimage Way) and 圣地亚哥之路 (The Santiago Way).

The researcher set some criteria in the screening of the initial results. Firstly, it must be related to the Camino de Santiago. So those that are related to other pilgrimage routes such as the kora or pilgrimages of Tibetan Buddhism were removed. Secondly it must be about the bloggers' personal journeys of the Camino. So, those blogs about the historical background or route information (stages, sites, rules) of the Camino, or the movie 'The Way' (an American movie featuring some pilgrims on the Camino, released in 2010) were excluded as well. Most blogs found under different sets of key words are the same group of blogs, so only the distinctive blogs were included in the pool of blogs for data analysis. Thus, there was no data duplication. The first search on the above-mentioned websites was performed in June 2020, and the last in December 2021. Since the first search there were no change in the of numbers of blogs of the major websites, perhaps it's because there

were very limited number of Chinese travellers making the journey as result of the Covid travel limit both domestically and internationally. The final number of blogs collected for the study was 94 – all are travel blogs of personal experience of the Camino de Santiago, posted by 94 individual Chinese travelers. The blogs were systematically labelled as JR1, JR2 ...and JR94.

4.2.3 Additional Data Collection

Additional data were obtained from in-depth, semi-structured interviews of 12 Chinese travellers of the Camino, to gain more clarity and insight on the results generated from the first phase of the research. As Picken (2018) argued, ‘as a method, interviews are the most appropriate for research that seeks to address questions that require an in-depth, individual response’ (p. 201). The interview method has been perhaps the most popular method in the disciplines relevant to tourism studies, it can be said that the knowledge body in the field of tourism was largely built on the use of interviews (Hyde & Lawson, 2003; Lincoln & Denzin, 2003). One of the most valuable advantages of conducting research through interviewing people is the possibility of probing – if something said by the participant is not being understood clearly by the researcher, the researcher has an opportunity to clarify, or if the relevant information is not presented clearly to the participant, the participant also has an opportunity to clarify or correct it if it’s against the knowledge or experience of the participant. In such ways, authenticity and clarity of the reality as perceived by the participant can be achieved, which is not always easy to obtain through other methods alone.

The interview participants were recruited from the Chinese Camino Friends’ social media community on WeChat, an active chat group with more than 300 members by December 2021, although only some of them actually did the Camino themselves. In

another word, many members are fans of the Camino and wish to do it themselves, they joined the virtual group for advice and tips. Using purposeful sampling, the researchers selected the participant of diverse age, gender, occupation, and religious affiliation. The participants were introduced the purpose of the study and asked for their consent of participation. Interviews were scheduled and conducted in the form of online conference during November and December 2020. Besides taking notes of demographic information and Camino trip information, open-ended questions related to specific aspects of their experience before, during and after the Camino journey were asked. The interviews were semi-structured, lasting on average seventy minutes. Interview questions are formulated to correspond to the categories identified from analysis of the blogs, so that the data from both datasets can be merged. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, translated into English, and recorded as IN1, IN2... IN12. The interview questions are shown in Appendix A.

4.3 Data Analysis

4.3.1 Inductive and Theory-Driven Content Analysis

Because this is the first time that the experience of Chinese travelers on the Camino was thoroughly studied, qualitative content analysis was applied to identify the general scheme of themes and their relationships of the blog texts produced by Chinese travelers. There are two different directions in the analytic process, i.e., inductive analysis approach and theory-driven approach. The inductive approach is similar to that of the grounded theory (Glaser 1978, 1992; Strauss 1987; Strauss & Corbin 1990), in which no prior theories or theoretical frameworks are adopted to guide the coding process, codes and themes emerge as the researcher goes through the original text, based on the understanding and interpretation of the researcher of the text; whereas theory-driven content analysis refers

to an analysis guide by the existing theoretical frameworks, concepts derived from previous literature on the topic (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Patton, 1990). From the literature review of the experience of pilgrims of the Camino, there have been some clear themes and relevant theoretical frameworks emerged, such as the pilgrims' motivational patterns being diverse, both religious and secular; the boundary between a traditional pilgrim identity and a postmodern tourist less clear-cut; the spiritual transformation experienced by many pilgrims as a result of the Camino journey; the sense of 'communitas' and the quality of liminal space that facilitated the journey of transformation. These existing themes along pilgrim motivation, identity, transformation, will be paid attention during the coding process, but this will not limit the effort of the researcher in extracting new information of the data generated from a specific, non-Western group who are mostly individuals from Europe, North and South America. For the purpose of this study, the researcher preferred to follow the inductive content analysis, with the past conceptual frameworks being 'bracketed' so that the data were examined with a fresh view and both the common and the distinctive characteristics of the phenomenon can be captured (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell, 2007; Riffe et al., 1998).

Creswell's (2007) model of qualitative data analysis and representation inspired by Moustakas (1994) was employed here. Creswell (2007, p. 156 - 157) identified six major steps: data managing (creating and organizing files for data); reading, memoing (reading through text, make margin notes, form initial codes); describing (describing personal experiences through 'epoche/bracketing', describing the 'essence' of the phenomenon); classifying (developing significant statements, group statements into meaning units); interpreting (developing a textual and a structural description of how it was experienced; then interpreting the 'essence' of the experience); finally representing or visualizing

(presenting narration of the 'essence' of the experience in tables/figures/discussion).

Following this method, all textual data from the ninety-four blogs were treated in the following steps:

1. An excel file was created to record the step-by-step analysis of the blog data
2. Each blog was read several times with the first time focusing on the general impression, the traveler profile information and route organization information were extracted and recorded into the excel file
3. During the second time of reading, the main focus was to identify the significant sentences that describe the blogger's experience of the Camino; their tentative meaning was identified, and initial codes were being developed at the same time
4. Those 'meaning units' were further grouped into a higher level of classification as in a 'theme'; the 'essence' within the themes were interpreted and recorded
5. The relationships among the themes were also explored and developed into a textual and structural description, represented in a figure
6. As a final step, the themes, relationships, and patterns that characterize the experience of Chinese travelers on the Camino were compared with the that of Western pilgrims, and the cultural or historical elements that may explain the differences as well as similarities would also be discussed

4.3.2 Computerized Data Analysis

The data generated from the interviews were translated into English so that more researchers could join in the project, for increasing research validity by triangulating the methods used. The translated interview data were analyzed with the assistance of qualitative data processing software NVIVO 1.0. This treatment consisted of separate coding among four researchers to increase coding reliability. An inter-coder comparison

indicated an agreement about 90% of all the codes and categories. The results from interviews were integrated in that from blog analysis according to the classification of themes and the thematic structure.

4.4 Reliability and Validity

Triangulation of research methods is one of the ways adopted by researchers to increase methodological rigor of qualitative studies. It includes data triangulation, methodology triangulation, investigator triangulation and theory triangulation (Decrop, 1999). The present study has adopted data triangulation through collecting relevant data from multiple travel websites where Chinese travelers are likely to post their personal travel stories. The study also triangulated methodologically through conducting interviews to obtain additional data of Chinese travelers about their experience of the Camino de Santiago besides conducting qualitative analysis of online UGC. Through co-coding the interview transcripts among co-researchers, the study also achieved investigator triangulation. All forms of such triangulation helped enhance the internal validity of the research.

Besides triangulation, the transcript of each interview was sent to the participant for verification prior to data analysis. All the transcripts were double-checked and confirmed by the participants. This is to increase reliability of the phenomenological research method (Gray, 2004, p.22).

Part IV. Results and Discussion

Chapter 5: Results

In this section, the analysis of the data collected from the 94 travel blogs of Chinese Camino travelers is presented in the sequence of their journey: first the blog author profile and their travel pattern, then the travel experience of Chinese Camino travelers structured along three stages: before, during and after their Camino journey, and its exposition is articulated following the semantic categories identified during the analysis process and guided by the factors identified in the literature review process (see Appendix B). Those findings extracted from the blog content analysis are followed by the additional information and results provided by the in-depth interviews.

5.1 Chinese Camino Travelers' Profile and Pattern

5.1.1 Demographic Profile

Table 6 shows the demographic information of Chinese Camino travelers identified through their travel blogs and that of the interview respondents. The demographic information of the international Camino pilgrims for comparison. Out of the 94 Camino travel blogs identified for the purpose of this research, about two-thirds of their authors are women, one-third are men. Two-thirds of these Camino travelers are younger than 30 years old, one-third age between 30-60, only one traveler is older than 60 years old. It can be said that majority of them are young people from 20-40 years old. Among the 94 Camino authors, around half are students who are currently studying universities in Europe, mostly in Spain. More than a third are working professionals who work mainly in mainland China – such information can be confirmed by their itineraries – these working people usually departed from China, traveled by air to Spain to do the Camino. About two thirds of the travelers come from major, affluent cities in China, including first-tier cities (Beijing,

Shanghai, Guangzhou, Shenzhen) or second-tier cities such as Tianjin, Xi'an, Hangzhou, Nanjing, Chengdu, Chongqing, Wuhan, etc. The rest did not indicate their place of origin. Most of the Camino blog authors are not affiliated to any religion. They either claimed it at the beginning of their blogs to justify why as a non-religious person they decided to make the journey or indicated it in the day-to-day diary while reporting their reaction as a non-religious person to religious sites (such as churches), or religious rituals (such as mass), or the religious behavior of other pilgrims (such as praying, self-disclosure of one's religious faith). Compared to the general pilgrim profile from the Pilgrims' Office statistics, Chinese Camino travelers seem to be younger, consists of more women and more students. Although the blog authors didn't disclose their education and income information, but it can be assumed that most of them have received higher education, which can be speculated from their occupational status as university students or professionals working in developed cities.

The interview respondents were recruited from Chinese Camino friends. The researcher intentionally recruited the same number of male and female respondents, in the hope of collecting a more gender-balanced feedback of their experiences of the Camino. In this group of 12 Camino travelers, there are slightly more working people than students, more individuals from the first-tier cities (the largest number of Camino friends in the Chinese Camino Friend social media chat group come from two cities, i.e., Beijing and Shanghai), two Christians (one Catholic and the other Protestant), the rest are not religious believers. The percentage of demographic information of the interview respondents is also listed in Table 6.

Table 6

Profile of International Pilgrims and Chinese Travelers

Category	Sub-category	International pilgrim (2019)	Blog authors	Interview respondents
gender	men	49%	38%	50%
	women	51%	62%	50%
age	<30	27%	66%	34%
	30-60	55%	33%	58%
	>60	19%	1%	8%
occupation	student	18%	48%	17%
	retired	13%	1%	17%
	other professions	69%	35%	66%
	not indicated		16%	
place of origin	first-tier cities		28%	50%
	second-tier cities	not applicable	35%	50%
	not indicated		37%	
religious status	religious believers		2%	17%
	non religious believers	not applicable	92%	83%
	not indicated		6%	

Source: Oficina de Acogida al Peregrino, Catedral de Santiago de Compostela (2020), author's elaboration

5.1.2 Travel pattern

How Chinese Camino travelers like to do their Camino? Table 7 shows that, apparently, the French Way is the most popular itinerary among Chinese Camino travelers – majority of Chinese Camino travelers chose this route. Others took the Northern Way, the Portuguese Way, or the Primitive Way. Almost all of them completed the Camino on foot, only three authors did it on bike. More than a third of the blog authors and half of the interview participants spent more than three weeks (more than 21 days) on the way, another one third of the blog authors and one third interviewees made the journey less than one week (less than eight days). On average Chinese Camino travelers spent eighteen days on their Camino, both for the blog authors and the interview respondents. Sarria - a small town in Galicia, Spain, and Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port – a small town at the border between France and Spain, France, were the most popular two starting places. There are

about half of Chinese Camino travelers started their Camino by themselves and with one or more companions. Almost all the Camino travelers conducted the trip on the Camino during the year of 2012-2020. These results correspond generally to the data shown by the Pilgrim Office which records the number of pilgrims who claimed a pilgrim certificate (the Compostela) at the Office. The number of Chinese travelers grew rather slowly from 2004 to 2012, with dozens more each year than the previous year. But since 2013 each year there were a few hundred more than the previous year. The growth trends of the official pilgrim record and the increase of numbers of travel blogs posted by Chinese travelers parallel, showing a steady and slow growth of travelers from China.

Table 7

Travel Patterns of Chinese Camino Travelers

Category	Sub-category	International pilgrim 2019	Blogs authors	Interview respondents
route option	the French Way	55%	77%	67%
	other routes	45%	23%	33%
mode	on foot	94%	98%	100%
	on bike	6%	2%	0%
organization	start alone	not applicable	55%	33%
	start with companion(s)		45%	67%

Source: Oficina de Acogida al Peregrino, Catedral de Santiago de Compostela (2020), author's elaboration

5.2 The Experience Before the Camino

5.2.1 Motivations

More than half of Chinese Camino travel blog authors (57%) and two thirds of the interview respondents (67%) reported that they walked the Camino for personal wellbeing and growth, such as to relax themselves, to escape from a stressful life, whether from work or study, or to look for peace and balance in life, to look for direction in life, or to search for the self. Those who wanted to experience something that they had not experienced

before such as long-distance hiking, or to satisfy their curiosity of the pilgrimage culture, nature, encountering different people, count for half of the Camino blog authors (50%) and half among the interview respondents (50%). Only one person (1%) among the authors and two from the interviewees (17%), all the three being Christian, mentioned that they walked the Camino pilgrimage road out of religious intentions such as ‘penance, getting closer to God’, or ‘feeling called’, apart from desires for personal or cultural discovery. About 4% Camino authors didn’t indicate any information on why they walked the way. Their motivational patterns are compared with that of international pilgrims (see Table 8).

Table 8

Motivations of International Pilgrims and Chinese Camino Travelers

Category	Sub-category	International pilgrims 2019	Blog authors	Interview respondents
motivation	religious motivation	40%	0%	0%
	religious and other motivation	49%	1%	17%
	non-religious motivation	11%	95%	83%
	not indicated	0%	4%	0%

Source: Oficina de Acogida al Peregrino, Catedral de Santiago de Compostela (2020), author’s elaboration

It should be noted that at least 23 blog authors (24%) and six interview respondents (50%) reported that they decided to do the Camino because they have seen *The Way* since this movie had impressed and inspired them with the beautiful natural scenery, fascinating cultural heritage on the Camino, and more importantly, the touching stories of personal growth and friendship. The movie touched something deep in them and they wanted to experience it for themselves, it is like some hidden desires have been waken. Some were motivated simply by a catchy line in the movie: ‘You don’t choose a life, you live one’.

‘The best introduction to the Camino is the movie They Way. A friend recommended this movie and this route to me. I couldn’t get out of it right after watching it, I was

deeply attracted by this way. I couldn't wait to set out on the Camino the first night after I saw that movie.' (JR22)

'I chose to walk the Camino not only because I watched the movie The Way. Most importantly it's because I wanted to stop, to ask questions about myself, to clarify doubts for myself.' (JR35)

'I don't seem to have a clear goal for walking the Camino, I simply wanted to become stronger and more courageous.' (JR61)

'We watched the movie The Way, the father-son story is touching. The father was against the son's life decision but eventually he walked the Camino on behalf of his son. And through the Camino the father was able to understand his son. The willpower, the faith... I also wanted to take a look at what is there on the Camino, I wanted to feel they felt in the movie, although I have no religious belief.' (IN6)

'The dry hay in the movie attracted me, also the windmill, the old town where the characters chased the thief in the movie, that feeling in the allies. More because of the interactions among the people in the movie because I like interacting with people. I was in a life transition phase, I was looking for life direction, I need to clarify some things.' (IN11)

5.2.2 Source of Information and Trip Planning

Where did Chinese travelers hear about the Camino pilgrimage road? The most popular two sources were acquaintance and the American movie *The Way* released in 2010. Those who learned about the Camino from this movie accounts for 48% of the blog authors and 17% from the interview respondents. It's like a hidden desire was awakened. Acquaintance (family and friends) is another important source of information, about 26% of the blog authors and 58% learned from other people, through a word-of-mouth

recommendation. Some learned from some published books, website, or social media (26% of the blog authors and 25% of the interview respondents), especially travel blogs about the Camino experience posted by those Chinese travelers who have completed their journey, especially on Qyer.com, the most popular Chinese online travel community for independent travelers. The three books mentioned by the blog authors as a source of inspiration include *Pilgrimage* by Paolo Coelho (translated in Chinese), *The Santiago Pilgrimage* by Jean-Christophe Rufin (translated in Chinese), and Sainan Wang's *The Santiago Pilgrimage Road* (written in Chinese).

Chinese Camino travelers in this study referred to the internet (36% among the blog authors and 50% among the interview respondents) or the friends (11% among the blog authors and 50% among the interview respondents) as their main reference sources when planning their journey, including deciding the which route to do, where the starting point would be, the distance of each stage, how many days they would need to complete it, connecting transportation, what things to pack for the journey, etc.. The websites being browsed for trip planning include both the Camino-related blogs on Chinese travel websites and some international websites, such as the official website of the Camino hosted by the Xunta de Galicia, and some English tourist websites. Of course, only those who are skilled in Spanish or English can benefit from non-Chinese websites for information searching. It should be noted that most of those who arrived in Spain from China used Chinese websites for preparation, especially from previous travelers' blogs. Among the students who were already living in Europe, some used non-Chinese official or commercial websites for their Camino trip-planning.

5.3 Experience during the Camino

5.3.1 First Impressions

As mentioned earlier, hiking is a new experience to many Chinese travelers, so many of them expressed a bit of uncertainty, anxiety on the first few days on the way, especially those who started the journey alone. What they felt uncertain about was whether the itinerary they took was correct, how to use the signposts such as the yellow arrows, where to find food and hostels. Some Chinese travelers also expressed the desire of some accompany and looked forward to encountering peer pilgrims on the way. The nature was impressive, the physical challenge was big, particularly for those who started from Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port, since on the very first day, they were expected to cross the Pyrenees, it was very challenging to many. But upon arrival on the first day, the fulfillment was also great.

'Finally, I was not alone anymore - I was thinking to myself. Suddenly felt relaxed and at peace. Then I realized I had been anxious all the time (the first day, from Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port).' (JR12)

'On the train from Madrid to Sarria, when I saw the snow on the mountains, I was afraid too. Then the moment I got off the train and saw many people from the same train who were searing backpacks and shells, then I knew I wouldn't be alone on this road, then I felt assured.' (JR26)

'The first day (from Sarria to Portomarin), is the lightest, we were energetic, stopped constantly, we even had energy to laugh...we knew nothing about what lied ahead of us, we were thinking for a moment that only till the destination of today could we find food to eat and a place to stay, or if the hostel was full we would have to sleep on the streets...then we learned that there are many bars on the way, the bars usually have accommodation and food service, the toilets are free to use, and there are shells to sell...milestones are important signs on the Camino, it would indicate

the distance to Santiago de Compostela and would point to the correct direction. milestones, yellow arrows, and shells follow you the whole journey. It's a wonderful that whenever I saw them on the way, I felt very at peace.' (JR27)

'It was very tiring; we were not familiar with the itinerary...the mountain climbing on the first day was quite challenging physically (from Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port.' (IN5)

'The first day the distance was the longest (from Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port). I walked and had blisters. I found everything new and exciting. I was not scared off by the difficulties, I was determined to walk to the end. But some people in the group were already thinking of giving up.' (IN12)

5.3.2 Nature

All Chinese travelers enjoyed the natural landscape of the Camino, regardless of their route selection. All Chinese Camino travelers, blog authors and interview respondents alike, come from an urban background, so the closeness to nature were impressive to them. Their expressed feelings associated with the natural landscape of the Camino include beauty, peace, content, healing and restoration, feelings of being touched, relaxed, free, liberated, energized. There is no doubt that nature has improved the mood and affectivity of Chinese Camino travelers, especially compared to their mood status before the journey, there was a big boost. The clean and fresh air, greenness, abundant plants, and animals, and in particular, the away-from-crowd, the peacefulness of nature is what Chinese Camino travelers enjoyed the most. Nature helped Chinese travelers become more present in their immediate reality, living in the present moment while walking the Camino. Although a few travelers evaluated the landscape not as the most beautiful one they have seen in the world, but it surely was beautiful to them because of its quality of peace. The natural landscape of Galicia was rated the most impressive among all sections of the French way.

'I enjoyed fully the beautiful long-time-no-see countryside view, my stressed body and mind suddenly felt relaxed a lot.' (JR13)

'Most tourists have an impression of Spain of the bright yellow and red, as the colors in the national flag of Spain. But to the walking pilgrims what they will remember is the beautiful, green Galicia.' (JR21)

'The streams are kissing the stones, the wind is blowing his leaves, the grass is producing their seeds, the cow is delivering his droppings, I am enjoying quietly the peace of solidarity but not loneliness.' (JR28)

'We walked the Primitive way, it is not along the sea, but the mountain landscape was very nice, I remember very well that I saw horses, sheep, cow, shepherd dogs along the way. The ecological environment is well preserved, I haven't seen it before, I was very impressed.' (IN1)

'When facing the sea and heading towards the clouds, this sense of desolation away from crowd is the most natural beauty of the Way of Saint James! This is the charm of hiking! I often travel but never go with a group. I like to feel slowly and feel the beauty of nature, or of cultural heritage. On the Northern Way, there is a section of snowy mountains, you can walk for three or five days to see the snowy mountains, it is very comfortable. We took the route along the beach, walked on the small trails, saw nobody in a few kilometers except for a photographer, I felt that the scenery along the way was the more beautiful. I don't like over-exploited scenic spots, here we find the original beauty of the nature. It is hard to see it in China because Chinese scenic spots are over-packed.' (IN6)

5.3.3 Food

Chinese Camino travelers in general liked local food very much. The most valued quality of the gastronomy on the Camino is the authentic flavor, the originality of local flavor. Some said they found that Spanish food is like Chinese food, for example the ways of cooking. So, they find it easy to adapt. There are some Chinese travelers who also cooked themselves Chinese food, not only for some home flavor, but also for social interaction – cross-cultural exchange with peer pilgrims.

‘They ordered many local, authentic Spanish tapas, and introduced one by one to me. The seafood of Galicia is indeed delicious.’ (JR24)

‘I was so thirsty that I went out to look for something to eat. My companion asked for an iced beer, I, as a pure Chinese, ordered a cup of hot water, and it shocked others. In such moments, besides ‘hola’, the only Spanish word I know came in handy – ‘agua caliente’, thanks to the Spanish friends I met in Norway. And my friends foresaw the scenario which I would be given hot tea if I asked for hot water, so they taught me to say also ‘agua solo’. (JR25)

‘All the fatigue of the day was healed by this food. Although they were not three-star Michelin gastronomy, but what a luxury and enjoyment to eat something warm after a long, stormy and muddy journey in the mountain!’. (JR71)

‘The pilgrim menu is very cost-effective, it’s a lot of food, sometimes I can’t even finish. The fried rice we ate at Pamplona was very delicious. Also, the pizza, the grapes at the vineyard, octopus, morcilla. Sometimes we cook at albergues by ourselves, it’s also a kind of experience of the Camino, a Camino culture. It’s not just for flavor, it’s for a better experience, when you sit down and eat and chat with others after cooking, to share Chinese culture, it’s very good. We once tried to avoid

crowds but soon we realized that's not right, then we started to choose to stay where most people would stay, to have a different experience.' (IN5)

'I like Spanish food very much. It is quite tasty. Many cuisines are like Chinese food. Besides, the price is inexpensive, and the food is fresh. I like them all, there is nothing I dislike. Octopus, Galician stew soup, shrimps and eggs, sea food, the taste is good.' (IN7)

'I liked them all. I have an international stomach, but my companion has a Chinese stomach. The food in this part of Spain seems to be very close to the flavor to Chinese people so we can adapt to it. It is a very local cuisine, original local flavor, with distinct characteristics. The cooking method is also to that of China, e.g., boiling, stewing. The deepest impression of food – it was so delicious – was Galician stewed bean soup, vegetable soup. It doesn't look very attractive, just looks like regular soup, but it tastes super good in the mouth. I didn't cook myself. I normally ate outside (on the Camino). I don't like cooking and I wanted to taste local food.' (IN9)

5.3.4 Language

Except for the Chinese students studying in Spain, most Chinese travelers do not speak Spanish, but it seems most of them could speak English and/or another European language, such as German or Portuguese. The non-Spanish-speaking travelers mentioned the experience of encountering language barriers, especially the lack of English proficiency among hostel and restaurant staff. The exception may be the last 100 kilometers, which were perceived as commercialized constructively. But anyway, the language barrier didn't seem to compromise the enjoyment of the journey. The attempt to communicate in the basic but human way – body language – was perceived a fun and authentic experience by Chinese travelers.

'English plus Google translate can deal with the basics. But if one knows Spanish it would be much easier, especially when ordering food. In large cities the service industry has no problem in communication in English, but in the small town along the way people don't speak English at all. I often say to myself with regret, why didn't I learn some Spanish before coming? Even if I wouldn't be able to chat freely with the grandpas, at least I could hear some stories from their conversation. The menu in Spain is truly incomprehensible without picture.' (JR6)

'The two of us communicated in clumsy English, plus body language to each other, like two noisy monkeys we talked with hands and legs dancing, even like that we chatted the whole way excitingly.' (JR9)

'Because there was no guide brochure in Chinese, I became 'blind' in the cathedral (of Burgos). I just took some pictures without a clue and wait to research about them after I go back to China. I didn't see the trace of the Renaissance, all the paintings of the Biblical figures were clothed in a conservative way, unlike in Italy or France, where it seems only nudity can manifest humanity most directly. Whether the paintings or the sculptures, I couldn't understand them, what does it mean when the figures holding a power stick or a Bible, lying underneath a sculpture? I don't know. It is sad when I looked at the explanatory boards without understanding a thing. The language barrier left me dazed and overwhelmed all the moments.' (JR63)

'Until in the second year of senior high school, I used to think that the entire Europe spoke English. Till I went to Norway as an exchange student I learnt that Germans speak German, French people speak French, Norwegian people speak Norwegian, Swedish people speak Swedish, Italians speak Italian, Icelanders speak Icelandic, not all blonde, blue-eyed people can speak fluent English. In a country where English is

not commonly spoken like Spain, particularly in those remote areas in this country, it is a lucky thing if you can speak a little Spanish. Even when we started the journey, we could only guess what other meant by putting together the words that we could understand, but slowly we could talk about life and religion with Spanish pilgrims with our broken Spanish. Of course, I wasn't sure whether they truly understood what I said, I wasn't sure if I truly understand theirs. But human communication does not depend on language alone. A smile, an eye expression can already express a lot.' (JR90)

'I don't speak English or Spanish. I used translation software to communicate with people or order food or ask for directions. A lady in a small town explained to me the local history, I used the software and it worked ok.' (IN2)

5.3.5 Cultural Landscape

The sense of history and ancientness of the cultural landscape on the Camino way impressed Chinese travelers the most. Surrounded by Romanic, Gothic architecture of centuries or even millennium years old, the Chinese travelers really enjoyed that 'local, exotic, historic, original' side of the place they passed by.

'On the other side of the town it is the Queen's bridge (Ponte de la Reina). It is still so well preserved after 900 years, it is incredible. Just by touching I felt like touching cultural relics.' (JR10)

'There was a cemetery on the side. I went in to take a look, there were traditional-shaped long coffin, there were also wall burial, all were simple and modest. Different from the cemeteries of us who do not belong to a religion, these tombs have a cross on each of them. Maybe it was the view on life and death of the Christians, or maybe it was the Western customs, their cemetery was located inside their village or town.'

The families and friends could visit them anytime, they didn't take death as a taboo, unlike us (the Chinese).' (JR64)

'We sat in a dining hall that was built with stones, suddenly it felt like returning back to the Middle Age.' (JR42)

'I didn't feel a strong cultural shock but did feel the difference in natural landscape and architecture. It seems more original style is preserved here. The households do gardening, it makes me admire, that has impressed me a lot. It feels that they live a refined life, they do gardening, grow flowers, and trim their trees in shapes. Even farmers have a pursuit of aesthetics. From that I feel a cultural difference in life attitude. I also remember very well the old town of Pamplona, many churches, the metal sculpture on the peak of pardon, cruz de ferro, because that's one of the scenes from the movie, it makes us excited. Others such as the cathedral in Burgos, in Leon, very impressed, very beautiful. The Celtic stone house is also very impressive. The winery as well.' (IN5)

'I don't have religious beliefs; I just enjoy architecture. There were many historical architecture monuments along the way, including local villages and their lifestyles. It's a way to learn about Spain. The previous knowledge about Spain was limited and subjective. It is a pity that many old houses are in poor condition. They are worthy of renovation or preservation. It is a social issue which should raise awareness of the government, to preserve the old houses for future generation as their history.' (IN9)

Religious architecture is an important part of the cultural landscape on the Camino in the eyes of Chinese travelers. Generally Chinese travelers enjoyed seeing and visiting the local churches, as part of their cultural experience, although an in-depth understanding of

the religious culture may be limited by language barriers. Some travelers also experienced peace and spiritual consolation in the religious space of a church.

'Sitting on the long bench here (in a small church) I felt a tranquility in the spirit, unlike a sense of awe that I felt in big cathedrals.' (JR7)

'I would visit every church I passed on the way and prayed there; this is a habit that I formed on the Camino. Churches can calm down and empower people. I'm not a believer, but God has not been stingy. Slowly, I fell a little in love with their God.' (JR34)

'There are many churches on the way. I don't believe in religion, so I can only appreciate their architecture, but what gave me the shock inside is not their grand and solemn appearance but the light that sheds into the church. That light, along with the angelic voice of hymns, as if it has shed into my mind when I stand there.' (JR76)

'It's a pity that while doing the Camino, I paid more attention to walking in a hurry and very little on the churches on the way. We encountered a lot of churches, and we went more for stamps, and there was little preparation in understanding the churches. I went in some of them for a look but didn't really understand it. If there is any story or history, we must have missed them... (in a church) we could see it was very ancient, and it was maintained very well. The churches are all in use and alive, not because it's old that it's abandoned. There are visitors, there are people going for masses, they do not interfere with each other and are quiet.' (IN2)

'If you don't understand the history behind it, cultural landscape is also like natural landscape. When doing my first Camino, I did not understand Christian culture, there was no background knowledge about it. The churches are attractive to Chinese

people because it is not common in China, but it is aesthetically tiring after seeing too many. You can see churches in any small town in Europe, and you feel the aesthetic fatigue. In fact, the aesthetic fatigue happens only when the knowledge reserve reaches a bottleneck. When the background knowledge is limited, everything looks the same. For example, the churches in Paris and Milan are the same, both Catholic, almost the same inside. If you don't understand the story behind it, you will soon get tired, because there are too many churches in Europe. Looking at the church all the way was interesting and boring, and I became used to it.' (IN7)

When the movie-driven Chinese travelers or those who had seen some official videos about the Camino before the journey went on the way and recognized some sites that have appeared in the movie or videos, they shared their excitement.

'This church has appeared in the movie The Way too, when the male lead first met the big guy from Netherland and the female pilgrim, the background was this church.' (JR13)

'I intentionally watched the movie again before I set off, so every step I took was like walking into the movie, but a several hundred times more wonderful than watching the movie!' (JR51)

'Soon I encountered the stone bridge which I saw (in the movie) from the official website, from imagination to realness it felt very amazing, as if (I was) experiencing history myself.' (JR58)

5.3.6 Pilgrim Hostels (Albergues)

The common narratives that the Camino blog authors talked about their experience in pilgrim hostels or 'albergue' in Spanish mainly involve interactions with peer pilgrims

such as chatting or cooking together. Some are about interactions with volunteers or 'hospitaleros' in Spanish. But many blog authors did make a brief introduction to various types of accommodation available on the Camino, classified them according to price and conditions. Few of them shared about their comments of facilities of the hostels they have stayed. To learn more about this aspect, the researcher asked the interview respondents to elaborate their experiences of accommodation. The feedback of the Camino interview respondents showed that even though accommodation was not an impressive experience on the Camino, it seems that they were satisfied with it in general. They were aware that the accommodation condition on the Camino was expected to be simple, so they were ready to accept rough conditions. It was an experience for them.

'After saying goodbye to the couple from Bilbao, I went back to the big bunk-bedded dormitory room. The curfew hour at the hostels is 10pm normally. I slipped into my bed in the dark. Accompanied by snores, sleep talks, whispers, laughters, feet smells, sweat smells, I fell asleep deeply.' (JR28)

'We live in pilgrim hostels. I've never slept on bunk beds or shared rooms with so many people before. We have people are from all parts of the world, from different cultures, different skin colors, mixed genders. I was very impressed.' (IN1)

'The entire Camino accommodation was pretty good. I went for the experience anyway. From the beginning I knew it was different from regular tourism. Of course, the accommodation may not be so convenient sometimes, but it was a unique experience....and in the albergue on the second last day, we met a group of Italian pilgrims in the kitchen. We talked a bit and later they came to me and invited me and my companions to eat together. We tasted their pasta and sang together.' (IN2)

'Albergues are very good. The conditions are ok. Anyway, it is normally this standard. It is acceptable if must accommodate 200 people. In the last stage my son was bitten by bed bugs, but this is part of the Camino. The impression of albergues in each town is very good. There is a place to live, it feels like a home, you communicate with people you meet during the day.' (IN8)

'I didn't book in advance all the way, except for the hotel in Santiago, I stayed wherever we walked to. I have stayed in the public albergues as well as private hostels, and it's interesting to experience different types of accommodation. On the second last day, I stayed in a century-old private albergue. The walls were made of stone, half a meter thick, and the decoration was particularly nice. It receives pilgrims and was very old and rustic. The owner's entire family runs this place, they literally piled up stone by stone by the previous generation and the present generation. I have been to Europe before, and I feel that my experience of accommodation of the 100 kilometers of the Camino is different from that of a hotel. In a shared space with bunk beds, you can meet all kinds of interesting people. We also stayed in historic hotels. Accommodation is also an important part of the Camino experience.' (IN9)

5.3.7 Hostel Volunteers (Hospitaleros)

Some Chinese Camino travelers realized that some staff in the pilgrim hostels are volunteers, who served pilgrims out of religious faith and devotion, especially in the albergues run by religious organizations. They respected them and felt moved by their warmth, their assistance and caring, and their religious commitment. But not all Chinese travelers had noticed such difference between regular hostel staff and volunteers, especially those who walked a short distance, e.g., the last 100 kilometers of the French

Way, as there are many options for accommodation, perhaps some pilgrims never run into a pilgrim albergue managed by volunteers, they only stayed in private commercial hostels.

'The nun had a big smile on her face. I don't know what word to describe it, it's a joy from the heart...anyway it made me feel so good all of sudden. Smiles truly can pass on positive energy...the volunteer grandpa sent me off at the gate. This is a very warm albergue...' (JR10)

'The hospitaleros that manage this albergue are all volunteers from local retired grandpas and grandmas. Every time we get in and out of the building, we need to ring the bell to ask them to open the door for us. Every time I saw them, with their white hair, walk with a staff, come slowly from inside, I would feel unbearable, respectful and moved: unbearable that at such an old age they have to serve me, moved that at such an old age they still tried their best to serve God...I was touched once again, what kind of faith made such a group of people of around 70 years old, to get up early and return late every day, to guard and serve the pilgrims?' (JR12)

'The hostel volunteer cooked herself for more than ten pilgrims of us, she let us sit around one table for supper, like a family. After supper she drew a map and explained in three languages to us the itinerary tomorrow, including how to cross the iron bridge, take the short-cut...how sweet.' (JR39)

'The nuns at the private monastery hotel impressed me a lot. The volunteers of the HERBÓN monastery were the most impressive. They were at their shifts, and we heard their experiences. They were very good at exaggerating the atmosphere and said very emotional things. The pilgrims were in tears that night. The next morning, the three volunteers served us breakfast and saw us off one by one to the door.' (IN3)

'On the worst day when my feet were swollen and limp, the straps of my backpack broke, others arrived early and helped me reserve a bed. When I arrived, the person who registered for me at the front desk greeted me warmly as soon as he saw me: it was you! He helped me see my foot injuries, regardless of whether my feet were dirty or smelly, he helped me apply medicine, he also helped us deal with bed bugs carefully. He is the hospitalero who impressed me the most.' (IN11)

5.3.8 Local people

'Warm-hearted', 'cheerful', 'relaxed' perhaps are the most frequent key words that Chinese Camino travelers used to describe the local people they encountered in Spain. Observing how local people live, interacting with them at bars, hostels, in the fields became an important part of their experience of Spain and the Camino. Chinese travelers reflected on the life attitude and values behind what they have seen on the locals. Related to this relaxing lifestyle, the Spanish business hours sometimes made some Chinese travelers felt inconvenient.

'Walking in Spain is a very comfortable experience. Apart from the picturesque landscape, the relaxing, calm life attitude of the local people shows a confident universal value that can exist only after one is self-sufficient.' (JR6)

'The local people in the bar were also very warm. When he saw me holding a camera, he asked if I could take a photo for him, so I also brought my beer glass and toasted with him. There was an uncle eating a big plate of seafood. He asked me which football league I like, Real Madrid or Barcelona. I said Barcelona and he said in a joking way – you get out, this is a place for Real Madrid fans. Then everyone in the bar burst into laughter.' (JR16)

'I went back to the town and walked around. I felt that the life of local people truly relaxing, the rhythm is also pretty slow and nature, and you could also feel that subtext that says, 'I want to rest, I don't want to work.' (JR63)

'The warmth of Spanish people must be the most memorable impression of everyone who walked the Camino, and to me it is also the most charming feature of this way.' (JR91)

'Then we started to complain about the fact that supermarkets are closed on Sundays. I said that in China all supermarkets are open all year long. We didn't have the awareness to prepare in advance for Sundays, and now I almost have no food left. She said that supermarkets are opened all year long in Korea too, and there would be convenience stores that open 24 hours, shopping is very convenient. Unlike here, besides Sundays, the shops are closed from 14:00-17:00. Really not used to this.' (JR17)

'The main cultural difference is the snap after lunch (siesta) of Spain. Every siesta feels like a village is dead, there is no one, there is no life, there is no place to buy stuff, and albergues are not opened yet, so I had to look for a place to wait.' (IN11)

But nonetheless, everyone was touched by how warm and kind the local people were towards pilgrims. The kindness of the local people gave Chinese travelers very warm memories of Spain and sweet memories of their Camino.

'As we passed through the village, the villagers or car drivers would greet us warmly when they saw that we were pilgrims. We surely responded happily.' (JR20)

'When I passed by the wayside church, a kind-looking, white-hair old grandma was helping the pilgrim stamp the stamp. After stamping, she then took out a necklace with a pendent of Mary, tied with a white string, placed it in her palm of hand, talked

to pilgrims, holding the hand of the pilgrim, said many words of blessing, then put the necklace on the pilgrims. This simple necklace became my most cherished treasure all along my way.’ (JR30)

‘The people living in the towns and cities along the Camino have developed a special skill, which is to perfectly understand the people with special needs like us, who write their pain on the face and wear boots, without needing us to say a word.’ (JR92)

‘Some villagers were very enthusiastic towards pilgrims on the pilgrimage road. I remember that we encountered an old man outside the courtyard picking figs for us. The language was not fluent, but this communication did not require language skills. I think they (local people) are very warm-hearted.’ (IN2)

‘When the local people gave us a thumbs up, we felt incredible strength! Everyone greeted us kindly and respects the pilgrims with backpacks and shells.’ (IN6)

5.3.9 Peer Pilgrims

‘Buen Camino’ in English means ‘have a good walk’, it is the most common greeting pilgrim say to their peers on the Camino. Sometimes the local people would say the same thing to them. Chinese travelers soon discovered this and enjoyed joining this custom. It made them feel welcomed, encouraged, consoled, and they could feel a sense of belonging to a community of pilgrims.

‘A greeting ‘Buen Camino’ from strangers can light up the landscapes around, remove the fatigue of the journey, warm the hardship of the way.’ (JR28)

‘When we felt tired, exhausted, thought that we couldn’t walk more or hold on anymore, a ‘Buen Camino’ from fellow pilgrims always made us feel so warm, gave us the strength to keep on.’ (JR32)

“A simple ‘Buen Camino’, the casual caring for each other, all made this way full of humanity.’ (JR35)

‘This greeting (buen camino) shocked me on the first day. Such a simple greeting could make the distance between one another so close. If you travel in a city, no matter how warm-hearted cities, when you say hello to strangers for directions or for assistance, they (will help you) but not many people would chat with you cheerfully, introduce themselves to you. But on the Camino, just a ‘Buen Camino’ is enough to initiate a conversation and a friendship. ‘Buen Camino’ is the best key for you to open this big gate. I believe that making friends on other journeys would not be as simple and effective as it is on the Camino.’ (JR54)

“‘Buen Camino’ is a word unique on the Camino, it is a bright view to behold on the Camino. It means ‘have a good walk’. It is both a greeting when you meet with someone but also a farewell when you depart from someone. Even ordinary passer-by would say ‘Buen Camino’ to us walkers – this is a special blessing to pilgrims from devoted and warm-hearted Spanish people, which makes us feel so warm. If I receive this blessing from the local people, I will definitely respond with ‘Gracias’ in Spanish to express gratitude. Every day on the Camino pilgrims is in a shower of such blessings.’ (JR73)

Interactions with fellow pilgrims is another most memorable experiences of the Camino. Chinese travelers were deeply moved by the caring, warm relationship among pilgrims, which is an experience that’s not always present in the everyday life.

‘I told him the staff is his now. He took out some biscuits from his backpack and passed them to me. Since then, our friendship as comrades in revolution had been born.’ (JR8)

'The Japanese sister learned that I didn't have Vaseline, she took out hers and applied it on my feet skillfully, not minding at all the smell or dirt on my feet from walking for two hours. The French lady saw that I was ok, she left first. I formally thanked her, but she said it was her honor to help... I'm not someone who gets emotional in everyday life, but this way seems to have developed my lacrimal gland. When I thought of the help from those two and those from my group, I walked alone slowly, cried loud as I was walking, I didn't know another way to express how touched I was except for crying. Words can't record the shock my heart felt when facing such kindness of others without any reservation...' (JR24)

'It was raining in the morning when I left... Auntie Irene from Scotland illuminated my path like an angel and reminded me from time to time about mud and puddles. I encountered all the time angels like her on the Camino. It has nothing to do with nationality or age.' (JR28)

'Because I had washed all my clothes, I was only wearing a T-shirt. I was trembling in the cold when I went out to the pharmacy. The big brother immediately handed to me an umbrella and put his jacket on me. What virtues or merits do I have to deserve the care of so many kind people all along this way! Because of this blog, I slowly remembered all these touching details through memories. Till today they still moved me to tears...' (JR30)

'People on the Camino all keep away their defense and apathy that has been formed in modern societies. They interact with each other with sincerity and offer each other help. This indeed is what is very absent in the everyday life in the forest of cement and steel.' (JR36)

A Lot of details in the Camino blogs recorded the exchange with fellow pilgrims, the interview respondents shared similar experiences. Besides the warmth and assistance, it is the cultural exchange that Chinese travelers enjoyed very much, it was a learning experience for them. They observed the cultural differences from others' behaviors and reflected on their home culture.

'The Italian pilgrims also emphasized some table manners, for example one can only use forks and roll up when eating pasta. Manners such as using chopsticks like the Chinese or using a knife with a fork like the Germans are extremely impolite behaviors, this is a religious thing. Also, after finishing the pasta, it is good to remove the sauce with bread, etc.' (JR7)

'She (a Swiss pilgrim) was like a student, raised many questions about our country. Every time she asked a question, she asked each of us about our opinions, I felt that each one was greatly respected. I learnt a lot from this conversation how important it is to allow everyone to talk about his or her thought in a group chat. In this impatient society, how many times our group gathering just got lost in boasting, gossiping, we unconsciously overlooked how other people felt.' (JR22)

'I met two little brothers who are missionaries. They live in San Sebastian, one comes from the US, the other from Ecuador. Different from my impression about missionaries who are usually conservative and boring, or maybe because we are of similar age, we chatted the whole way while walking. I, who received an atheist education since I was young, know very little about religion apparently. I asked many unorganized questions, I guess I disclosed my ignorance too, but the little brother was very patient. He talked about Jesus, about the twelve disciples, three Apostles,

Religious Reformation, the Pentecost, I can say I understood half of it. One should have (religious) faith, no?’ (JR33)

‘Foreigners like to pause to rest for a long time during the journey, enjoyed a meal, had a drink, then keep on. But we, more often prefer to reach the day’s destination faster, take a shower and change clothes, then enjoy a meal, have a drink in the sunset. They enjoy it on the way, we enjoy it at the destination. These feelings truly come from the heart, it’s all the charm of hiking. I hope that there’ll be more Chinese to go there to feel it – the atmosphere of different cultures during the hiking.’ (JR87)

‘The grandpa brought his son to experience (the Camino). I feel that Westerners start to cultivate the independence of children at an earlier age than Easterners...In the afternoon, Western pilgrims put their feet in the pond, with their shoes and socks. Those who stayed here tonight also put their feet inside the pond. Westerners believe that cold water can help remove swelling and pain. This is the opposite to the Eastern way of removing swelling and pain by soaking feet in hot water. Easterners believe that hot water is good for circulation, relaxation of tendons, removal of swelling and dissolution of blood stasis. Western medicine focuses on methods that can bring immediate effect, Chinese medicine emphasizes the promotion of the natural healing functions of the human body...’ (JR88)

‘There is also a culture of seeking common ground while reserving differences: on the Camino, everyone walks at different speeds, does not demand to be fast or slow, I think this is very good. Doesn’t have to comprise to adjust to other’s rhythm. I like that. I have very comfortable impression about peer pilgrims. Many people on the Camino like to communicate with others, if they make an eye contact, they will start to communicate. I have made many friends. In the following years, I went to Europe

several times, and I met again with people from Spain and Italy whom I met on the Camino. They are all very warm-hearted, and they all come to invite me to dinner. The relationship is pretty good. Europeans live differently from ours. A Spaniard said that after working for a few years, he took a few years off and then went to work again. The Chinese work very hard, they have been working hard and fighting until they are old. The Spanish guy I met lives a typical Western lifestyle, and maybe many Europeans are also like it. This impressed me quite deeply, and I think their lifestyle is quite good.’ (IN8)

‘It’s a great feeling that you can interact with and get shocked by people from different countries and different cultures in the same time and space...One important aspect about the Camino is the experience to open oneself, as long as he is willing to open, integrate into the environment and interact with people, the atmosphere created by the whole environment is like this. Everyone has many stories after walking. But going to Paris or Italy is just your own story. There are not many other people's stories. But the Camino is more than 100 kilometers to communicate with different people, and the memory is still alive, I can still remember how it was like when communicating with people...The way of communication and of opening oneself is through cultural collision. In China it is quite closed. Sometimes if I want to say hello to others in the morning, say, in the elevator, others will feel very weird. That’s depressing. When I got to the Camino, I felt normal. I could relax and open myself...’ (IN9)

Chinese travelers soon discovered that there were few Chinese on the Camino, that was the feedback from other pilgrims and from local people sometimes. One side of it was they received attention, in a positive and friendly way. Another side of it was, from the

exchange with non-Chinese, particularly with pilgrims of Western background, it was also a discovery about the cognitive gap about China in the Western world. In this sense, encountering Chinese is also a learning experience to Western pilgrims.

'They showed their curiosity about China in the conversation, I was surely very willing to clarify doubts and introduce the current situation in China, we had a happy chat, I even invited them to officially join our wolf pack... He (a German pilgrim) was an engineer before retirement. After learning that I come from China, he asked me many questions regarding the present situation in China. These days I discovered that many people are actually curious about today's China but know very little.'

(JR13)

'After I sat down and put off my thick jackets and organized my backpack, the waiter unexpectedly served a cup of cappuccino and bread, but I didn't order it?! The Swiss auntie at the next table smiled and said, 'there will be bread and there will be café', it was her treat, to the first Chinese she met on the Camino. At that moment, I was so moved that I was speechless.' (JR18)

'...I switched the English mode in my brain to German mode right away, to listen to what the Germans were discussing about China...to my surprise they were talking about Chinese drink only the milk but not eat cheese...in the end the wife of that couple said 'echt komisch' (how ridiculous), I reacted sensitively, immediately responded by saying, 'warum komisch' (why ridiculous?) right there those Germans were completely shocked...I guess that they had never seen a Chinese who speaks German...then I said, you Germans only eat rice but not rice porridge, that is also ridiculous. The Germans were frozen for three seconds and apologized to me...In fact, this is nothing related to principles, we would not argue over the table for this...The

Germans suddenly got interested in me and started to ask me many questions...then we suddenly became very close friends. Indeed, how much must they not know China! They expectedly asked me about whether Chinese eat dog meat, I answered them seriously and objectively: in China there are only two regions that eat dog meat, most other provinces do not have that custom. They were very excited to catch a Chinese who can speak German, they indeed chatted with me the whole night and I had no time to dry my wet clothes...' (JR22)

'The sister said that she learned from others that 'if one has not been to China means one has not seen the world', so she was interested to China but never was able to start to travel. I said, I have already come here to your country and your city, why is it impossible for you to come to mine? China welcomes you! The grandpa saw my water-heater, he was very surprised and told everyone, do you know that this Chinese girl carries her kitchen in her backpack! In their eyes this Chinese girl is strange because of the many stuffs she carries, and often some weird things such as hair-dyer, water-heater, massage kit and the sort, and even more scary, she likes to drink boiling tea! (of course, to me it's just hot tea).' (JR53)

'Maybe there are indeed a few Chinese on the way, or maybe it is out of curiosity about China, so when they faced us who are a non-Catholic, Chinese, the truly wanted to know: how did you learnt about the Camino? Why did you walk this way? My ancient motherland is a mystery in the eyes of many who have never been to China. I was also very willing to tell them how China was rapidly developing, people living peacefully and happily today...we were often mistaken as Koreans, Japanese, or from Taiwan. I would correct it right away: I'm Chinese!' (JR67)

There was a sense of community among the pilgrims, in which Chinese pilgrims were a part of. It's a feeling that has been formed from sharing similar experiences, sharing time and space, sharing food and thoughts, sharing an identity. To many Chinese travelers, this feeling is like that of a family, where members are emotionally connected.

'We who were standing on the square, looking up at the Santiago cathedral, come from different countries, having different skin colors and age cohorts, different educational and occupational background, but in essence our lives are not very different, our happiness and pain, struggles and frustrations, bitterness and sweetness in life are all similar...when I was attending together with hundreds of pilgrims the pilgrim mass, I again had a sense of happiness to share with others and a sense of belonging.' (JR1)

'I like very much the albergue tonight. Without wifi but we were all very happy. We ate together, sang, and danced together. Even we didn't know each other, we met tonight and will say goodbye tomorrow morning, we felt like a family. One must come oneself to be able to understand the warmth it has created.' (JR11)

'Observing them is observing myself. We have walked the same long distance, this empathy can be understood and appreciated when there was eye contacts, even if we don't know each other... Life always needs this kind of sense of ritual, which allows people from different parts of the world, with different skin color, race, religion, nationality to come together and do such an unbelievable thing to those who cannot understand it, and then to enjoy the joy and contentedness that belong to the self at the plaza of the Santiago cathedral together.' (JR16)

'I'm going to join them', I said to myself. Till now I feel this is kind of surreal. When I learnt about the Camino three years ago on the Spanish textbook, I never thought I

would be part of those dry texts, as if we belonged to two different quadrants. But today I am standing on this old way of pilgrimage, so real... isn't this an amazing and interesting thing, that your journey overlaps with that of people of a thousand years ago.' (JR31)

'Time in albergues is an important part of the Camino. After a day's hiking and shower, we sit down together at the albergue lobby, chat about interesting experience of the day. At dinner time, sometimes we buy food and cook together, just like a family. We often say, 'we are Camino family'. On the Camino, you can chat with pilgrims around the world, learning about the cultures of different countries.' (JR41)

'Everyone comes from a different country, different race, different families. They are either happy or unhappy, either rich or poor. Despite different goals, at least at this moment, at least there is one thing in common – all of us have walked the same way and reached the same destination.' (JR57)

'We participate in group dinner and service (cleaning). It was a heart-to-heart communication, like that among soldiers.' (IN8)

Yuanfen is a Buddhist term, meaning predestined relationship, is often referred in Chinese culture to explain the invisible dynamics in interpersonal relationships. It somehow determines when people encounter and when they depart. It's interesting to see that so many Chinese Camino travelers attributed their interactions with fellow pilgrims to the work of *yuanfen*.

'This way is indeed amazing. All the companions maybe you meet once and then never meet again, or after a long time they appeared again suddenly. It's really hard to describe that feeling of amazement brought by yuanfen.' (JR22)

'Yuanfen is truly an interesting thing. Now when I recalled it, many times you thought it would be just a short departure, but you never met each other again.

Sometimes you thought it would be a short stay but never were able to leave.' (JR37)

'Yuanfen is very amazing, you would encounter whom you meant to encounter...

People around you come and go, it's difficult to walk with one person till the end, but the Camino is something that keeps bring you surprises.' (JR40)

'The word of yuanfen is amazing. Last year on the Camino, I met a sister from Korea, we walked together about a hundred kilometers. She asked me if in Chinese there is a word that expresses a tight tie between people, which arrive suddenly. I told her the word is called yuanfen. She repeated that 'we are yuanfen'. If you ask me whether I believe that yuanfen lies among people, I do believe it. Every encounter, every flame that is generated in a conversation is caused by yuanfen.' (JR49)

'The Camino is like this. All the departures and reunions depend totally on yuanfen... After all, we all walk on this way, if we have yuanfen, we will meet each other sooner or later.' (JR53)

5.3.10 Identity

Majority of Chinese Camino travelers perceived themselves sharing the same identity with other individuals who were walking on the same way, in another word, they perceived themselves as pilgrims of the Camino de Santiago. They observed pilgrim traditions such as wearing a shell, carrying their backpack, using pilgrim credentials for stamps, applying for a pilgrim certificate after arrival and joining the pilgrim mass at the cathedral. They had this self-assumed identity based on their understanding of what a Camino pilgrim implied - some fundamental characteristics which they associated to the identity of a Camino pilgrim, e.g., enduring hardship (carrying one's own backpack,

traveling on foot), perseverance (covering long distance), living under simple conditions, dressed up simply. When those unspoken 'code of conduct' was broken they felt a sense of violation against the values or standards they held. Their perceived identity as a legitimate pilgrim was not based on religious belief.

'Out of the commitment as a pilgrim, we refused her invitation of a ride, we completed the last two kilometers on foot.' (JR20)

'I only walked 14 kilometers today, super lazy, I don't look like someone who came here to do a pilgrimage...Some people started to take a bus to Leon from Burgos because there isn't much landscape and there's too much sun, but we believe that as long as one starts to walk, one should complete the entire journey on one's own feet, we never thought of taking a bus. But of course, everyone has one's own choice.' (JR40)

'I ordered a plate of octopus that I have been longing for, consoled my wounded body – although I'm not supposed to indulge myself on a way that's meant for hardship.' (JR30)

'We hide the real-life label of each of one of us, all the background has been hidden, each of us has become a pure pilgrim.' (JR70)

'(in a city) when walking among a group of people who dressed neatly and brightly, I felt myself like an alien.' (JR71)

'In fact, there are some people who cheat, especially in the last 100 kms that start from Sarria. Many shipped their backpacks through private or taxi companies and walked without carrying any weight. In principle this kind of walkers cannot occupy public albergues in priority, but there are always some 'smart and thick-cheeked' ones did so. I wonder if such pilgrimage will also count.' (JR94)

To better understand what inspired Chinese Camino travelers to hold such 'criteria' of the pilgrim identity, questions about the understanding of 'pilgrimage' and 'pilgrim' before and after they walked the Camino were asked to the interview respondents. It seems their conceptualization of pilgrimage and pilgrim originally came from Buddhism, and their image of a pilgrim has been influenced by pilgrims of Tibetan Buddhism such as 'kora', which often involves hardship, self-discipline, perseverance, simple conditions. However, after walking the Camino, most of their perception of pilgrimage has changed. They now believe that pilgrimage is a journey to the self, anyone who seeks their self-defined sacredness is a pilgrim, and their journey is a pilgrimage.

'If you talked about pilgrimage or pilgrim to me before the Camino, I would think this is something very far from me, because of the atheist education and the information I received from the internet, not relevant to me at all. But after walking the Camino, I think that pilgrimage is not far from us. I think everyone has a holy temple in his heart. You don't have to believe in a certain god to do a pilgrimage. If you walk towards the holy temple in your heart, your goal, walking towards goodness, the direction of the good, the beautiful ideas in your heart, you are a pilgrim or a pilgrimage road, even if it's not the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage road.'

(IN1)

'I could only recall Tibetan kora when I heard of pilgrimage before I walked the Camino. It was out of religious faith. Pilgrimage is for the believers, individual or group, to walk to a direction or a destination. There are changes in my understanding. First, this word 'pilgrimage' still is quite formal, but 'pilgrim' can have or not have religious faith. It doesn't mean that non-religious believers cannot use the word 'pilgrim'. Pilgrimage is an inner quest. He who does a pilgrimage is to

search in his heart, then I understand that everyone can be called a pilgrim. The moment you empty yourself, all the reflections and self-dialogue, is also a pilgrimage. If you feel this way and have obtained something, you are a pilgrim, it's not related to religion.' (IN5)

'Before I walked the Camino my understanding was first it's a religious activity, one must have a religious faith to come to a place to pursue a sublimation in the body and mind and spirituality. After walking the Camino, I think in fact pilgrimage is not as far and abstract as I thought, it's quite real. Whether you have religious belief or not, you can go on a pilgrimage. The idea of 'sacredness' in everyone's heart is different. You can pursue your religious belief, you can pursue your personal belief too, which is also a kind of pilgrimage.' (IN10)

5.3.11 Inner Feelings

Most Chinese Camino travelers reported frequently having a sense of joy, contentedness, inner peace, freedom, liberation, and relaxation during the journey on the Camino. Close contact with nature, escape from everyday stress, opportunities to live a simple lifestyle and to freely express one's will, warmth of strangers, all contributed to their positive affectivity. It should be noted that even the same question on the inner movement was asked to the interview respondents among Chinese Camino travelers, most of the time the responses they gave were related to a report of an event which focused on what happened rather than how they felt. It somehow implies that sharing abstract, emotional experience in an interview, especially when it depends on recalling of an experience, is not always an easy thing.

'I've never thought that I would one day stand in the field, feeling happy and even moved just by watching the farmers harvesting, smiling like a fool. After walking the

Camino, I often felt that an innocent heart woke up again in my body, all the small and subtle beauty around would make me feel content and happy.’ (JR12)

‘I found that I have changed gradually, I no longer wanted to argue, my character gradually started to become quieter.’ (JR14)

‘I had a happy walk along the way, except for the inevitable physical fatigue and pain. I’m very grateful for this short but complete freedom, which allows me to cut temporarily from the life in the past. All the twenty-four hours are my own, I can walk, sing, read, talk, sleep, I can schedule the day as I wish, no need to be responsible for anyone.’ (JR39)

‘After being on the way for twelve days, I have a wonderful feeling, it seems that the life on the Camino or my heart has slowly become calm and settled, and a sense of peace rose, which is difficult to describe in words. I could see how time was flowing silently and slowly, but I was neither anxious nor excited. I couldn’t remember what had happened the day before and didn’t pay attention to what would happen the next day. I had no questions in the brain for reflection and no answers to seek. I was just watching everything to happen quietly...’ (JR73)

‘But in this world where speed and convenience are goals for everything, who will still spend a whole day’s time to reflect on a simple question? Or just simply look at the blue sky, the clouds, or the shapes of the tree leaves? Who are still willing to spend five to six hours to walk a distance that can be covered in more than ten minutes? It was the time that has flown slowly that allowed my inner world to complete a transformation from hot debate, to self-reflection, to inner peace in the end. Compared to the weight of the backpack, the weight in the mind is harder to

bear. And the slow-flowing time here unloaded the heavy backpack in my mind.'

(JR90)

'There are many landscapes to see, the vast sunflower fields, corn fields, vineyards, and it's very open – when the landscape is connected and vast, it is spectacular... It's a kind of relaxation brought by space.' (IN7)

Other positive attitude towards the self also appeared in the accounts of Chinese travelers. For instance, many of them reported having reached a sense settlement- an acceptance of reality, whether it's related to themselves or to life in general. Such an acceptance was developed through all that was experienced during the journey, some specifically pointed out it was through accepting one's physical limits, accepting the fact that one cannot have total control in what happens in life, whether it was a gain or loss, just as one cannot control at what time who would walk in and out of their Camino journey. Some claimed having obtained a sense of courage and strength in themselves and towards the unknown future, often as a fruit of having been able to overcome all kinds of difficulties to complete the Camino. The simple, frank yet very heart-warming interactions with others during the journey made many Chinese travelers express a deep sense of gratitude towards others and towards life. These positive feelings and attitudes made a sharp contrast to the gloomy, heavy feelings of the same individuals before they embarked on the Camino.

'I re-accepted myself, maybe since now I no longer get happy or sad for the gains and loss in life. Or maybe I rediscovered the balance between the id, ego and superego.' (JR19)

'Often in real life I cannot fit in, as if there was a door between me and the world around me. I love my friends, but I often find it difficult to dialogue with them. But this is not important anymore. After walking this way, I'm certain that I still love

them, but I'm not afraid to let them see my inner loneliness and isolation. I have slowly obtained a soft inner self which one should have to embrace this world...I absorbed the energy all along this way to soften my inner self, and I have found the fortitude and courage to face life.' (JR26)

'I'm also very happy that I have met these lovely people, they made me change, made me more cheerful, more confident.' (#40)

'There are two things you cannot expect to get just by asking: one is weather, the other is love. It will rain when it must rain, will be cloudy when it must be cloudy...even when it pours, as long it's sunny in the heart, every day is a happy day, regardless of the weather. So, I accept happily with gratitude what Heaven has given me and use limited conditions to create more happiness that belongs to me.' (JR90)

'The moment I was alone by myself, the whole world is just very very quiet, my whole heart then quiet down. I feel that my body and soul are together again. Because many things happened before the Camino, I was busy and occupied and felt I was split into two, one is the body and the other is the soul. On the Camino this two 'I' became one again. My whole person and whole heart became very quiet after walking the Camino, I remembered what I originally intended to pursue.' (IN10)

5.3.12 Lost in Time and Space

Another common experience that has been reported is related to disorientation of time and space, usually a slowed time and disorientation in location.

'That night (after a community prayer at a pilgrim hostel), I felt that time had stopped. There was no work stress, no language barrier, as if I had been through a baptism of rebirth. I knew at that moment we all encountered another self.' (JR14)

'Away from crowd and internet, time restored its due speed. Those humble small villages made me feel that time has been frozen. They made me believe that the world hasn't changed. But those that are remembered by the land are being forgotten by the broken world. In the center of the modern society, either one expands, or one extinguish.' (JR31)

'The period when the sun is rising is the most comfortable period, the temperature is just right, and I'm by myself. That feeling is like that the whole world is yours, time seems to have slowed down.' (JR63)

'Twelve days (on the way), it felt like several months have passed.' (JR70)

'Every day I rest well, full of energy. It's just that I have to recall where I am now...'
(JR79)

5.3.13 Experience of Religion

Religious elements are very present on the Camino, especially on the French way. Majority of Chinese Camino travelers, blog authors and interview respondents included, reported their observation of and involvement in religious activities. Besides visiting churches, Chinese travelers also practiced religious behavior such as praying and going to mass. Such behavior indicated that they also utilized the religious sites and facilities on the Camino, although it might be different than those religious pilgrims. Not being a believer doesn't seem to hinder their expression of spirituality.

'I stood alone for a long time under the cruz de ferro, my feelings were heavy. I dragged my wounded feet up here. The standing cross at this moment turned into a kind of emotional and spiritual sustenance.' (JR13)

'The grandma in front of me was the first one to hug me (during the peace greeting in a mass). I was surprised and confused then, hesitating whether I should join the

hugging like others. The grandma and Gloria both reached their hands to me... I hugged the grandma and then Gloria. 'Shock' can be used to describe this experience, I felt for the first time the true meaning of 'great harmony under heaven' and 'benevolence on earth'. (JR36)

'In every church that I have passed, if conditions allow, I will light a candle of petition, and rest for a while inside.' (JR57)

'I found that they would study the Bible, sing and pray when taking a rest. At that moment, I would close my eyes and felt it with my heart. Although I don't believe in religion, don't understand French, there was a warm stream running in my heart, I felt touched, beyond words.' (JR61)

'Many pilgrims prayed in a religious manner. I looked at them, admiration rose in my heart.' (JR78)

'At the end when we were in the Santiago Cathedral, we caught up with the pilgrims' mass incense burner ceremony at 12 o'clock, which was very impressive... I don't believe in religion and don't know much about the liturgy... The climax is the incense burner ceremony. Several people in costume swung the incense burner. The ritual was very impressive, it felt solemn and sacred, and it had a sense of ritual. Even if you did not believe in religion, at that moment, you seemed to have been separated from the world and completely melted into the atmosphere.' (IN2)

'There are many churches. Actually, I don't believe in religion, but I really like the atmosphere of the church. It's very quiet, not literally quiet, but the kind of quiet that can purify the soul. After you sit there, you will suddenly recall the complicated things in your heart but feel those things can be put aside in this environment. It's nice to be able to sit there and enjoy ten minutes quietly without any interruption. I

will not miss it. I visited churches and also attended their mass two or three times on the way because it happened to be Sunday morning. There is no interaction because I don't believe in religion, and I don't understand Spanish. I just sat and enjoyed the atmosphere, feeling sacred, and in that moment, I feel that you have to believe in the existence of sacred power.' (IN11)

5.3.14 Reflections on Religious Faith

Due to constant exposure to religion, it's natural to see that many Chinese Camino travelers shared their reflection on religion. Generally speaking, Chinese Camino travelers were very open to religion, acknowledged its positive function in one's life.

'I think I've come to understand to some degree the existence of religion. The birth of religion is not for people to fear or to worship, but to provide people hope and spiritual sustenance...nowadays religion has become less and less important in modern people's lives. Many people like me just come to a church as a visitor or see it as a kind of symbol of culture, art and history. But at this moment, sitting here in a small church, I suddenly come to understand the meaning of religion. Religion was an important means through which people searched for spiritual sustenance and discovered themselves, when material and moral ethics were not this advanced. Even for contemporary people, the spirit of self-cultivation, self-discovery, faith, which are advocated by religion, has still to do with qualities that deserve attention and development.' (JR7)

'In a narrow sense I think I'm an atheist, but I think this depends on how to define the existence of 'God'...The term 'all creations' in The Book of the Secrets and 'Dao' said by Laozi, isn't that 'God'? These are all what I reflected and clarified on the way,

and only through authentic walking, walking meditation, can help me open this book and read it.’ (JR26)

‘An unexpected rain kept me in a chapel. A musician played the instrument, a deep but surreal sound crystalized in this simple but solemn space, as if all the earthly noise is gone, this is the sound of heaven... a grandma approached me again to pass to me a rosary... when the mass was over, I returned it to her, but her trembling hands held my hands and she asked me to take away the gift of God... we only communicated through eye expressions and smiles, without saying a word...my first time feeling the power of religion in only forty-five minutes... I held this most precious gift, feeling so moved, words can’t describe it. Whenever I get in difficult situations or feel confused, I put this rosary in my palm, remembering that moment when I was treated gently by the world... as an atheist, I felt the great power of religion at the end of the Camino. After I came back, I would consciously read histories and stories about religion. Although I’m not yet a believer, but on this millennium-old way, I’m always treated kindly.’ (JR47)

‘Some cried, some smiled, some kept silent, but nobody was not moved. If what you believe is an idol, your world will be always full of contradictions and misunderstanding; if what you believe is what can be called good spirits in humanity, you will be able to find peace even in chaos.’ (JR94)

‘The experience (of the Camino) to someone of my age is a purification of heart and mind. I think it’s good that one has religious belief. I felt this way because I met many people who are Catholic. (Religious) believers are happy to help others, such as those volunteers in pilgrim albergues, they have good characters...Some churches are older than one thousand years. When the bell rings in a small town, everybody goes to the

church. The priest is busy, but people are quiet. I attended some masses in small towns. Although I didn't understand what people said, but I felt the atmosphere was good, very comfortable in my heart. Some locals encouraged me to go to the front to receive something, it made me feel good. I don't know I've never approached Catholic churches at home. I think I'd like to participate more in such church activities in Beijing when the pandemic is over. I'd like to learn more about h Catholic church, I'm interested.' (IN12)

5.3.15 Reaching the Destination

Whether it was after traveling on foot or by bike for as long as a month, or as short as a week, when Chinese Camino travelers arrived at Santiago de Compostela, they normally felt a sense of loss, peace, excitement, sense of achievement, regardless of the distance that has been covered it seems. Some felt a sense of loss because they didn't want it to end - it felt so good being on the way. Only a couple of blog authors reported that the last 100 km on the French way became too crowded and noisy, which has compromised their peaceful mood they were feeling before reaching Sarria, where the last 100 km begins. Usually, such travelers have already walked some days before reaching Sarria.

'On the last three day I was in a low mood. Facing the upcoming end of the journey, I was not ready. I thought the faster I walked, the more I ignored the views on the way, the less I would miss everything that had happened on the way when I reached Santiago. But reality was not like this.' (JR24)

'My mood was simple, an unprecedented peace, as calm as a machine. I was not eager to enter the Cathedral and make a wish, nor to line up for the Compostela in the pilgrim office, nor to take photos or connect to the internet. I just quietly observe

everything in front of my eyes, recalled the past month. It truly felt like a dream.'

(JR16)

'Started from Sarria, due to the explosion in the number of people, the towns and hostels become more commercialized along the way, it's difficult to experience that sense of connected with others where people cherish each other, because after Sarria the atmosphere started to become superficial.' (JR22)

'That excitement in the last few kilometers on the last day, is a kind of victory, especially when seeing everyone run into the Cathedral, we hailed and screamed, we hugged each other and cried.' (JR46)

'When I finally reached the destination, I had a strong sense of accomplishment.'

(IN2)

'I didn't want it to end, didn't want to walk the last 100kms because after that what shall I do? I should walk more slowly but I couldn't slow down.' (IN5)

When Chinese travelers reached Santiago de Compostela, they joined other pilgrims in some pilgrim traditions such as claiming the pilgrim certificate or 'Compostela', attending the pilgrim mass in the Santiago cathedral, tour around the city and bought souvenirs – their shells, pilgrim certificate and walking staff were considered the most meaningful souvenirs of the Camino journey. Some bought magnets, T-shirts, pins with shell and yellow arrows. Many of them chose to reach Finisterre after Santiago, by bus or on foot.

5.4 Experience after the Camino

5.4.1 Evaluation of the Camino Experience

Many Chinese Camino blog authors summarized their journey upon its completion in the last section of their blogs or occasionally in the first section where they tried to

introduce to their readers how charming and fascinating the Camino was to them. The interview participants were also asked to make an overall evaluation of their Camino experience. Their summaries can be classified into two types of evaluation: the gains from the journey, and the attributes of the Camino.

When Chinese travelers recalled their entire Camino experience, the greatest gains they felt from the journey include primarily psychological benefits, such as personal growth and positive feelings.

'Although this journey is short, but slowly we have obtained some courage, some perseverance and some assertiveness.' (JR32)

'This indeed is a journey of growth.' (JR53)

'I have received a full load of inspiration which moved me so much and gained an attitude to slowly put down some inner burdens and have seen the most beautiful landscape.' (JR55)

'In these 25 days, I've been already used to the walking on the Camino, or the life on the way. Eat, drink, walk, sleep, communicate, simple styles made me feel relaxed and free.'(JR73)

'Happy, comfortable, I didn't want it to end.' (IN10)

Specifically, a switch in the perception of the most important things in life can be observed from Chinese travelers' accounts. A balanced lifestyle, simplicity, authenticity, compassion was listed as examples of updated life priority.

'The charm of the Camino is not having to think of other things but only focusing on walking, eating, and sleeping – the three most essential things. Other things such as work, living, work, relationships, stress are not related to you in these thirty days.'

The Camino has proven the importance of the balance between body and mind.'

(JR1)

'After the journey, you discovered easily that the greatest happiness lies in returning to simplicity and authenticity, a simple life. The less fear you have in life, the lighter your backpack is. Thinking replaces reading, reduce social network, lower one's desires, smiles are the best cosmetic products. You cannot bring the materials with you at birth or death, no need to possess too many things.' (JR39)

'Seeing the world is something much more important than buying houses and cars. The father one travels the more one sees and realizes one's ignorance and will sincerely fall in love with this world. One will care not only for oneself but will feel sad for the victims of natural disasters and human tragedies around the world. On this lonely and beautiful planet, everyone is indeed closely concerned with each other.' (JR53)

'Here it has all of the long-lost earnest in the real society. All things came lightly and left lightly, but they left a trace of warmth in the depth of the mind. I hope as a beneficiary I can pass down the love...' (JR58)

'When we are bathed in beautiful scenery, visiting places of interest, and receiving care along the way, we realize that our lives have changed, and every minute is worth living well. I feel that I can distinguish what is the most essential thing in life. Life can be as simple as that. A clothe to change, a piece of bread, and a place to rest are enough. A friendly greeting and a warm gesture while walking alone are enough to move us. A simple and beautiful life has allowed me to re-plan my future life and continue to travel the world with my feet in my limited lifetime!' (IN6)

'A journey of the mind or 'a journey of the inner self' (*xinling zhi lv*) are very frequent phrases that Chinese travelers used to summarize the Camino, by which they referred to an experience of personal well-being and growth, and of rich and profound reflections and feelings about themselves and about life. They seem to have been through a transformative process from which more happiness, peace, and life clarity were achieved. The Chinese word '*xinling*' consists of '*xin*' (heart), and '*ling*' (spirit), and together they mean one's inner world, in contrast to the external world, or the mind in contrast to the physical body. Because of this quest of the self, the Camino was perceived as a personal journey.

'The Camino is truly a platform for cross-cultural communication . . . This route is a get-together for the world, open your heart and you can dialogue with the world. Isn't that exciting!' (JR22)

'After those days on the way I now understand why the Camino is called a journey that touches the mind, and I come to believe that everyone can find here the meanings for the self.' (JR65)

'The Camino is a very personal thing, starting points and destinations are symbolic – the journey of the mind/inner self has no end.' (JR90)

'It's an enriching, diverse and inclusive way which allows people of different skin colors, gender, nationality and culture to come, and different people absorb different things that this way has brought from different angles.' (IN5)

'It's an amazing way, because I can see all kinds of people, experience different kinds of life, observe different attitudes towards life.' (IN10)

The Camino was seen by many as a life metaphor. The two journeys were associated with each other for common characteristics of staged itineraries, uncertainties, burdens, and serendipitous encounters and events.

'Life and journeys have been closely related for so long that it is not counted as a metaphor anymore. When we talk about life we must think about long journeys, we talk about life when we walk on long journeys. On the pilgrimage way of the Camino, the destination is Santiago, whereas in life, eternal rest is the destination; all the pains and sadness of the journey is just like the moments in which we must endure the sufferings in life; all the encounters on the journey are as wonderful as the yuanfen/predestined encounters in life. On the way to the Christian holy city, it's inevitable to remember the book of Ecclesiastes of the Old Testament: to everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven. A time to be born, and a time to die, a time to weep and a time to laugh...all such variations.' (JR23)

'My backpack feels particularly heavy while climbing the slope, which feels like an embodiment of the burden of life. Indeed, one cannot carry too many things in life, otherwise you would be most likely to collapse.' (JR27)

'Whether the Camino pilgrimage or life, neither is a race in which people compete over who arrives at the destination first...no need to change the plans for others, one will encounter whom one must encounter. The Camino is like this, life is about the same.' (JR84)

'I feel that life is very simple, I get contented very easily. During these days of hiking, I don't want to check work emails, don't want to open work Wechat groups, even had the feeling that many things are just dispensable if you see them through...' (JR86)

'During the incense ceremony, the music, I was very touched, I recalled this journey of life, so many feelings about some life moments...I didn't want to say goodbye, memorable moments, my inner struggles.' (IN5)

It was regarded as a journey full of human warmth. Benevolence lights up the Camino and the heart of Chinese travelers.

'On the Camino, those who received assistance felt the warmth, then they would actively help those who need help as much as they can. It is exactly this warmth among people that makes the Camino not only a historical hiking route but also a way of human warmth. The charming Camino! What makes it charming is not only the landscape, but more those interesting individuals one encountered!' (JR13)

'The 'donativo' food stand on the wayside is the warmest scene on the way.' (JR31)

The volunteers at the Gaucelmo Albergue reminded me of other warm-hearted volunteers along the way, such as Grandpa Francisco, Antie Rosa, Uncle Jose Luis, etc. The volunteers are indeed a beautiful sight of the Camino. In fact, I want to thank them for their warmth and welcome to all pilgrims regardless of their cultures and back- grounds, which have allowed the Camino to become a unique, charming route of cultural diversity.' (JR73)

'It's my first time to see it (donativo food stand), I was very moved. The great humanistic care on this way melt the doubts and suspicion in your heart.' (JR80)

'We walked most of the time through small villages on the Northern way. The Spanish people were sincere, simple, warm, and friendly, despite of language barrier, but the smiles on their faces were like the sun in southern Europe. When the pilgrims met, they always had many warm-hearted little stories to share, about how Spanish people assisted them. The local people also respected the pilgrims very much, they

believed what they were doing is a meaningful thing. The local governments also made much effort to create better hiking conditions for pilgrims. Many public albergues run on donations.’ (JR91)

The Camino was also perceived as an enriching cross-cultural journey. inclusiveness, diversity, dialogue was valued on the way.

‘The Camino is truly a platform for cross-cultural communication... This route is a get-together for the world, open your heart and you can dialogue with the world. Isn’t that exciting!’ (JR22)

‘The most interesting part of the Camino for me is to share with people from different countries my story and culture.’ (JR25)

‘At some degree, walking the Camino de Santiago in the most modest way still embodies in a power of the spirit of equality – men or women, young or old, poor or rich, this is a life journey that everyone can walk.’ (JR94)

5.4.2 Evaluation of the Camino Route

Both the blog authors and the interview respondents commented that the Camino is a mature hiking tourist route. Specifically, the interview respondents were asked to specify the strengths and weaknesses of the Camino as a heritage or tourist project – what makes it so successful and in what way can it be improved? Ten out of 12 respondents listed ‘well-preserved natural and cultural landscape’, seven listed ‘completeness of facilities’, five listed ‘not over commercialized’ and four listed ‘cultural diversity’ as key factors behind the success of the Camino.

‘The Camino de Santiago is a very mature hiking route, there’re increasingly complete facilities along the way. The food and housing conditions are higher than my expectations and are super cost-effective.’ (JR1)

'The most impressive thing is that the Camino is one of very few tourist routes I have encountered that is so mature and so well-known, yet it has preserved its authentic and warm-hearted style, it respects and cares for each pilgrim, which allows you to complete a pure journey of the mind without having to worry of being cheated.'
(JR48)

'I think the Camino has a good combination of nature, history and modern elements. It has preserved a lot of its originality, not many artificial interferences, unlike in China there are artificial constructions here and there. I feel that route is quite original, but at the same time it's modern, when we need service, we can find the service we need in modern life, such as wifi, food, souvenirs, the stamps. It's an integrated route with signposts and accommodations all along the way from the beginning to the end, so one can walk the whole way through. This is what makes the Camino successful, its holistic route planning, it feels one, integrated, no confusion to the tourists.' (IN1)

'It is not very commercialized and has maintained the original ecology. The preservation of natural environment and culture is very good.' (IN3)

'The Camino de Santiago has preserved a lot of original features without over-commercialization, which is very rare. What should be preserved are preserved. Once it is too commercial, it will lose its original characteristics and meaning. There is also the ancient history, heritage, and supporting facilities that make the experience very strong.' (IN9)

A major area for improvement in the eyes of Chinese Camino interview respondents was the lack of multilingual (Chinese in particular) information about the cultural sites along the way, which frustrated to a certain extent their interest in learning about

European history and culture. They recommended that such information can be in digital forms, through websites or more preferably on a mobile APP so that it's more convenient for them to access while walking the way.

5.4.3 Intention to Revisit

Twenty-two Camino blog authors explicitly expressed that they would like to do the Camino again, most likely a different route. Three reported that they would not do it again because the journey was a once-in-a-lifetime experience so it would not make sense to repeat it. The other blog authors didn't tackle this issue. A question regarding intentions to revisit was asked to all the interview respondents, and 11 out of 12 said they would like to walk the Camino again soon. One said he would like to visit some sites and reunite with some friends he has made on the way, but not necessarily to walk the whole way again since he has other destinations of interest in Europe to explore. In fact, half of the interview respondents had already completed their second Camino, usually walked a different route from the choice of the first time.

'Goodbye Santiago, see you next year on the French way.' (JR19)

'The next Camino is not very far away, and I will walk with more confidence.' (JR43)

'I'm already planning the next pilgrimage; I'd like to choose a different route.' (JR68)

'The door of a new world has been opened; I want to experience other routes.' (IN1)

'It's a way that you'd want to repeat after walking it, a way that one gets addicted to.' (IN4)

'It is an amazing route, there's much pain but there's a lot of reward. When I walked, I didn't walk to walk for another time, but when it ended, I wanted to do it again.'
(IN8)

In this chapter, the sharing of Chinese travelers of the Camino de Santiago is classified into three stages of the journey and is presented in detail according to the underlying themes of the texts. The findings of the 106 Chinese Camino travelers' experience of their journey across datasets are quite similar, in terms of themes and in terms of underlying factors associated with different themes.

In the next chapter, the relationships among those themes will be discussed in the light of various relevant theoretical frameworks to better understand Chinese travelers' experiences on the Camino, as well as how the findings can inform the management, the sustainable development, marketing of the Camino as a cultural route heritage, a tourist product, and beyond.

Chapter 6: Discussion

In this chapter, the experience of Chinese travelers on the Camino de Santiago will be understood under the light of the conceptual frameworks of the previous studies, and relationship between their experience and the specific socio-cultural context of those Chinese travelers will also be discussed.

6.1 An Emerging Need for Wellbeing

The demographic profile, travel behavior and motivational pattern of Chinese Camino travelers have reflected the growing need for wellbeing and growth of the young, independent, urban Chinese individuals, whose desire for self-enhancement may stay latent until it's activated by others' travel experience that demonstrates the fulfillment of such inner needs. This also has implications of the marketing planning of the Camino as a destination of wellness among Chinese tourists, besides its current fame as a world cultural heritage route.

6.1.1 A Younger Group

Informed by the demographic features of Chinese travelers of the Camino, all of them are independent travelers who come from an urban background, mostly from the first tier and second-tier cities, implying a young, well-educated, middle-class profile of this group. As a group, Chinese Camino travelers consist of more students and women than among general outbound Chinese tourists and general domestic walking tourists in China (Chen et al., 2014; Long, 2011; UNWTO, 2019; Xiang, 2013). The overseas Chinese students might be over-represented among Chinese Camino travelers, after all this group is more likely to learn about the Camino de Santiago than other groups in China; and among Chinese students in Spain, the number of female students almost doubles that of male

students, which could be partially related to the overrepresentation of female Chinese travelers (Ministry of University, 2021).

The pattern of higher ratio of female, young, student Chinese travelers duplicates when compared to the general profile of International Camino pilgrims, but it's worth noting that the ratio of Chinese Camino travelers older than 60 years old is significantly lower than that among international pilgrims. This reflects similar patterns within Chinese travelers abroad – only around 5% are people over 60 years old (UNWTO, 2019). Perhaps language barriers, physical strength, and travel mode (e.g., hiking) makes the Camino less accessible to this group of Chinese travelers. But since the population is aging very rapidly in China, and people who are currently between forty and fifty years old are financially better-off, better educated than the previous generation, so when this age cohort gets retired, it is expected that they could create a third 'wave' of Chinese tourists around the world, since to this group, traveling is already part of their lifestyle (Bao et al., 2018; Chen et al., 2022). In terms of tourism marketing of the Camino, this age group among Chinese tourists deserve more promotional attention in the near future, even though the young students seem to be the largest group among Chinese Camino walkers at present.

Chinese travelers walked their Camino in similar modes with their international counterparts, although the French Way is even more popular among the Chinese, especially for their first Camino endeavor. This similarity in travel pattern among Chinese and general Camino pilgrims shows the convergence of all the Camino pilgrims as one cohort. It also indicates the preference of this group of Chinese tourists as they consume destinations like the Camino routes, e.g., through the mode of walking, a slower way of traveling, which is perceived by most Chinese travelers as the most authentic way to do the Camino. It is regarded as a journey of the self, a pilgrimage of spiritual traditions by going

through hardship with one's own feet and sincere mind, just like those pious Buddhist believers make their pilgrimage journeys in the East.

At present, electronic word-of-mouth (travel blogs), books, movies still play a critical role in the promotion of the Camino among Chinese tourists, which may have limited the spread of information about this potentially attractive destination among Chinese tourists. Since there is a high level of revisit interest, other routes will one day welcome more Chinese travelers as well, given more targeted promotion in the future.

6.1.2 A Secular Journey: Walking for the Self

Chinese Camino travelers mostly walked towards personal enhancement of some kind: becoming more balanced, more relaxed, happier, more peaceful, becoming a better person, gaining more life experience than before. Their confessed motivations make a clear contrast to the major travel purpose of general Chinese outbound tourists as leisure and holiday (China Tourism Academy, 2020; UNWTO, 2019), but are similar to the interests of Chinese walking tourists such as backpackers (Chen et al., 2014; Luo et al., 2015). The motivational landscape of Western pilgrims is more diverse, which includes spiritual, religious, leisure and sport, cultural, etc. (Amaro et al., 2018; Farias et al., 2019; Fernandes et al., 2012). Religious motivation is minimum among Chinese travelers on the Camino de Santiago. This is the biggest contrast with the overall Camino pilgrims, who are mostly Westerners by cultural or national origin. The secular, personal nature behind the travel interests that has driven Chinese travelers on the Camino can be interpreted as a reaction to the increasing pressure of modern life in the Chinese society, especially in those large, developed metropolitan cities. From the motivations and the actual experiences of Chinese travelers it can be inferred that wellness is a real need among the population, and the

Camino de Santiago serves well as a wellness tourism destination to Chinese tourists, on top of a destination of cultural tourism.

6.1.3 When the Desires Are Latent

Many Chinese travelers said they decided to walk the Camino after they had seen the movie *The Way* or others' Camino blogs. Stories of other travelers about their inner life, their struggles, their resilience, and growth, seemed to have awakened something deep inside the potential travelers. As a response they wanted to experience it for themselves, even if they have never done such an outdoor, long-distance hiking, knew nothing about this sport, were not sure whether they would be able to complete it. The concerns of the unknown were overcome by the awakened desire.

Iso-Ahola (1983) argued in his understanding of tourist motivation, in which motivation is understood as the key internal factor that arouses one's desire to travel to a place, for example, the imagined potential satisfaction that is awakened by one's positive travel experience in the past after exposure of a tourist destination (Iso-Ahola, 1983, p. 258; Murray, 1964, p 7). It's not very clear that whether those Chinese travelers who decided to do a Camino after watching *The Way* or having read other travelers' blogs had similar travel experience like the Camino in the past. Although some interview respondents did disclose that they like hiking and had some experience of hiking in China before, many Chinese travelers, including the blog authors, indicated explicitly that they had never traveled in this way before, this way of traveling is a new experience in life. Still, a 'waking-up' mechanism seemed to have happened in them just like what is described by Iso-Ahola (1983). The exposure to the Camino de Santiago Pilgrimage Road through the movie and the travel blogs seemed to have raised an awareness of some potential fulfillment of an otherwise latent desire, e.g., a search for meaning, for personal wellbeing, for growth and

breakthrough, to become a better self. Through observing how such personal-enhancement desires have been fulfilled in the movie and travel blogs, the hidden desires were awakened. And the successful example of others' travel experience greatly motivated many Chinese Camino travelers to set off. Humans are social beings who learn by observation of examples of others (Bandura & Walters, 1977). Besides memories from one's own experience of satisfaction (Iso-Ahola, 1983), this study seems to have implied that the potential satisfaction aroused by others' positive travel experience can also move individuals to make travel decisions, even if the individuals do not yet have direct experience themselves.

But will other types of exposure of the Camino have the same effect in motivating their viewers to choose this destination, a time-consuming and physically challenging journey? Some travelers mentioned that they had heard about the Camino for the first time from their language teacher or their friend, but it was after watching the movie that they made up their mind to go, partially also because they were encountering some kind of crisis or stagnation in life (graduation, for example), they felt the timing was right. This means the interest has already been there in the potential Camino travelers, but it needs to reach a certain level that is strong enough to turn it to a decision or action. Only landscape, culture, reputation, etc. the 'pull factors' of the destination (Dann, 1981) are not always sufficient to turn the inner desire into a decision to do a Camino, as such features or qualities of the Camino most likely only wake up memories of fulfillment of needs for pleasure or excitement or social status. It depends on the type needs. This group of people – the Camino group - needed something deeper: they needed to discover and enhance themselves. The study of how some Chinese travelers made their decision to do a Camino through movies and blogs seems to implies that, for inner and latent desires related to

personal growth, meaning and spiritual quest, which perhaps have been lying in the subconscious, the exposure of the Camino needs to include the successful fulfillment of inner quests, most effectively through the successful examples of other people of similar background so the viewers can relate themselves to those inner experience of others. In other words, for more basic needs such as pleasure or status, the presentation of the destination with its landscape, reputation, fun qualities seem sufficient to motivate the tourists to make a travel decision by waking up their past memory of satisfaction. But for higher or deeper, abstract, often latent, or unconscious desires, such as for personal growth and transformation, the presentation of the destination with only the pull factor qualities will not be enough. It must show how it could fulfill the inner needs. The fulfillment of inner, personal needs is not easy to show in simple brochures with colorful images and texts, because it is an inner process. Stories, personal stories of this process, this path of growth, can serve that purpose of 'waking up' described by Iso-Ahola (1983). The only difference is just that, instead of through activating the satisfaction experience of the individuals to motivate them to travel, here it needs to activate the satisfaction experience of others to motivate the individuals to travel. So, the wake-up process is more indirect here, when it comes to hidden, profound needs for self-enhancement. Following this pattern, if the marketers of the Camino de Santiago would like to attract more potential travelers successfully and effectively, introductions with only its history, landscape, fame... can attract some types of travelers but potentially there are more out there in the crowd in the modern world, especially in the busy, materialized, industrialized urban societies. The marketers can try to employ more personal stories of the inner experience in their introduction of this unique destination, i.e., its spiritual richness and the opportunities it avails for such quests, to arouse hidden desires for spiritual quest or personal growth

among those who otherwise are not aware of what they profound desires they have or feel. Perhaps for any destinations with such spiritual, psychological wellness potential or qualities can be informed by such insight gained from the observation of Chinese Camino travelers. Such individuals need more than regular content in the promotion of such destinations or tourist products. To make good use of the experience of the 'pioneers' who have demonstrated how abstract, spiritual, wellness desires can be fulfilled on the Camino, the potential travelers can turn such indirect experience into actions, once those desires are awakened.

6.2 A Transformative Experience

The results of this study illustrate that many Chinese Camino travelers had generally positive transformative experiences in the understanding, feelings, attitudes, and behaviors related to self, others and the transcendent, which correspond to the various dimensions of changes conceptualized in the theoretical frameworks of spiritual transformation and quantum change theories (Mahoney & Pargament, 2004; Miller, 2004; Pargament, 2006).

6.2.1 An Integral View on Spirituality

To further examine the transformative experiences of the Chinese travelers of the Camino, it can be observed that changes along various dimensions such as personal, interpersonal, natural and the transcendent are inter-related. For example, a closer relationship with nature contributed to an improved affective status in the self; changes in the self are also connected with changes in relationship with others and with the transcendent. Specifically, through accepting one's physical limits and through affirmative feedback of others, Chinese travelers gained more acceptance and confidence of the self. With this improved sense in oneself they were more ready to accept changes in plans or in

relationships such as departures of peers on the way. This generalized accepting attitude reinforced one's relationship with the transcendent - acceptance to life or destiny in general. Similarly, perceptions in the relationship with the transcendent also influences one's perceptions in the relationship with others: by attributing their relationships with other people on the Camino to the transcending influence of '*yuanfen*' or pre-destined relationship, Chinese travelers felt the connectedness with others. In fact, human beings (self, others), non-human beings (nature) and the transcendent have been conceptualized as an integral part of a holistic life in Chinese spiritual traditions, whether in concepts such as 'union between heaven and man' (Liu, 2011; Tang, 2005), or the interactive relations of man and fate through the concept of pre-destined relationships (Bai, 2004). In another word, the physical world and the transcendent realm are both an indispensable part of man (Guo & Ma, 2014; Tang, 2005; Wang et al., 2020; Zhang, 2020). As the research results revealed, to many Chinese travelers, the travel experience of the Camino de Santiago has improved or reinforced their relationship with themselves, with other people, with nature, and with the transcendent, it has contributed to their psychological wellness through touching all dimensions of their spiritual life.

6.2.2 The Importance of Embodied Practice in Spiritual Transformation

Walking and its positive effect on self-sense, mood and interpersonal relationship have been already acknowledged by scholars in mental health and tourism studies (Chan et al., 2006; Hill et al., 2009; Roberson & Babic, 2009). The physical exercise on the Camino has been proven to have such benefit among the Camino travelers. Besides the effect, the process of how embodied engagement functions in transforming the Camino travelers is also interesting. In Mezirow's (1991) transformative learning theory, transformation is initiated by a reflection and re-evaluation of one's knowledge or values that are challenged

by perceived difference of values in other people or places. New behaviors are adapted if the new knowledge is integrated into the person's previous value system or replaces it, such as in the phenomenon of cultural shock adaptation – transformation in consciousness leads to transformation in behavior. But the transformative experience of Chinese travelers on the Camino showed a different process of change. For instance, Chinese travelers first adopted a behavioral pattern that's different from their familiar routine life, such as using minimum amount of stuff, living under basic conditions, spending much time in nature, engaging in much physical exercise. Such new behavioral patterns brought new, positive feelings, which prompted them to make meaning out of such experience, to re-evaluate their past behaviors and beliefs. Then a new set of knowledge and values were developed: a simple, balanced lifestyle is more authentic, meaningful, and contended. Similarly, participating in unfamiliar rituals such as peace-greeting in a mass or thanksgiving prayer before group dinner, arouse among Chinese travelers' positive feelings towards religion and made them reflect; as a result, openness and appreciation towards religion was formed. In other words, the fact that the changes in behavioral pattern occurred prior to the changes in attitude indicates the importance of embodied practice in the transformative process. (Pung et al., 2020; Tisdell, 2017; Urry & Larsen, 2011).

6.2.3 A Closer Look at Liminality

'Liminality' refers to the disorienting state in which previous social values and structures are temporarily dissolved and new structures or values are yet to be established, meanwhile the previous norms are reviewed with a refreshing sight, as an individual goes through a 'rite of passage' (Turner, 1969). In the existing literature on pilgrim experience, Turner's concept of liminality is believed to be the element that underlies the spiritual transformation of the Camino pilgrims. Through a closer observation of Chinese Camino

travelers and the dynamics among the transformative dimensions and some journey-related factors, the liminal quality of the Camino can be understood as a disconnection from one's previous reality – often a busy, stressful, urban life, which often leads to the feeling of an inauthentic self, is now replaced by a different reality: immersion in nature with its liveliness and peace, a simplified lifestyle where little material is needed, the mutually-related existential *communitas* (Turner, 2012), dissolved social roles which people have to play to make structures function in routine life. This last aspect perhaps is more relevant to mainland Chinese travelers since many of their familiar socio-political norms do not automatically apply here on the Camino. Close interactions with people from other cultures and societies is a liminal experience, participation in religious rituals is another one. The Camino to Chinese travelers is in this sense, more 'liminal' than it is to individuals of Western cultural background.

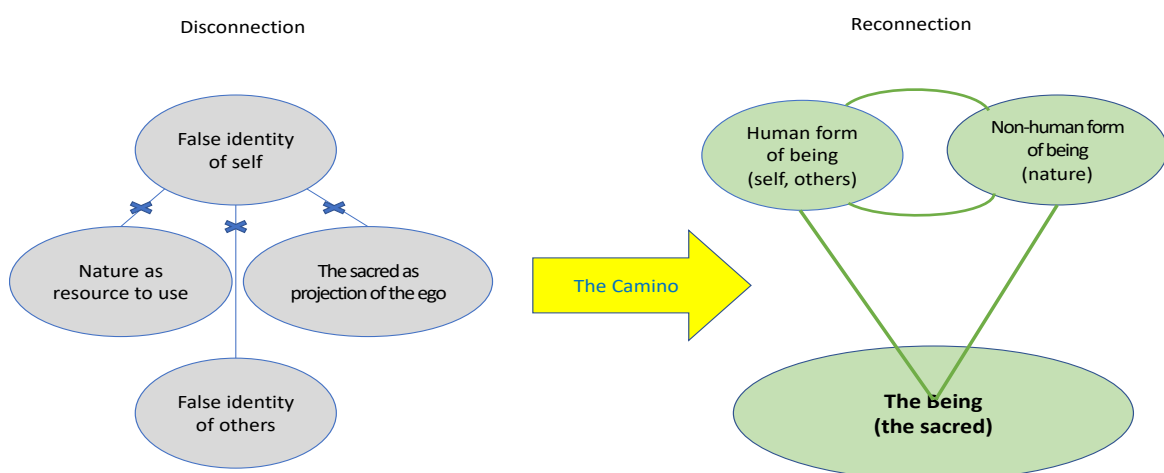
Why a disconnection is important in spiritual transformation? According to Eckhart Tolle (2016), a German spiritual teacher, many moderners have the false belief of one's identity being defined by material possessions, possessions of talents, fame, information or virtues, body appearance, social roles, one's emotions or life stories. When individuals relate to themselves, others, nature or the transcendent based on such false self-identities, their relationships cannot be authentic: the human-human relationship will become just an interaction between one role and another, the human-nature relationship just a relationship between the owner and one's resources, the human-transcendence relationship just an extension to one's egoistic self (e.g. 'my' religion, 'my' God, versus 'your' religion, 'your' God). On the Camino, however, an individual is invited to undergo a break-away from such false identifications and get in touch with nothing but what is happening at the moment: the sensations and actual conditions of the body instead of one's ambitions

or ideals; the authentic interactions with others whose social roles are temporarily suspended; a harmonious, appreciative connection with nature rather than with what is to be merely used for personal benefit.

A disconnection from one’s own usual discourses of the mind is the first step inside the ‘liminality’ which contributes to spiritual transformation on the Camino. Nonetheless, to make transformation possible, there needs to be a (re)connection as well - to connect with Life, the essence that is transcending (or the *Dao*, the Chinese concept of the Source of all creations) in every human and nonhuman form of being, is what spiritual awakening is about – a transformation in the level of consciousness (Tolle, 2016, p. 78; Miller, 2004, p. 459). Changes of this nature redefines everything else: one’s relationship with self, others, and nature – all are interconnected, all rooted in the transcendent, the Dao, or Life (see Figure 4). In other words, for liminality availed on the Camino to become active catalyst to spiritual transformation, a disconnection is necessary but still not sufficient. It depends on whether an individual can connect with Life.

Figure 4

The Internal Process of Liminality



Source: author’s elaboration, Tolle (2016)

6.3 A Quest for Authenticity: The Critical Quality of the Camino Experience

From the shared experience of the Camino by Chinese travelers, especially from their evaluation of the Camino route, the almost ubiquitous underlying element is the experiences of authenticity. Authenticity is both a core concept in tourism scholarship and a key theme in pilgrim studies of the Camino. Authenticity can be experienced in objective forms, such as the originality of historical sites and artifacts, or subjective forms, such as being true to oneself and being sincere in interpersonal relationships (Cohen, 1988; 2007; McCanell, 1973; Wang, 1999). The results indicate that Chinese Camino travelers experienced both objective and subjective authenticity on the Camino. They repeated in their accounts of how they enjoyed the 'original state' of nature, the historical monuments, or traditions, and the 'original flavor' of the local food. They also emphasized how the Camino allowed them to find their 'original intention' and feel 'genuine warmth' from others. Learning about and accepting their actual physical condition and the reality that certain things in life such as encounters with people helped them develop courage and strength towards life in general. Their experience of authenticity on the Camino demonstrated the importance, the power of authenticity in traveling experience.

Traditional Chinese society emphasizes norms, self-discipline, and the collective will over the individual will (Guo, 2006; Huo, 2020). Industrialized modern life in Chinese society today is too fast-paced, competitive, superficial, and complicated, according to the pilgrims themselves. Both factors are present in mainstream Chinese society to a certain extent and tend to suppress the individual's experience of authenticity. In the non-Chinese, slowed-down, and simplified time and space of the Camino, authenticity is experienced extensively: through following human rhythms instead of industrial timetables; through the awareness of real needs under simple life conditions rather than materialized desires; through

nonpolluted nature, a well-preserved heritage, and traditions other than commercialized, artificial attractions; through articulating one's true mind rather than having to wear social masks; through genuine interpersonal interactions with others rather than goal-oriented relationship maintenance.

6.4 A Guest at Home

6.4.1 Benevolence, Harmony, Interconnectedness – Chinese Values in Play

Benevolence is 'common language' of the Camino, it has impressed and touched the hearts of Chinese travelers, through their interactions with local people and peer pilgrims, through the countless small deeds of the volunteers and free offering of food along the journey. Benevolence is a core value advocated in Christianity, it is also a core value embedded in the teachings of Confucianism and Buddhism, which have greatly influenced people in China (Tang, 1997).

Another element in the overall experiences of Chinese travelers resonates well with Chinese culture is a sense of harmony, one of the core values in Chinese social life in the past and the present (Guo, 2006; Jiang et al., 2018; Qing, 2006; Shao & Qi, 2007; Wang & Stringer, 2000). Similar experiences are also reported in the studies of Western pilgrims. Specifically, walking helps pilgrims achieve unity with the body (Cazaux, 2011); time in the wilderness fosters harmony between self and nature (Kim et al., 2016); engagement with the local culture and people facilitates a sense of connectedness with the place (Carbone et al., 2016); interactions with pilgrim peers from all over the world creates a warm memory and the sense of belonging to a '*communitas*' (Cazaux, 2011; Genoni, 2011; Luik, 2012; Turner & Turner, 1978). On the Camino de Santiago, this sense of unity and collective experience is special because it's among individuals from all nations under heaven (*tianxia*).

A harmonious relationship between man and nature has always been valued in Chinese culture (Guo, 2006; Jiang et al., 2018). In Daoist views, a harmonious bonding with nature is like returning home or getting connected with one's origin, and it cultivates restoration and healing (Qing, 2006; Wang & Stringer, 2000). The representation of the Camino as a 'magical' way because of the countless serendipitous encounters with others that happen along the way, as well as the frequent interpretation of such encounters as predestined relationships (*yuanfen*) in play, can both find their roots in Chinese folk beliefs, originally introduced from Buddhism, about the causes and timing as to when people enter or exit relationships with one another (Bai, 2004). This popular view in the Chinese mindset inspires individuals to perceive new relationships in a positive light and serves as a constructive force in maintaining harmonious social relationships, especially in group contexts (Cai et al., 2019; Zhao & Zuo, 2008). In Confucianism, social and interpersonal harmony is always at the heart of its teachings (Guo, 2006). In short, the harmony experienced on the Camino journeys provided a profound response to the cultural and psychological needs of Chinese pilgrims and it helped them reconnect with their cultural roots (Guo, 2006; Jiang et al., 2018; Pearce et al., 2013).

Studies of Chinese outbound tourists and backpackers consistently identified the behavioral preference of group interaction and interpersonal relationship among Chinese travelers. The diversity here among the Camino travelers were perceived as an exciting, positive experience, because it does not compromise the connection and unity among pilgrims. This 'harmony but not sameness' (*he er bu tong*) principle is a long-held cultural tradition in China along its millennium-old history (Jin, 2015; Shao & Qi, 2007; Tang, 1997). Besides the interconnectedness with other people, these findings of this study also revealed the interconnectedness of experiential aspects of Chinese travelers, e.g., the

experience of nature, culture, people, the self, are all related to each other. The Camino de Santiago journey fulfilled not only the personal, spiritual needs of the modern travelers from China, but also responded the cultural values they hold since the ancient time.

6.4.2 Evolving Modes, Multiple Centers

Cohen (1979) identified five modes in which a tourist travels, from a relatively superficial escape mode to a more sophisticated transformation mode. He suggested that a tourist can travel in different modes on the same journey. This seems particularly true regarding Chinese travelers on the Camino, who may start out as tourists that look forward to a break from stress and stagnation, or as explorers seeking new life experiences, but end up as cultural and spiritual pilgrims discovering a meaningful alternative lifestyle in which they can live simply but more happily. As the Camino journey progressed, the travel desires of the travelers also evolved, and their travel experience evolved correspondingly.

Moreover, in Cohen's model (1979), tourists travel in between 'centers' that symbolize varying sets of personal values and beliefs. To Chinese travelers, the Camino stands as a center of its own, and represents simplicity, balance, authenticity, harmony, and benevolence. To Chinese travelers, the Camino functions both as a center of 'origin' (where they come from), and of 'destination' (where they travel to). For instance, when some Chinese travelers experience the presence of harmony, communion with nature, self, benevolence towards others and harmony in interpersonal relationships, they feel at home because both harmony and balance are very relevant in traditional Chinese culture and social life (Guo, 2006; Jiang et al., 2018). Thus, walking the Camino is walking towards their origin where their long-held values are alive. On the other hand, the Camino also reveals itself to be an alternative center that Chinese pilgrims' approach, a center that is simple, authentic, and meaningful, in contrast to the stressful, inauthentic mainstream Chinese

society today that has been rapidly modernized and urbanized over the last few decades. In this sense, the Camino is both a homeland (because it lives out Chinese cultural ideals and values), and a foreign land (because it stands in contrast to contemporary Chinese mainstream culture), where Chinese travelers paradoxically feel like a guest at home.

6.5 The Santiago Pilgrimage Routes as Flagship of Cultural Route Heritage Development

Cultural route heritage is the most complicated category of cultural heritage that has been identified so far – it is often old in history and large in scale, it integrates multiple heritage elements related to nature, history, art, culture, politics, military, economy, transportation, and religion. Besides its complexity and richness, the value of cultural route heritage lies in its witness to the reciprocal exchange across regions, cultures, and peoples (ICOMOS, 2008). As we learn about the Camino de Santiago routes from its history and status that is informed by how contemporary travelers experience it, it is inspiring to discover how this ancient cultural route has evolved through time by ‘living with the time’.

6.5.1 What Has Changed, What Has Not

What has remained the same and is very much alive today about the Camino is the strong spiritual elements within this long-held tradition, e.g., the quest for meaning and authenticity, the spirit of benevolence and hospitality, the cross-fertilization within diversity, although, the ways these aspects are pursued or expressed may vary across time (Guzmán et al., 2017; Lois–González et al., 2014; López 2013; López & Santos, 2019). These time-enduring intangible elements give the Camino its depth, as they have touched the profound level of human nature as an existential being. Loving, walking, searching, learning, relating, all are ways of living – the metaphoric intrinsic connection between life and journey has been identified by Camino pilgrims, regardless of their cultural origin or

religious belief. On the tangible side, the Camino has been a multi-faceted activity of economy, culture, politics, religion, tourism (Murray & Graham, 1997).

The differences are also clear to see. For example, the secularization of travel motivations and leadership in management, the globalization of pilgrim origins, the diversification in interpretation of experiences and route identity, the switch of political discourse from contestation against Muslim influence in the past to inclusion and unity today (Guzmán et al., 2017; Herrero-Perez, 2008; Lois-González et al., 2014; Murray, 2014). And with much organized social and economic investment in route infrastructure by regional, national, and local governments and the input of civil collaborators, the Camino allows more ways of participation than walking, and the management of the Camino as a heritage and tourism project makes it more accessible to a much larger audience, beyond its traditional influence in the Western world. Now the Camino is by no doubt a global cultural route. In one word, the multi-directional expansion gives the Camino its width.

All the above-mentioned features that reach the depth and width of the Camino tell something about why this heritage route is very attractive among modern individuals around the world today. What has changed and unchanged about the Camino make an important, classic example of how a living heritage, as complex as a cultural route, can thrive and benefit contemporary people and society without compromising its authenticity and integrity.

6.5.2 A Route for the Future: Conceptualization of Global Cultural Route

The idea of identifying and preserving something as a time-valued heritage, both in tangible and intangible forms, is to honor what represents the outstanding universal value of the entire humanity, to keep our common memories and identities, to protect them from the harm of disasters and conflicts (UNESCO, 1972). If we recall the conceptual

framework formulated from the expert meeting about cultural route heritage in Madrid in 1994, the outstanding value of cultural route heritage (CRH) is reflected in its witness to history of mutual understanding, culture of peace, and in its potential to achieve these goals through promoting 'population movement, encounters and dialogue, cultural exchanges and cross-fertilization, taking place both in space and time' (UNESCO, 1994, p. 1), and the richness and fertility of the concept for the world today (UNESCO, 1994, p.2) . Cultural route heritage, therefore, is not only for preserving the past, but also for managing the present and preparing for the future.

What are our needs of today and our aspirations for the future? On the path of rapid industrialization around the globe in the last few centuries, we have arrived at a crossroad where we need to take a direction and that is sustainable development along environmental, economic, and social dimensions (UN, 2015). However, the opportunities as well as the challenges lie ahead us in the way of achieving such goals, to name just a few: pollution, climate change, pandemic, ideological division and conflict, polarization of wealth, famine, natural disasters, drug abuse, weaponization of technology, trade and development resources, arm race, refugees, gender or racial discrimination... these challenges threaten the sustainable development for all of us, particularly for the impoverished and the marginalized. Can cultural route heritage do something to make a contribution? The answer is positive.

There are many responses from different social sectors and fields. The findings from this research of Chinese travelers' experience of the Santiago Pilgrimage Routes can shed some light to the response to this question, which is incorporated in the framework of 'global cultural routes' (GCR) for the sustainable development of cultural route heritage. GCR keeps the past, the present, and the prospect of the future in vision. The GCR

framework contains three major themes and nice specific aspects, which are shown below in Table 9:

Table 9

Conceptual Framework of Global Cultural Routes

Theme	Aspect
Global	are opened to all members of humanity, regardless of their biological or socio-cultural backgrounds promote benevolence, harmony, inclusion, cross-cultural diversity in unity of humanity as one community are committed to sustainable management, cultural and social aspects
Cultural	identify, value and preserve the traditional universal values of the route identify, formulate and promote the contemporary universal values of the route are committed to sustainable management, cultural and social aspects
Route	are presented in multiple physical forms, on land or water, as networks or lines offer multiple ways of engagement, on foot or vehicle are committed to sustainable management, environmental, economic/technological aspects

Source: author's elaboration

While keeping the mission and vision of cultural route heritage in mind (ICOMOS, 2008; UNESCO, 1994), the GCR framework sets sustainability as its goal (UN, 2015), follows the principle of 'diversity in unity' or the Chinese value of 'harmony but not sameness' as its foundation (COE, 1987; Shao & Qi, 2007; Tang, 1997), takes the managerial experience of historical/modern routes and trails as its reference (Ramos Riera, 2021; Timothy & Boyd, 2015; Zhang et al., 2021). With an open mind to embrace diversity and a commitment to the common good, there will be the wisdom and resources to overcome all kinds of challenges ahead – when there is a will, there is a way, we believe.

Part V. Conclusions

Chapter 7: Conclusions and Implications

7.1 Summary of the Main Findings and Contributions

This research aimed at getting an in-depth understanding of the experience of Chinese travelers on the Camino de Santiago heritage route, and to discover the evolved identity of the contemporary Camino and its core attractions to Chinese travelers. By answering those questions, the research enriched the overall knowledge of traveler experience of the Camino today by adding the non-Western perspective. It also helped to understand better the emerging interests and needs of today's Chinese travelers, to explore the development prospect of alternative, wellness tourism especially in China. The research also proposed a new conceptual framework for the sustainable management and tourist development of cultural route heritage such as the Camino in the 21st century.

7.1.1 Experience of Chinese Travelers

The findings of this research have drawn a general picture of the Chinese travelers' experience of the Camino de Santiago route, to add to the existing body of knowledge about traveler experience of the Camino de Santiago as the phenomenon regained popularity among its contemporary audience around the world. To Chinese travelers, the overall experience of the Camino is positive, transformative, and profound. They enjoyed it so much that it was perceived as a symbolic journey of life and a journey of the self.

The group of Chinese travelers on the Camino today consists of a young, well-educated, middle-class urban travelers, who decided to make their Camino journey to improve their personal wellbeing, achieve personal growth and increase their life experience. Unlike their Western counterparts, the majority of whom are older, Chinese Camino travelers rarely walked the Camino for religious or athletic purposes, implying a

secularized, self-focused, wellness-oriented needs and interests which have driven this group of Chinese travelers on the way. Further investigation discovered that Chinese travelers' motivations from personal wellbeing and self-enhancement are related to their everyday stressful life experience, indicating a latent but strong need of individuals with similar background in this emerging form of tourist activity such as walking tourism and wellness tourism. From the experience of Chinese Camino travelers, it seems that such personal, hidden desires for wellbeing and growth can be awakened by observing how such needs are fulfilled in others in their travels of the Camino, for example, from the stories of how the four pilgrims overcome their life struggles and achieved reconciliation and inner peace on the Camino de Santiago. Chinese travelers and Western travelers tend to do their Camino in similar patterns, mostly through walking, favored the French way, and preferred to start either from the point of the last 100 kilometers or from the French-Spanish border under the Pyrenees.

This research also identified the key aspects and critical features which Chinese travelers found the Camino so attractive. Chinese travelers were attracted to the Camino not only by its natural environment, local people, culture, and infrastructure, which are common factors that lead to tourist satisfaction (Laws, 1995), but by the space for deep personal wellbeing experience and rich cross-cultural engagement that the Camino has provided. These two aspects make the Camino stand out as unique among other international destinations that usually attract Chinese tourists. A sense of authenticity and harmony can be found as the key elements that contribute to the positive experience of the Camino.

Western travelers of the Camino perceived their journeys as an experience of religious or spiritual growth, of leisure and sport activity. Chinese travelers' experience in

contrast highlighted the dimension of personal wellbeing without religious implications. Rather they gave much more emphasis of the excitement from diverse trans-cultural interactions more than their Western counterparts. This reflected a very secular social-cultural orientation in contemporary China. Chinese travelers also experienced the bonding with other pilgrims as '*communitas*', and it reminded them of the Confucian teaching of social harmony and ideals of universal unity that embraces difference and diversity. The benevolent pilgrim traditions also warmed Chinese travelers' hearts and reminded them of the Chinese traditional social values. The immersion in nature was a therapeutic experience of Chinese travelers who had a chance to feel in line with Daoist philosophy of man-nature harmony. The satisfaction from experiencing home cultural values being expressed perfectly on a foreign land is impressive – it connects the Camino with its visitors from the East at a very profound level.

7.1.2 The Camino of the 21st Century: A Universal Space

The Camino de Santiago of the 21st century is a multiple space - religious, spiritual, existential, cultural, tourist, interpersonal, the identity of the Camino has expanded beyond a Christian pilgrimage route originated from the Middle Age in Europe (Guzmán et al., 2017; Murray & Graham, 1997; Nilsson & Tesfahuney, 2016; Norman, 2012). It is indeed a foreign cultural environment to Chinese travelers since most of the people they interacted with are local Spanish people and pilgrims from Europe and America. The cultural landscape of the way is also unfamiliar and exotic, nevertheless they tended to interpret their personal, spiritual experience in the Chinese cultural light, for instance, attributing interpersonal encounters as '*yuanfen*' (Buddhism), interpreting the interpersonal connectedness felt while attending a Catholic liturgy as 'great harmony under heaven' and 'benevolence' (Confucianism). On one hand this phenomenon reflected how culture shapes one's

understanding and expression of spiritual experience, on the other hand it shows that spiritual experience is not necessarily inhibited by the 'foreignness' of a religious/spiritual space. The Camino de Santiago originated in Christianity, but the open, liberal ways of participation provide a space that allows universal spiritual experience. That is to say, even non-Christian, non-Western individuals can have profound spiritual experience and cross-cultural, cross-national connectedness (Zhang et al., 2021). In an increasingly changing time, diverse, open-minded, inclusive cultural-spiritual spaces such as the Camino are positive examples for more culturally diverse regions to follow, more culturally diverse people to encounter each other, to connect with each other. The greater the number of such spaces, perhaps the greater the chance of success in facilitating cross-cultural, cross-national understanding and collaboration, thus developing the capacity to overcome common challenges of our time.

This research proposed a conceptual model of 'Global Cultural Route' (GCR) which captures the inspirations drawn from the current study of how the Camino de Santiago is experienced as a world cultural route heritage and a tourist destination that has developed into a universal space and platform. Sustainability is the principle and the goal underlying the three key aspects of the GCR model, i.e., global, cultural, and route. GCR can respond to both personal needs and universal socio-cultural needs of our time. Openness, inclusion, diversity, collaboration, promotion of universal values such as benevolence, authenticity and solidarity are the key qualities that are advocated in the GCR model, to ensure a sustainable management and development of the complex heritage category such as cultural heritage route, a type of heritage that honors reciprocal cultural exchange in the past, an inspiration, a tool and a role model for us today, to lead us to a future of common prosperity.

7.2 Implications for the Promotion and Management of the Camino

7.2.1 Promotion of the Camino among Chinese Travelers

The Camino de Santiago as a tourist destination currently has low visibility in China. To increase the visibility of the Camino in the Chinese tourist market, target group, content, form of delivery all should be further considered before taking specific measures in marketing.

Who are the main target group that are most likely to come to walk the Camino? The top tourist source cities - where Chinese outbound tourists come from – are mainly the first-tier cities (such as Beijing, Shanghai) but are rapidly expanding to second-tier cities (especially the cities in Jiangsu, Guangdong, and Zhejiang province) (UNWTO, 2019). The profile is getting younger as well. So, the primary target group should be young people (25-44 years old) from more developed cities in China, these age cohort counts for 58% of the total Chinese outbound tourists. The Chinese students in Spanish universities can also benefit from the tourist promotional information of the Camino.

What could be the highlights in the presentation of the Camino to the Chinese tourists? Since the Camino is not a traditional, mass-tourist destination where sight-seeing and shopping are main tourist activities, the ‘alternative’ or ‘innovative’ non-mass tourist features of the Camino such as immersion in nature, self-discovery, encountering the world can be highlighted. These features together offer Chinese travelers something that are rare, precious in their daily lives. The focus in the presentation of the Camino can mark this ‘out-of-the-everyday life’ quality, to attract the target audience to undertake an unforgettable journey in a ‘parallel world’ of their routine urban life. Of course, other regular attractions such as gastronomy, cultural landscape (ancient towns, traditional or local architecture) would be effective add-ups to the unique attractors of the Camino in the destination

promotion. Attention to the diversity within a specific route shouldn't be ignored, for example the vinery and wine of La Rioja, the ancient history of Castilla y León, the green landscape and seafood of Galicia. This differentiated attractiveness of each section/region along the entire route.

Since the website has now become the major source of information (UNWTO, 2019; Chen et al., 2022), visibility on popular travel websites can be utilized as one of the platforms for promotion of the Camino, but other popular social media platforms such as *Douyin* (Chinese version of Ticktok), Wechat, *Xiaohongshu* can be used too, both through Spanish tourism official accounts in Chinese/China for instance the Tourism section of Spanish Embassy in China, Xunta de Galicia, and through some prestigious collaborators Chinese account, for example qyer, ctrip, mafengwo, tripadvisor, as well as smaller but highly relevant entities such as the Chinese Camino Friends organization. The communication and collaboration are valuable, to share promotional resources and synchronize with each other their goals and discourse, to create a win-win result. Traditional text, image, short videoclips are helpful, especially those that highlights nature, inner journey, and diverse cultural experience through personal stories of those who have experienced it themselves can be designed into the promotional materials. Live-streaming by social media influencers known to Chinese subscribers whose image and style fit the features of the Camino can be invited to make live-streaming video clips about the Camino in collaboration with Spanish tourism authorities.

It's true that till today not many Chinese tourists have heard about the Camino. Those who have walked it are really 'the lucky few'. The number of sources from where Chinese public or tourists may learn about the Camino is not many – movies, word-of-mouth from friends or travel blogs. If the marketers of the Camino such as Spanish or

Galician tourism authorities would like to get more Chinese tourists to experience the Camino, they need to increase its publicity.

One possible measure to take is to increase organized publicity on the internet and popular marketing-oriented social media which is used by many young people in China. Specifically, the marketers can use 'cover stories' to be the headline of the most popular travel platforms in the low season of the Camino so that the readers can have time to prepare for their trip – visa, transportation reservation – before the high season comes). The movie *The Way* can still work as an effective 'catalyst' to wake up hidden drives for personal growth and quest, so more movie activities can be organized in Spanish cultural institutions or language schools in China, by sending free printed materials and videos to those institutions, or more movie reviews on popular movie review platforms such as douban.com. The pandemic in the last two years have generalized the usage of online platform in social and educational settings, this means many of such activities can be organized online as well. Online interaction can be made following the movie-watching, so that audience can have a chance to express themselves and hear others' comments and sharing, explore their inner desires and needs, and get further 'enticed'. There are many students coming to study in Europe, Spain is one of the study destinations. In 2016 there were more than 8000 Chinese student who went to study in Spain, and still 27797 students are studying the Spanish language in mainland China, those numbers are increasing (Chinanews, 2017). Since all students need to go to the embassy for visa application, perhaps it's a good idea to put brochures in the visa center reception area, highlighting the uniqueness of the Camino, which can be a highlight experience in their study time in Europe, even in life. Make the Camino visible to Chinese public, especially those who are already planning to come.

7.2.2 Sustainable Management of the Camino as Cultural Route Heritage

Cultural route heritage is a relatively new category of cultural heritage certified by UNESCO since 1993, when the Santiago Pilgrimage Routes were first recognized as world heritage. The world has learnt so much from the management of the Camino how to preserve and develop living, large-scale heritage like the Camino. The key findings on what makes the Camino journey so memorable among international travelers can shed light on the sustainable management of cultural route heritage in general, including the Camino de Santiago. Besides the general model of Global Cultural Route which points a direction into the future, specific measures can be taken to achieve the sustainable goal of the Camino.

First and foremost, authenticity should be positioned as the most fundamental and central attribute of heritage to keep the Camino attractive and cherished (Gusmán et al., 2017; Tilson, 2005). That includes the preservation of nature, local landscape, cultural heritage sites, pilgrimage traditions such as traveling by walking, albergue volunteering, symbols, religious atmosphere, stamping and certification. Also, over-commercialization needs to be avoided, by redirecting tourists to other routes – currently there are ten official routes of the Camino, but two to three of them converge in the last few days with the French route. In high seasons like summer, the last few stages of the French way gets overcrowded, which has resulted in some complaints among pilgrims. Promotional effort of other routes can be increased, as well as installation of basic, public infrastructure system, such as public albergues, water supply, auto-vending machines for food.

Secondly, balance between regional authenticity and integrity of the entire route. While remaining consistent with the general theme and feature of the Camino as a heritage route, the regional, local feature should be preserved too. Homogeneity should be avoided to preserve authenticity, but on the other side of the same coin, heterogeneity should not

be a threat to integrity of the route either. This particularly involves restoration, renovation projects across autonomous administrative regions along the route. Cross-regional coordination and collaboration must be in place to guarantee the integrity and authenticity at the same time.

Thirdly, an inclusive approach that welcomes multicultural diversity and universal fraternity would continue to inspire and foster cross-cultural dialogue, mutual understanding, and collaboration in the face of the common challenges of the contemporary world, such as the pandemic and climate change. This orientation is in line with traditional Chinese value of 'harmony but not the sameness' or 'diversity in unity' (Fang, 2003; Fei, 2001; Shao & Qi, 2007). This is similar to the Western traditional value, which is 'unity in diversity' or 'diversity in unity' in English (Parker, 2003; Banks, 2004). West or East, despite diverse cultures and traditions, there are common grounds where universality is shared, such as the value of benevolence, the quest for personal wellbeing, growth, connection, authenticity and meaning. To paint a picture of cultural route heritage for a common future, such universality must appear as its background color.

7.3 Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this study lie, first of all, in the sample structure and the possibility that younger, technologically informed subjects, along with those who felt a rich experience on the Camino, are over-represented, since those who are not used to posting travel stories online, or those who were not impressed by their Camino experiences, might not be so easily identifiable under such an investigation. Focusing on a sample of a specific cultural group may also limit the generalizability of its findings.

Another limitation is related to the retrospective nature of the interview process, which is not conducive to capturing those spontaneous and profound thoughts and feelings

on the spot, unlike in many travel blogs, which were written while the author was undertaking the journey.

On the other hand, to point out the limitation of the language, both in terms of the reference literature and in the narratives analyzed. The review of previous research on the Camino pilgrim experience is also limited to the literature in the English language. Also, some personal experiences such as spiritual experiences are often abstract and difficult to express or synthesize with full clarity. In the travel blogs it is sometimes articulated using philosophically abstruse stances or poetic quotes, therefore it is possible that some relevant experiences and their underlying themes have not been identified as relevant and then have been missed out. Moreover, the fact that some Chinese travelers did not record in their blogs very detailed accounts on spiritual experience, does not mean that those individuals did not have such experiences, particularly some male Chinese travelers or some individuals who tend to be more reserved in expressing their inner self or emotions. Besides this, with the aim of bridging linguistic traditions and cultural realms, the initial coding was done by a coder who, although feeling very much at home in English and has training in interpreting psychological texts, is a Chinese native: this allows an expressionist thrust, which, notwithstanding, always bears a certain level of subjectivity in generating the codes. The netnographic study ensures indeed a high degree of external validity but complicates the synthesis of data.

7.4 Future Research Directions

Regarding specific research topics such as spiritual experience on the Camino, survey questionnaires that incorporate main theoretical dimensions of spiritual transformation can be developed and handed to Chinese individuals before they start the journey, then collect them after they complete it. This will allow a better tracking of their

spiritual experience, specifically in what concerns the investigation of the process of such transformation. Other theoretical frameworks outside the field of religious studies or mental health can be brought in to analyze the phenomenon of transformation to explore other kinds of transformative experience on the Camino, such as changes in cross-cultural understanding, attitude, and behavior. To further investigate the key dimensions of spiritual transformation of Chinese travelers and their internal dynamics, the results of this research could be compared with other studies done in similar settings that also possess elements of nature, intensive physical exercise and interpersonal interactions, religion/spirituality, etc. The Kumano Kodo in Japan, the Ruta del Inca in Peru would be candidates for this sort of research endeavor. Correspondingly, the spiritual transformation of Western travelers in Chinese cultural and spiritual settings could also be researched to gain insights about eventual commensurability of experiences.

General future research efforts could be directed towards exploring the experiences of other non-Western pilgrims considering their respective cultural contexts, the experience of local people and Western pilgrims in terms of their interactions with non-Western pilgrims, and how such cross-cultural encounters transform individuals and communities and inform the sustainable and inclusive management of global cultural routes like the Camino de Santiago. A promising line of research lays in considering how the 'best practice' of this European heritage route can cross-fertilize the preservation, management, and tourism development of Chinese cultural itineraries. Evaluations of the effects of targeted marketing strategies among Chinese tourists could also be investigated, such as in the first- and second-tier Chinese cities, or among the lovers of outdoor activities in China.

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Appendix

A. Interview Guide

Part One: pilgrim profile

Name (or nickname):

Gender:

Age:

Occupation:

Religion:

Part Two: Camino profile

Year:

Duration:

Route:

Starting point:

Mode:

Grouping:

Number of times:

Part Three: experience

1. Where did you learn about the Camino?
2. What motivated you to walk the Camino?
3. Where did you search for information before departure?
4. Where did you search for information on the way?
5. How did you experience the nature on the Camino?
6. How did you find the local culture?
7. What's your experience with food?
8. What's your experience with accommodation?
9. What's your experience with the local people?
10. What's your experience with the hospitaleros at the albergues?
11. What's your experience with peer pilgrims?
12. What were your thoughts and feelings while walking the Camino?
13. What's your experience of arriving at Santiago?
14. Did you bring any souvenirs? What are they?
15. What impressed you the most about the Camino de Santiago?
16. What's your overall comment about the Camino?
17. What are the strengths of the Camino as a cultural heritage or a travel destination?
18. What are the weaknesses of the Camino as a cultural heritage or a travel destination?
19. How do you understand 'pilgrimage' and 'pilgrim' before doing the Camino?
20. How do you understand 'pilgrimage' and 'pilgrim' after doing the Camino?

B. List of Codes

Before the Camino	motivation	wellbeing balance feel life clarification/directic life transition self-enhancement curiosity new experience sport religion not clear no indication	balance self-exploration achivement growth movie book culture nature hiking penance, closness to God, petition just want to walk	away from stress inner peace relaxation happier mood physical health authentic life beauty in life graduation job turn-over break-up of relationship other life decisions authentic self self-challenge fulfill a dream stronger more open-minded more persistant more courageous The Way Into the Wild The Pilgrimage the Camino pilgrimage route Europe Spain landscape
	source of information	aquaintance movie internet other channels book no indication	friends teacher relatives The Way travel blogs documentary, show, exhibition, Wechat account The Pilgrimage	
	trip planning	travel blogs websites guide book mobile APP friend pilgrim office at Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port no indication		
	Initial	physical challenge	muscular pain blister backpack overweight	

experience	anxiety beauty of nature	uncertainty of itinerary uncertainty of one's capacity mountain view (the Pyrenees)
nature	beauty good preservation quietness/peacefulness/away from crowd surreality authenticity good mood weather	sunrise clear blue sky, clouds, starry sky air quality open landscape mountain view (the Pyrenees) sea view (the Northern Way) greenness (in Galicia) crops sounds in nature colors in nature country side view animals flowers fog forest in Galicia fresh smells in nature uncultivated land pastures relaxation contentedness gratitude restoration/empowerment rain (in Galicia) dry heat
food	great experience specific food Chinese food self-cooking	general Galicia tapas vino, sidra tortilla churro jamón pilgrim menú hot water home flavor home flavor share with peer pilgrims, cross-cultural exchange tasty original flavor similar to Chinese cuisine tasty original flavor pulpo, pimiento de padrón, cost-effective, lot of food
language	communication understanding of cu in cultural sites	can communicate despite language barrier limited communication due to language barrier

On the Camino		in mass
	cultural landscape	<p>good preservation, : church (and mass)</p> <p>Gaudí's works</p> <p>hórreo</p> <p>cemetery (in Galicia)</p> <p>local festivals</p> <p>old towns</p> <p>other landmarks (monestaries, cruceiro, labyrinth)</p> <p>sites seen in the movie</p> <p>new experience a different Spain (not bullfighting or flamenco)</p> <p>difficulty in underst: church (religious meaning)</p>
	pilgrim hostels	<p>bonding with peer pilgrims</p> <p>cross-cultural communication</p> <p>warmth of hospitaleros</p> <p>new experience (bunk-bed)</p> <p>rough conditions (snoring, smell, bedbugs)</p>
	hospitaleros	<p>warm welcome surprised at receiving Chinese pilgrims</p> <p>warm welcome of Chinese pilgrims</p> <p>assistance to pilgrin information</p> <p>food/cooking</p> <p>medicine/blister</p> <p>religious devotion of hospitaleros</p>
	local people	<p>warmth towards pil warm greetings to pilgrims</p> <p>share food with pilgrims</p> <p>give directions to pilgrims</p> <p>medical assistance to pilgrim</p> <p>warm, cheerful pers: love life: eating, singing, dancing</p> <p>spontaneus in communication</p> <p>relaxing lifestyle/at business hours</p> <p>dining hours are late</p> <p>many festivals/celebrations/night life</p> <p>beautiful gardens</p> <p>eating, singing, dancing</p>
	peer pilgrims	<p>warmth Buen Camino' greeting</p> <p>mutual caring assistance</p> <p>sharing of things and experience</p> <p>sincerity sharing of personal experience</p> <p>communitas sense of community (as pilgrims)</p> <p>sense of family</p> <p>friendship</p> <p>cross-cultural exper learning about different cultures</p> <p>learning about different peoples</p> <p>reflection on one's own culture</p> <p>yuanfen unexpected encounters and departures</p>
		<p>hardship travel on foot</p> <p>carry one's backpack</p> <p>perseverance walk long distance</p> <p>simple life eat and live under modest condition</p>

pilgrim identity	<p>dress up simply</p> <p>pilgrimage tradition pilgrim facilities (hostel, fountain, milestone, arrow)</p> <p>pilgrim symbols (shell, credential, stamp, certificate)</p> <p>donativo</p> <p>hospitalero</p> <p>pilgrim mass, botafumeiro</p> <p>perceptions of pilgri involves hardship</p> <p>associate with religious commitments</p> <p>impression of Tibetan kora</p> <p>perceptions of pilgri not bound to religion</p> <p>it is a journey of the inner self</p> <p>personal definition of sacredness</p>
inner movements	<p>positive affectivity joy/contentednes simple lifestyle</p> <p>nature</p> <p>warmth of others</p> <p>inner peace nature</p> <p>religious rituals, sites</p> <p>freedom/liberatio away from everyday life</p> <p>nature</p> <p>self-determined schedule</p> <p>relaxation lifestyle</p> <p>nature</p> <p>relationship</p> <p>change in attitude the Camino is life full of unexpected changes</p> <p>full of challenges</p> <p>a journey towards a destination</p> <p>what must happen will happen</p> <p>acceptance the journey</p> <p>self limits</p> <p>life changes</p> <p>yuanfen</p> <p>courage overcoming difficulties</p> <p>warmth of others</p> <p>gratitude warmth of others</p> <p>religious rituals</p> <p>the journey</p>
lost in time and space	<p>disorientation of tin time has slowed c journey, nature</p> <p>loss of memory of journey, nature</p> <p>back in history old town, building</p> <p>disorientation of sp: nowhere</p> <p>in another world (peaceful, simple, nowhere)</p> <p>surreality feel like a dream</p> <p>sharp contrast with routine life</p>
experience of religion	<p>relationship with th religion feels good religious rituals, sites</p> <p>trust in the transe in destiny/miracle</p> <p>interconnectedne religious ritual</p> <p>reflections on religic religion is importa religious rituals, sites, others' devotion</p> <p>religion is meanin religious rituals, sites, others' devotion</p>

	arrival at Santiago	<p>the last few days excited</p> <p>in front of the cathe peace</p> <p> nothing/emptiness</p> <p> feeling lost/sad</p> <p> not want to end</p> <p> gratitude</p> <p> sense of achievement</p> <p> excited</p> <p>fulfillment of tradition (pilgrim certificate, pilgrim mass)</p> <p>continue to Finisterre and/or Muxía)</p> <p>farewell with friends</p> <p>souvenir shopping</p>
After the Camino	evaluation of the journey	<p>growth</p> <p>goodness, compassion</p> <p>life priorities</p> <p>happiness</p> <p>warmth</p> <p>peace, acceptance</p> <p>gratefulness</p> <p>liberation</p> <p>life answer</p>
	evaluation of the route	<p>journey of the mind</p> <p>life metaphor</p> <p>magical</p> <p>personal</p> <p>cross-cultural</p> <p>worthwhile</p> <p>unforgettable</p> <p>historical-cultural</p> <p>universal</p>
	intention to revisit	<p>would like to walk again</p> <p>would like to walk other routes</p> <p>have already walked again (other routes/sections)</p>

C. Published Article 1

Article

A Guest at Home: The Experience of Chinese Pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago

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Abstract: This study identifies the main dimensions and attributes that shape the experience of the Camino de Santiago for Chinese travelers as a tourism product. By exploring the similarities and differences between their experiences and that of Western pilgrims, it also reflects on the sustainable marketing strategies of the Camino among Chinese travelers. The research adopts a phenomenological approach and gathers data from 112 online travel journals posted by Chinese Camino pilgrims, and from in-depth interviews with twelve Chinese pilgrims. The results reveal that the Camino is experienced by Chinese pilgrims as a personal journey of well-being and growth, as well as a cross-cultural experience. Authenticity and harmony are observed to be the key elements that contribute to a satisfying and transformative experience for Chinese pilgrims, where they find a cultural-spiritual center close to their traditional values, yet distant from their everyday social practices. Both Chinese and Western pilgrims undergo similar external and internal journeys, although each group travels in its respective sociocultural framework. The study is based on Cohen's (1979) five travel-mode theory and enriches the discussion from a cross-cultural point of view. The implications for the sustainable management of the Camino as a global cultural heritage route, and for effectively marketing it among Chinese tourists, are also discussed.

Keywords: tourist experience; Camino de Santiago; religious tourism; sacred space; Chinese tourists



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1. Introduction

The Santiago Pilgrimage Routes, a UNESCO world heritage site, also known as the Camino de Santiago, have attracted millions of travelers a year since their revitalization in the late 20th century [1,2]. The growing multinational representation among the Camino travelers reveals the internationalization of this unique heritage tourism phenomenon as it marches into the new millennium [2]. In 2019 alone, it received more than 340,000 pilgrims from 190 different countries and regions, including 1062 from mainland China, accounting for 0.3% of the total number of pilgrims [3]. How contemporary travelers experience this millenary pilgrimage route has been capturing the attention of many scholars for over two decades. The tourist experience can be understood as the subjective interpretation of the meanings and memories created during travel-related events or while consuming tourism-related services [4,5]. It leaves a profound mark on the tourist's memory, well-being, identity, meaning-making, destination perception, satisfaction, and intention to revisit [6,7].

Among many scholars of the tourist experience, Cohen [8] proposes a typology that encompasses previously conflicting views on the nature of the tourist experience and conceptualizes it as one phenomenon with varying degrees of motivations, needs, and patterns of behavior. According to the aforementioned author, the tourist experience can be understood as the experience of traveling between 'centers'. The concept of a 'center' was first raised by Eliade [9] to refer to 'the zone of the sacred and absolute reality' (p. 17).

It was then highlighted by Turner [10] to conceptualize pilgrimage as a sacred journey towards 'the center out there', which is not necessarily in strict geographical or religious terms. The idea of such a 'center' can be multiple: it can be religious, cultural, political, or spiritual. In Cohen's conceptualization, such a 'center' is more of a spiritual locus that symbolizes ultimate meanings and values for the individual [8]. Tourists tend to either walk away from their original center, in which life is too stressful, inauthentic, or meaningless, or away from one center and towards another one. They may merely approach a new center as the goal of the trip without denying the center of their origin. Depending on how a tourist moves around different centers, Cohen [8] identifies five travel modes: the recreational mode, in which tourists desire to run away from stressful modern life and look for recreation and refreshment so that they can return to their original society with renewed energy; the diversionary mode, in which tourists simply want to run away from meaninglessness in their usual society by taking a vacation; the experiential mode, in which individuals approach and explore their own personal spiritual center; the experimental mode, in which they are not sure of their own spiritual center, and are trying out new lifestyles that represent new centers; and the existential mode, in which individuals intentionally commit to a new spiritual center that is distant from their original one. The typology focuses on tourists' personal drives and to what extent they desire to escape from the original cultural/spiritual center and seek an alternative. Cohen's typology of tourist experiences allows us to link the desires and motivations of the tourists with their behaviors. Recreational and diversionary tourists want to run away and relax. They seek a break time with pleasure and fun, and are likely to behave like tourists, engaging in hedonic mass-tourism activities. Experiential and experimental tourists travel as cultural explorers or pilgrims. They are out for authentic experiences and seek authenticity and meaning in the life of others [11,12]. Existential tourists seek higher meaning, such as human communion or union with nature. They are like new members of a culture or a religion, outside of their original sociocultural environment [8].

Given that the conceptualization of the tourist experience is highly subjective and shaped by sociocultural contexts [4,5], the non-Western tourist experience should be interpreted through different cultural lenses, taking a critical distance from Anglo-Western sociological theories [4,13–15]. Most current studies focus on pilgrims from parts of the Western world, such as Europe, North America, and Oceania [16–19]. A close look at how the Camino is experienced by travelers from a non-Western background contributes to a more complete picture of the phenomena of the tourist experience on the Santiago Pilgrimage Routes, and of the tourist experience in general.

As Spain is one of the most-visited tourist destinations in the world, the entities responsible for tourism promotion in this country are striving to offer innovative and diversified tourist products to attract more high-spending tourist markets, such as China, Russia, and the USA, as one of the measures to compensate for the limitations of seasonality [20,21]. The growing importance of Chinese outbound tourism, combined with the interest in cultural and long-distance tourism, makes China one of the places with the greatest potential for outbound tourism. The global context is transforming at an unprecedented speed, weakening traditional outbound markets, with a strong and keen interest in capturing the attention of emerging markets. As a result, adaptation to the world's largest market, China, is becoming necessary [22–24]. In this context, marketing plays an essential role, beyond its promotional role, as an authentic tool for tourism territorial management [25]. To that end, understanding the travel experiences and preferences of Chinese pilgrims on the Camino can provide better information for local tourist sectors in Spain and, thus, help them to improve their management and service, increase the attractiveness of the Camino, and enhance their chances of success as an emerging destination among Chinese travelers who currently have little awareness of the Camino de Santiago.

The pilgrimage itineraries that lead to Santiago de Compostela in northern Spain, known as the Camino, can be dated back to the 9th century when the tomb of St James, one of Jesus' twelve apostles, was first discovered and visited. The pilgrimage routes were

walked for centuries, until a decline in the 16th century. They were then revitalized in the late 20th century across Europe and beyond [1,26]. In 1987, the Santiago de Compostela Pilgrim routes were declared the first European cultural route by the Council of Europe through its cultural route program, which aims at celebrating the common memories, values, and identities of Europe, and promoting sustainable tourism [27]. The main routes and sections of the Camino were later included on the UNESCO World Heritage List of Sites [28]. With nearly three decades of rapid growth, the Camino has developed significantly and its success has resulted in an imitation of its model in other parts of the world, such as Via Francigena in Italy, and Kumano Kodo in Japan [29,30]. China is rich in cultural route heritage [31,32]. Learning from the best practice of the Camino in its revitalization could inform and inspire China in its efforts to preserve and develop the cultural routes in China.

A number of studies have researched the experiences of Camino pilgrims from a variety of disciplines, such as sociology, anthropology, psychology, and religious studies. Among these, pilgrim motivation is the most-investigated topic. Studies on thousands of Camino pilgrims, mostly of Western origin, show that the popularity of the Camino started in the late 20th century and arose from secular motives, rather than religious ones, as the majority of pilgrims made their Camino for personal reasons that may have eventually had spiritual overtones, such as a quest for meaning and life direction, as well as a desire to escape daily routines, relax in nature, or engage in sports or adventure [2,17,19,33–36].

Much of the discussion about the extensive experiences of Camino pilgrims also focuses on authentic experience, personal transformation, and communion among pilgrims. Pilgrims expressed a desire for authentic experiences by welcoming the traditions of the pilgrimage route, such as carrying one's bags, walking long distances, and living under simple conditions [37–39], by running away from everyday routines [40], pursuing spiritual enlightenment and self-discovery [41], and engaging in intercultural dialogue [42]. The Camino is generally believed to be a transformative journey through which pilgrims experience a sense of freedom because the Camino allows individuals to accept the natural rhythm and limitations of the body [41,42]. The simple and slow lifestyle along the way frees people from the influence of consumerism and the pressures of modern life, such as fast-paced schedules and endless demands [40–43]. Pilgrims also reported discovering a sense of the need to update their life priorities and worldviews at the end of the journey [16–18]. With the immersion into an unstructured setting that is in contrast to their highly structured everyday lives, pilgrims are believed to be able to enter a 'liminal space' that allows change to take place [17,44]. 'Communitas' is a concept in anthropology, applied to the pilgrimage phenomena, that refers to the sense of communion felt by pilgrims during their pilgrimage journey [44,45]. Many scholars have discovered that the Camino pilgrims are able to establish an intersubjective 'communitas' among themselves by sharing common goals, life conditions, and affective experiences [16,17,46].

The aim of this paper is fourfold: (1) to investigate the experience of Chinese travelers on the Camino de Santiago, and its similarities and differences with that of Western travelers in terms of motivational and experiential patterns in order to enrich the understanding of the overall pilgrim experience of the Camino; (2) to understand the experiences of Chinese Camino travelers in light of their sociocultural contexts in order to increase the understanding of the tourist experience from a non-Western perspective; (3) to identify the main attributes of the Camino as a tourist product that attracts Chinese travelers; (4) to inform more sustainable and inclusive management of the Camino as a global heritage route.

2. Materials and Methods

Following an interpretivist tradition, a phenomenological approach was adopted for this study to discover the experiential meaning-making process, and the underlying dynamics of the participants through their own testimony [47,48].

Online tourist travel blogs have been found to be an effective material for discovering tourist motives, travel behaviors, and destination images, as tourists can freely express

their motivations, experiences, and reflections in their blogs and journals in diverse forms, such as text, image, and music and videos, which makes such user-generated content a rich source of information for the purpose of this study [49]. Since this is the first empirical attempt to investigate the experience of Chinese travellers on the Camino, online journals posted by Chinese travellers from multiple sources were searched without any time limits on their publication dates, so that as much relevant data as possible could be collected. The most popular Chinese travel websites, such as Qyer, Mafengwo, and Ctrip, and the most popular Chinese social media platforms, Douban and Jianshu, were searched under two key terms that corresponded to 'Camino de Santiago' and 'Santiago Pilgrimage Route'. The difference is that the latter contains the word 'pilgrimage'. The first search was performed in June 2020 and the last in February 2021. The criteria for selection included: (1) the authors indicated that they had completed a Camino trip; and (2) the written account contained substantial content related to the author's personal experience on the Camino. Initial searches generated hundreds of results from various platforms, although not all were relevant. Journals about other pilgrimage routes, Camino-related movie reviews, and historical or practical information were excluded. Repeated journals were also removed. After careful screening, 112 travel journals were located, with sixty-five from Qyer, twenty-nine from Mafengwo, two from Ctrip, nine from Douban, and seven from Jianshu. The journals are systematically labelled as JR1, JR2, . . . , JR112. Most journals were written in a day-to-day diary style and were posted after 2014, although the earliest ones can be dated from 2008, and the most recent ones from 2020.

The data from online journals were treated with a traditional content analysis method and theme-identifying techniques. Inductive content analysis is a method frequently used for analyzing qualitative data without a pre-existing guiding theoretical framework, which allows the researcher to look at the data with a fresh eye [50,51]. Nevertheless, the major topics in previous Camino pilgrim studies were taken into consideration for the purpose of comparison between Chinese and Western pilgrims. In addition to background information about the pilgrims and how they organized their Camino, the analysis generated themes, such as motivation, experience with nature, food, people, walking, accommodation, culture, etc. Those themes were further grouped into categories, such as motivation, impression of Spain, culture of the Camino, evaluation of the journey, etc.

Additional data were obtained from in-depth, semi-structured interviews with twelve Chinese travelers in order to gain more clarity and insight into the results generated from the first phase of the research. The participants must have completed the Camino but have not published journals about their journey on the websites used for data collection in this research to avoid repeating results. The participants were recruited from the Chinese Camino Friends' social media community on WeChat, an active chat group with more than 300 members (by December 2020). Using purposeful sampling, the researchers selected participants with diverse ages, genders, occupations, and religious affiliations. The participants were familiarized with the purpose of the study and were asked for their written consent to participate. The interviews were scheduled and conducted in the form of online meetings using social media during November and December 2020. As well as taking notes about demographic information and Camino travel patterns, open-ended questions were asked related to specific aspects of their experience before, during, and after the Camino journey. The questions were formulated according to the categories identified from pilgrim journal analysis, so that the data from both datasets could be merged. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, translated into English, and labelled as IN1, IN2, . . . , IN12.

The data generated from the interviews were analysed with the assistance of NVIVO 1.0. This treatment consisted of separate coding among the four authors, followed by inter-author verification to increase coding reliability. An intercoder comparison indicated an agreement of approximately 90% in terms of all the codes and categories. The results from the interviews were combined with those from the previous journal analysis, and the relations between the themes and categories were explored at this stage.

3. Results

3.1. Pilgrim Profile

The results show a group of young, urban, secular Chinese individuals walking the Camino de Santiago. As illustrated in Figure 1 and Table 1, nearly two-thirds of the Chinese pilgrims in this study were young people under the age of thirty. The working population (mostly working in China) and students (mostly studying in Europe) formed two main groups. More than a third of Chinese pilgrims came from the first-tier cities in China (i.e., Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Shenzhen). Most of them reported not adhering to any religion, and only four reported being Christian (Catholic or Protestant) across the datasets. The most popular route for Chinese pilgrims was the French Way. The majority of Chinese pilgrims travelled on foot and half of them started the journey alone. Compared to international pilgrims [3], there seemed to be more women, a younger student population, and much fewer senior and retired people among Chinese pilgrims. Both Chinese and international pilgrims chose to make their Camino mainly by walking, whereas international pilgrims tend to be more diversified in their choice of itineraries in comparison to Chinese pilgrims who are found mostly on the French Way, especially on their first Camino trip.

Many Chinese pilgrims learned for the first time about the Camino from the movie *The Way* (40%), from acquaintances (28%), and from websites (12%), and the rest (20%) did not disclose this information. Most Chinese pilgrims searched online for information about the itinerary, packing, accommodation, and the visa from previous pilgrims' posts on major Chinese travel websites before departure. Some also browsed the Galician official Camino website, especially those who were students based in Europe. While making this journey, those pilgrims who could read English or another Western language often used mobile applications, such as Buen Camino or Eroski, for route-related information. Some also consulted guidebooks and their pilgrim peers.

Table 1. Profile of Chinese pilgrims and international pilgrims.

		Number	Percentage	International Pilgrims (2019)
gender	Male	46	37%	51%
	Female	78	63%	49%
age	<30	78	63%	55%
	30–60	44	35%	27%
	>60	2	2%	19%
occupation	student	55	45%	18%
	employed	51	41%	65%
	retired	3	2%	13%
	not indicated/other occupation	15	12%	4%
religion	non	114	92%	Not available
	Christian	4	3%	Not available
	not indicated	6	5%	Not available
route	French Way	94	76%	55%
	other routes	30	24%	45%
starting point	Saint Jean Pied de Port	36	29%	10%
	Sarria	31	25%	28%
mode	on foot	121	98%	94%
	bike	3	2%	6%
organization	alone	66	53%	Not available
	with companions	58	47%	Not available

Source: Chinese pilgrims: authors' elaboration; international pilgrims: Pilgrims' Office.

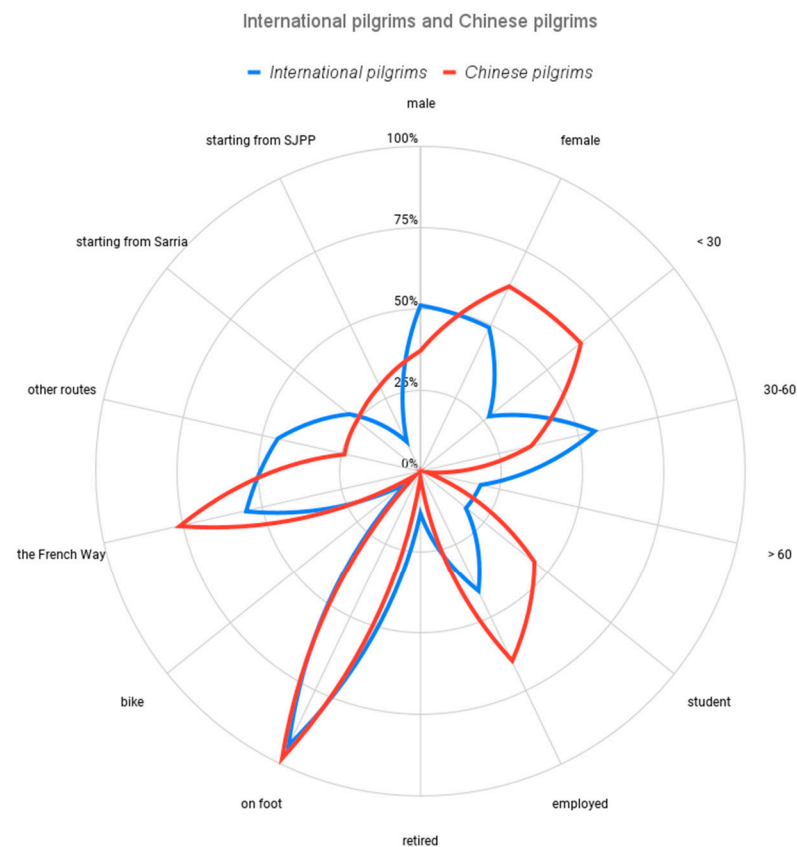


Figure 1. Profile of Chinese pilgrims and international pilgrims. Source: Authors' elaboration.

3.2. Motivations

Similar patterns of travel motivation were observed across datasets. More than half of Chinese pilgrims in this study (56%) embarked on the journey mainly to promote personal well-being and growth, as an escape from stress to 'feel life', or as a quest for clarification and direction after graduation or a change of job. The second most popular motivation (52%) was curiosity, an interest in experiencing something new, such as European cultural heritage, landscapes, or cross-cultural interactions through the Camino. Very few reported walking for sport/health or religious reasons. Four of the participants did not disclose their motivation. Two of them, both of whom were Christians, indicated that they also wanted to 'get closer to God' (JR14, IN3). A significant number of participants (37%) stated that they decided to walk the Camino after watching the movie *The Way*, since this movie had impressed and inspired them with its beautiful natural scenery, fascinating cultural heritage, and touching stories of personal growth and friendship. Some of the respondents (JR6, JR40, JR62, JR76, IN8) were motivated simply by a catchy line in the movie: 'You don't choose a life, you live one'.

'I chose to walk the Camino not only because I watched the movie The Way. Most importantly it's because I wanted to stop, to ask questions about myself, to clarify doubts for myself.' (JR35)

'I don't seem to have a clear goal for walking the Camino, I simply wanted to become stronger and more courageous.' (JR90)

'I was attracted by the natural landscape, the cultural landscape such as architecture, local life along the Camino presented in the movie The Way. It's like a landscape movie, but it has much spiritual elements, reflections, etc., (which leads me to make) reflections on my own present life.' (IN9)

3.3. Experience of Spain

Experiences with the local people, food, culture, and natural landscape also contributed to a vivid part of Chinese pilgrims' Camino memories. Some commented that the Camino journey made them discover a different Spain from the one which had been previously known to the Chinese, limited to its iconic images of bullfighting, flamenco dancing, and Gaudí's architectural heritage. The most frequent word that Chinese pilgrims used to describe the local people in general was 'warm-hearted (requing)', and it was used particularly to describe pilgrims. Their passion and contentment with their lives, in addition to their relaxing lifestyle, all impressed Chinese pilgrims.

'When the locals give us a thumbs up, we feel incredible strength! Everyone greets us kindly and respects the pilgrims with backpacks and shells.' (IN6)

'Walking in Spain is a very comfortable experience. Besides the picturesque landscape, the relaxing and calm life attitude of the local people shows a confident universal value that can exist only after one is self-sufficient.' (JR6)

'Maybe it's under the influence of Christian views or Western customs on life and death, their cemeteries are located inside their village, their relatives can go and visit them anytime, they don't take death as a taboo like us.' (JR64)

Data from both journals and interviews provide evidence that Chinese pilgrims were very satisfied with the authentic ('yuanzhiyuanwei', meaning original flavor) local food on their Camino. Some commented that Spanish cuisine is close to Chinese cuisine in terms of flavor and ways of cooking. The majority of Chinese pilgrims reported that they admired the well-preserved cultural heritage along the Camino, such as the historical towns, churches, and cultural traditions, which contributed to the strong sense of an authentic cultural experience. Some acknowledged not being acquainted with the history and culture of Spain but showed a desire to learn more. Some stated that they had looked for an on-site introduction to better appreciate the local cultural heritage but could not find sufficient multilingual information available.

The tranquil wilderness of the Camino allowed Chinese pilgrims to enjoy not only the beauty of nature, but also a general sense of restoration, joy, and connection, and feelings of 'relaxation', 'peace', a 'return to simplicity and authenticity' (fanpuguizhen), 'liberation', 'happiness' and 'healing'.

3.4. The Camino as a Unique Culture

Some Chinese pilgrims pointed out that the Camino itself represents a culture characterized by a spiritual quest, a simple lifestyle, benevolent traditions, cross-cultural interactions, and unity. This culture seemed unusual and unique in contrast with their everyday social reality.

'In the mountains I encountered several times 'fruit self-service', not machines, 'self-service' here means not supervised. Owners put out for sale their grapes, bananas, apples, oranges, packed nuts, etc, each for 1 euro, and they left a locked cash box next to it. I've never seen this in cities, I think I'll never see it. Only here on the Camino you can see something like this.' (JR103)

The volunteers at the Gaucelmo Albergue reminded me of other warm-hearted volunteers along the way, such as Grandpa Francisco, Antie Rosa, Uncle Jose Luis, etc.. The volunteers are indeed a beautiful sight of the Camino. In fact I want to thank them for their warmth and welcome to all pilgrims regardless of their cultures and backgrounds, which have allowed the Camino to become a unique, charming route of cultural diversity.' (JR73)

'The Camino stands for a lifestyle in its original and simple form: walking, carrying your own bags, living in hostels with limited conditions.' (IN2)

The experience with pilgrim peers dominates the Camino stories of Chinese pilgrims, often including detailed accounts of their observations and interactions with pilgrims of

other nationalities. The altruism, warmth, and openness felt from fellow pilgrims deeply touched the Chinese pilgrims and fostered a sense of intimate bonding and communion. Many Chinese pilgrims used words such as ‘warm’, ‘earnest’, ‘magical’, ‘predestined relationship (yuanfen)’, ‘family’, and ‘belonging’ to describe the unforgettable moments with other pilgrims. The dynamic exchange of practical skills, cultural knowledge, and values offered Chinese pilgrims an exciting and enriching cross-cultural experience.

‘A Western grandpa brought his little grandson to experience the Camino. It seems Westerners start to cultivate independence in their children at an earlier age than Easterners.’ (JR63)

‘It was raining in the morning when I left . . . Auntie Irene from Scotland illuminated my path like an angel and reminded me from time to time about mud and puddles. I encountered all the time angels like her on the way, it has nothing to do with nationality or age.’ (JR28)

‘I’m very lucky that I encountered a community that’s like a family: we use ‘Camino family’ to address each other and name our team as ‘Camino legend’. We have ten young people from eight countries and five continents: we are Chinese, German, Irish, Canadian, American, French, Australian and Brazilian.’ (JR54)

3.5. Evaluation of the Pilgrimage Route

Many Chinese pilgrim authors summarized their journey upon its completion. The interview participants were also asked to make an overall evaluation of their Camino experience. Their summaries can be classified into two types: the perceived benefits of the trip, and the attributes of the Camino. The key words and frequencies of the Chinese pilgrims’ evaluation of their journey are provided in Table 2. The results across datasets show that the perceived benefits of the journey are primarily personal and psychological. ‘A journey of the inner self’ or ‘a journey of the mind’ (xinling zhi lv) are very frequent phrases that Chinese pilgrims used to summarize the Camino, by which they refer to an experience of personal well-being and growth, and of rich and profound thoughts and feelings. Chinese pilgrims seem to have been through a transformative process from which more happiness, peace, and life clarity were achieved. The Chinese word ‘xinling’ consists of ‘xin’ (heart), and ‘ling’ (spirit), and together they mean one’s inner world in contrast to the physical world, or the mind in contrast to the physical body [52]. The Camino was seen by many as a life metaphor with its symbolic staged itineraries, uncertainties, and serendipitous events. It was also perceived as an enriching cross-cultural experience:

‘Many things happened before the Camino, I was preoccupied and felt split into two: one being the body and the other the mind. On the Camino the two ‘I’s became one again . . . I recalled what I originally intended to pursue.’ (IN10)

‘After those days on the way I now understand why the Camino is called a journey that touches the mind, and I come to believe that everyone can find here the meanings for the self.’ (JR65)

‘The Camino is truly a platform for cross-cultural communication . . . This route is a get-together for the world, open your heart and you can dialogue with the world. Isn’t that exciting!’ (JR22)

The interview respondents were asked to specify the strengths and weaknesses of the Camino as a heritage or tourist project. The top three strengths indicated were: ‘completeness of facilities’ (80%); ‘well-preserved cultural heritage’ (77%); followed by ‘beautiful and well-preserved natural landscape’ (27%). A major area for improvement in the eyes of Chinese pilgrims (67%) was the lack of multilingual (Chinese in particular) information about the cultural sites along the way, which frustrated to a certain extent their interest in learning about European culture. When asked about their intention to revisit, all of the respondents stated that they would like to experience the Camino again and try a different route the next time. In fact, half of the respondents had already made their second or even third Camino by the time of the interview.

'There are no such hiking trails in China, with supplies in every 20 km along the entire trail. The facilities are perfect. That's rare.' (IN8)

'It is not very commercialized and has maintained the original ecology. The preservation of natural environment and culture is very good.' (IN3)

'I had little preparation in understanding the churches. We visited some of them but didn't really understand them. If there are any stories or background history, we must have missed that.' (IN2)

Table 2. Perceptions of the Camino by Chinese pilgrims.

Key Words of Benefit	Numbers of Pilgrims Who Used the Key Word	Percentage among All Pilgrims	Key Words of Attribute	Number of Pilgrims Who Used the Key Word	Percentage among All Pilgrims
growth	17	14%	life metaphor	29	23%
happiness	14	11%	magical	28	23%
feeling touched	10	8%	journey of the mind	27	22%
goodness	9	7%	personal	18	15%
inner peace	9	7%	worthwhile	14	11%
purity	9	7%	intercultural	14	11%
warmth	9	7%	unforgettable	12	10%
gratefulness	7	6%	historical-cultural	7	6%
liberated	6	5%	universal	3	2%
life answer	6	5%			
new life	4	3%			
rebalance	3	2%			

Source: authors' elaboration.

4. Discussion

4.1. Journey of Authenticity and Harmony

The findings reveal two underlying elements reoccurring in the accounts of many Chinese pilgrims across the datasets. One of these was their experience of authenticity. Authenticity is both a core concept in tourism scholarship and a key theme in pilgrim studies of the Camino. Authenticity can be experienced in objective forms, such as the originality of historical sites and artifacts, or subjective forms, such as being true to oneself and being sincere in interpersonal relationships [11,53–55]. The results indicate that Chinese pilgrims experienced both objective and subjective authenticity on the Camino. They repeatedly described how they enjoyed the 'original state' of nature, the historical monuments or traditions, and the 'original flavor' of the local food. They also emphasized how the Camino allowed them to find their 'original intention' and feel 'genuine warmth' from others.

Traditional Chinese society emphasizes norms, self-discipline, and the collective will over the individual will [56,57]. Industrialized modern life in Chinese society today is too fast-paced, competitive, superficial, and complicated, according to the pilgrims themselves. Both of these factors are present in mainstream Chinese society to a certain extent and tend to suppress the individual's experience of authenticity. In the non-Chinese, slowed-down, and simplified time and space of the Camino, authenticity is experienced extensively: through following human rhythms instead of industrial timetables; through the awareness of real needs under simple life conditions rather than materialized desires; through nonpolluted nature, a well-preserved heritage, and traditions other than commercialized, artificial attractions; through articulating one's true mind rather than having to wear social masks; through genuine interpersonal interactions with others rather than goal-oriented relationship maintenance.

Another almost ubiquitous element in the experience of Chinese pilgrims on their journey to Santiago was a sense of harmony, one of the core values in Chinese social life in the past and the present [56,58–60]. Similar experiences are also reported in the studies of Western pilgrims. Specifically, walking helps pilgrims achieve unity with the body [46]; time in the wilderness fosters harmony between self and nature [36]; engagement with the

local culture and people facilitates a sense of connectedness with the place [41]; interactions with pilgrim peers from all over the world creates a warm memory and the sense of belonging to a 'communitas' [16,39,45,46].

A harmonious relationship between man and nature (tianrenheyi) has always been one of the core values in Chinese culture [56,58]. In Daoist views, a harmonious bonding with nature is like returning home, and it cultivates restoration and healing [59,60]. The representation of the Camino as a 'magical' way because of the countless serendipitous encounters with others that happen along the way, as well as the frequent interpretation of such encounters as predestined relationships (yuanfen) in play, can both find their roots in Chinese folk beliefs, originally introduced from Buddhism, about the causes and timing as to when people enter or exit relationships with one another [61]. This popular view in the Chinese mindset inspires individuals to perceive new relationships in a positive light and serves as a constructive force in maintaining harmonious social relationships [62]. In Confucianism, social and interpersonal harmony is always at the heart of its teachings [56]. In short, the harmony experienced on the Camino provided a profound response to the cultural and psychological needs of Chinese pilgrims and helped them reconnect with their cultural roots [56,58,63].

4.2. *Evolving Modes and Plural Centers of Travel Experience*

Cohen [8] identified five modes in which a tourist travels, from a relatively superficial escape mode to a more sophisticated transformation mode. He suggested that a tourist can travel in different modes on the same journey. This seems particularly true with regard to Chinese pilgrims on the Camino, who may start out as tourists that look forward to a break from stress and stagnation, or as explorers seeking new life experiences, but end up as cultural and spiritual pilgrims discovering a meaningful alternative lifestyle in which they can live simply but more happily. As the Camino journey progressed, the travel desires of the pilgrims also evolved, and their travel experience evolved correspondingly. Moreover, in Cohen's model, tourists travel in between 'centers' that symbolize varying sets of personal values and beliefs. For Chinese pilgrims, the Camino stands as a center of its own, and represents simplicity, balance, authenticity, harmony, and benevolence. To Chinese pilgrims, the Camino functions both as a center of 'origin' (where they come from), and of 'destination' (where they travel to). For instance, when some Chinese pilgrims experience the presence of harmony with nature, self, and others, they feel at home because both harmony and balance are very relevant in traditional Chinese culture and social life [56,58]. Thus, walking the Camino is walking towards their origin where their long-held values are alive. On the other hand, the Camino also reveals itself to be an alternative center that Chinese pilgrims approach, one which is simple, authentic, and meaningful, in contrast to the stressful mainstream Chinese society today that has been rapidly modernized and urbanized over the last few decades. In this sense, the Camino is both a homeland (because it lives out Chinese cultural ideals and values), and a foreign land (because it stands in contrast to contemporary Chinese mainstream culture), where Chinese pilgrims paradoxically feel like a *guest at home*.

4.3. *Similarities and Differences between Chinese and Western Pilgrims*

Most studies on Western pilgrims focus on their motivational patterns and their transformative experiences [1,2,17–19,33–35]. It seems that the motivational patterns of Chinese Camino pilgrims are essentially similar to those of Western pilgrims [17,18,35,46], for whom personal well-being, growth, and a wish for new experiences are key motivators. However, unlike Western pilgrims, Chinese pilgrims rarely walk for reasons such as religious purpose or sport [34,35,64]. The lack of religious and athletic motivations among Chinese pilgrims may reflect the ideologically atheist background of the country and the relatively less popularity of sport in public life.

For both Western and Chinese pilgrims, encountering an authentic world, and experiencing an authentic self, plays a key role in their satisfaction and the transformative

benefits of the Camino [41,65]. It seems that a journey like the Camino helps both Chinese and Western individuals find a break from the stress and the sensation of burnout caused by modern life [16–18,36,40,43,66]. Both groups reported having experienced a kind of re-balance, restoration and healing, achievement of clarity and direction, and a sense of meaning through in-depth inner dialogue or self-reflection [16–18,33,37–43].

However, compared to Western pilgrims, Chinese pilgrims seem to have attached greater value to their intercultural experience on the Camino, whether it involved encountering people from different countries and continents, or learning about the facts and customs of other cultures, exchanging opinions, or joining a temporary ‘family of united nations’, which all contributed to a sense of enrichment, fulfillment, and joy, despite some barriers, such as language and the unfamiliarity with the historical or religious background. Another characteristic observed among Chinese pilgrims was their attribution of interpersonal encounters and interactions to the wonders of predestined relationship (yuanfen).

Generally speaking, both Chinese and Western pilgrims had a satisfactory experience of the Camino and showed high intentions to revisit, which indicate that the Camino, rooted in Western-Christian traditions, has attracted fans beyond the boundaries of geography, culture, and religion. It is a globally popular destination with unique resources that allows people from diverse backgrounds to encounter and exchange with one other.

4.4. Key Attractions of the Camino for Chinese Pilgrims

The findings of the current study suggest that, for the Chinese pilgrims who participated, the satisfaction they derived from the Camino came not only from its natural environment, local people, culture, and infrastructure, which are common factors that lead to tourist satisfaction [67], but, in particular, from the space for personal growth and cross-cultural engagement that the Camino allows. These last two elements make the Camino stand out as unique among the other international destinations that usually attract Chinese tourists.

4.5. Reflection on Sustainable Management of Cultural Route Heritage

Furthermore, the findings of this study could provide specific implications for the sustainable management of a global cultural route project, such as the Camino:

- (1) First and foremost, authenticity should be positioned as the most fundamental and central attribute of heritage in order to keep the Camino attractive and cherished.
- (2) Multilingual information on the history, culture, and art of heritage sites along the Camino would also help Chinese pilgrims to intellectually appreciate their Camino more, e.g., by providing relevant digital information accessible through an on-site QR code, or adding images of the food on restaurant menus to improve the gastronomic experience.
- (3) An inclusive approach that welcomes multicultural diversity and universal fraternity would continue to inspire and foster cross-cultural dialogue, mutual understanding, and collaboration in the face of the common challenges of the contemporary world, such as the pandemic and climate change.

5. Conclusions

This study reveals that the Camino is, first and foremost, a personal journey of wellbeing and growth, and then a cross-cultural journey of exchange and enrichment for Chinese pilgrims. It was a memorable experience for all of the Chinese pilgrims who participated in this study.

According to the old Chinese saying, ‘different paths end in the same destination’ (shututonggui), or its English equivalent, ‘all roads lead to Rome’, and Chinese and Western pilgrims share a lot of similar experiences on their way to Santiago, although each group’s travels are conditioned by their respective sociocultural frameworks. Through the open-minded exchanges and intimate relationships formed between these two groups of pilgrims

during the journey, the Camino de Santiago route has proved itself as a perfect platform for facilitating East-West dialogue and promoting peace [68,69].

Besides the attractions of nature, people, cultural landscapes, traditions, and facilities, what impressed Chinese pilgrims the most was the unique opportunities that the Camino provided for personal growth and interpersonal and intercultural mutual enrichment. These attributes point to a clear direction for a sustainable management strategy that the Camino de Santiago should continue to follow: the preservation of the natural landscape and ecology along the routes; the protection of cultural and spiritual traditions that are unique to the Camino, including benevolence, simplicity, and welcome of diversity; the promotion of local products and services; and the good maintenance of infrastructure.

In light of the findings of this study, a more effective promotional strategy could be considered in order to increase the visibility of the Camino among Chinese travelers, taking into account the following factors:

- (1) The Camino tends to be attractive to young, middle-class professionals from large cities in China and also to Chinese students living in Europe. The promotion targeted at these groups might be more effective in motivating them to experience the cultural route heritage. However, this does not rule out the possible appeal of the Camino to more general Chinese tourists who have become more diversified and experience-seeking [70], particularly among lovers of outdoor activities, religious tourists, and, perhaps, among the well-off retired population [71].
- (2) Adoption of the online platforms that are most familiar to the prospective groups, such as the most popular travel websites and social media accounts used by young, middle-class professionals, or the school newsletters or cultural activity programs in European universities where Chinese students study or utilizing the networks of university professors who teach Chinese students, particularly in Spain.
- (3) In addition to highlighting the natural landscape and cultural heritage, the authentic quality of the gastronomy, multicultural encounters, and the spiritual profoundness that makes the Camino experience so unique could also be featured in the promotional efforts aimed at Chinese tourists.
- (4) The presentation of the Camino could be delivered through various media, including online journals and articles, books, movies, video clips, promotional conferences, exhibitions, etc., and the attention could be focused on the personal stories of pilgrims through these presentations, as this is more likely to 'wake up' the otherwise latent desires of other tourists for personal growth and intercultural experiences.

The limitations of this study lie in the possibility that younger, technologically informed subjects, along with those who felt a rich experience on the Camino, are over-represented, since those who are not used to posting travel stories online, or those who were not impressed by their Camino experiences, might not be so easily identifiable under such an investigation. Focusing on a sample of a specific cultural group may also limit the generalizability of its findings. Another limitation is related to the retrospective nature of the interview process, which is not conducive to capturing those spontaneous and profound thoughts and feelings on the spot, unlike in many travel journals, which were written while the author was undertaking the journey. The review of previous research on the Camino pilgrim experience is also limited to the literature in the English language.

Future research efforts should be directed towards exploring the experiences of other non-Western pilgrims in light of their respective cultural contexts, the experience of local people and Western pilgrims in terms of their interactions with non-Western pilgrims, and how such cross-cultural encounters transform individuals and communities and inform the sustainable and inclusive management of global cultural routes like the Camino de Santiago. A promising line of research lays in considering how the 'best practice' of this European heritage route can cross-fertilize the preservation, management, and tourism development of Chinese cultural itineraries. Evaluations of the effects of targeted marketing strategies among Chinese tourists could also be investigated, such as in the first- and second-tier Chinese cities, or among lovers of outdoor activities in China.

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D. Published Article 2

Ancient routes, new gateways: a systematic literature review of China's cultural route heritage

Cultural route
heritage

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Abstract

Purpose – The study aims to understand how cultural route heritage is conceptualized and managed in China by systematically reviewing the research literature on Chinese cultural route heritage (CRH). The study intends to inspire further discussion on the theoretical and practical development of cultural routes since the development is still at a liminal stage in China.

Design/methodology/approach – A total of 253 research articles related to Chinese cultural route heritage from major Chinese and English research databases China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), Web of Science (WOS) and Scopus have been comprehensively identified and reviewed for the purpose of the study.

Findings – Four major themes of research on Chinese CRH have been identified: conceptual evaluation, list of the routes and characteristics of the routes, conservation and utilization. The results revealed that China has very rich resources in CRH, many of which were formed a long time ago, which exist across vast geographic regions and have assumed multiple functions and undergone dynamic reciprocal exchanges among diverse cultures and ethnicities.

Practical implications – The paper summarizes some major obstacles faced by CRH in China and proposes a strategic model to address the need for a more sustainable development of CRH in the Chinese context.

Originality/value – The paper offers a comprehensive overview of CRH in China and discusses practical issues in management and development of heritage great in size, number and complexity.

Keywords Cultural route heritage, Chinese cultural routes, Cultural heritage, Heritage management, Heritage tourism

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Cultural heritage represents the shared memory of people in a community, a region, a nation or among nations. It bears witness to the formation of history and socio-cultural identity. Modern societies are increasingly aware of the importance of preserving their cultural and natural heritage so that future generations can also have access to the common memories that have shaped identity and reality for present-day people. This awareness led the United Nations

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Educational, Scientific Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to adopt the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (UNESCO, 1972). By the year 2021, there are 1,154 heritages inscribed in the World Heritage List, which were distributed among 167 countries around the world (UNESCO, 2021). The heritage movement has acquired global momentum as one of the greatest collective human achievements of the past decades.

The understanding of the essence of cultural heritage has deepened through decades of multi-disciplinary research and heritage management practice. For instance, in the last few decades of the 20th century, the development of a series of programs concerning linear heritage such as heritage canals and trails by the National Park Service (NPS) in the USA as well as the cultural routes of the Council of Europe (COE) program contributed to a significant advancement in the field of heritage conservation and utilization. Since the notion of “cultural route” first appeared with the Santiago de Compostela Declaration (COE, 1987) and the subsequent inscription of the Santiago pilgrimage routes into the World Heritage List in 1993, the conceptualization of cultural routes has attracted a great deal of scholarly attention and discussion. In 2005, the World Heritage Center of UNESCO included “heritage routes” as a specific term of reference to heritage in its operational guidelines, together with another category “canal heritage” (WHC, 2005), in addition to the existing categories, namely monuments, groups of buildings, sites, historical towns and town centers and cultural landscape. A milestone was reached when the advisory body of UNESCO’s world heritage program, the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), defined this form of comprehensive and holistic heritage in the ICOMOS Charter on Cultural Routes (ICOMOS, 2008). In the document, a cultural route is defined as:

“Any route of communication, be it land, water, or some other type, which is physically delimited and characterized by having its own specific dynamic and historic functionality, which must fulfill the following conditions: It must arise from and reflect interactive movements of people as well as multi-dimensional, continuous, and reciprocal exchanges of goods, ideas, knowledge and values between peoples, countries, regions or continents over significant periods of time. It must have thereby promoted a cross-fertilization of the affected cultures in space and time, as reflected both in their tangible and intangible heritage; it must have integrated into a dynamic the historic relations and cultural properties associated with its existence.” (ICOMOS, 2008).

As compared to other forms of cultural heritage, the ICOMOS (2008) definition highlights some distinctive features of CRH along with spatial, temporal, cultural and purposeful dimensions besides the outstanding universal values it possesses. For example, CRH emphasizes that temporal and spatial continuity for some routes can be significantly large in scale, traversing vast geographical regions, sometimes crossing continents; it includes great diversity in heritage forms and in landscape; it forms an integrative system itself, inseparable from its context and environment, and the value of the route as a whole is greater than the sum of its individual parts; CRH reflects the interactive, dynamic historical process of human communication and connection; the purpose of cultural routes as heritage projects has an overarching diachronical significance: it helps to the understanding and preservation of the reciprocal exchanges and ties among peoples and cultures in history, it serves as an instrument for sustainable territorial development today and it constitutes a platform for fostering cross-cultural understanding, collaboration and cohesion in the future (ICOMOS, 2008; Majdoub, 2010; Wang and Ruan, 2009; Shang, 2017; Gao, 2017).

Meanwhile, other conceptual frameworks concerning linear heritage have been developed outside the ICOMOS realm. Among them, the cultural route program of the COE and the National Historic Trails (NHT) of the NPS developed their own frameworks in order to meet the economic and socio-cultural needs in their respective contexts (COE, 2021; NPS, 2021). Some similarities and differences can be observed in the ICOMOS definition on cultural routes when compared to those of the COE and NPS. All three definitions adopt a holistic approach toward preservation management which takes into consideration both heritage and its contexts, both

tangible and intangible heritage. Moreover, all programs promote the utilization of heritage for economic and social development (Laven *et al.*, 2010, Timothy and Boyd, 2015; Guo and Yang, 2015; Liu and Shen, 2017; Briedenhann and Wickens, 2004). Both the ICOMOS and COE highlight the historical and cultural aspects of a given route and emphasize cross-cultural exchanges and dialog (Guo and Yang, 2015; Liu and Shen, 2017), whereas the NHT aims at fulfilling recreational needs of the population and consider natural resources and landscape to be one of its key elements as reflected in the collaborative administration over the trails by the NPS and official authorities of land and forest (Timothy and Boyd, 2015). Furthermore, the ICOMOS definition is concerned primarily with heritage identification and conservation and it points to a physical delimitation of the routes and to a differentiation from tourism routes with cultural interests; however, the other concepts do not specify such focal points (ICOMOS, 2008; Timothy and Boyd, 2015; Guo and Yang, 2015; Liu and Shen, 2017).

The research and management of CRH is still in its conceptual phase, and there is much to debate about the scope and the operational evaluation criteria to sufficiently define cultural routes and differentiate them from other linear heritage with similar heritage characteristics and elements (Wang and Ruan, 2009; Ruiz *et al.*, 2017). Most of the scholarly studies on cultural route as heritage or tourism resources that are accessible in publications in the English language focused on the examples from the world's developed countries, which resulted in an unbalanced investigation of CRH from other regions such as Asia, Latin America and Africa, where there is abundant heritage resources of cultural route, such as the Silk Road, the Inca Trail and the Slave Route as a few examples (Timothy and Boyd, 2015; Liu and Shen, 2017). China has a long-standing history of constant, extensive cultural exchange among various regions of the country and also with other countries in the world, which has left a legacy of very rich CRH resources in the territory (Shan, 2009; Peng, 2015). Nevertheless, no systematic study assessing the overall current status of China's CRH has yet been conducted in the literature in English. Indeed, in the literature in Chinese, there are only two systematic literature reviews. One is an article which primarily documents the Chinese route-based heritage that has been studied so far by Chinese scholars (Dai *et al.*, 2016). Somewhat confusingly, the authors of this article do not distinguish between "cultural route" and other heritage of linear form. The other review focuses on the research status of CRH in the Chinese literature but not on the routes (Lin *et al.*, 2017). Consequently, there is a lack of a comprehensive and conceptually consistent evaluation of the research literature in English on the CRH development in the Chinese context. This literature review aims to contribute to the academic discussion about CRH under the ICOMOS conceptual framework by addressing the questions as follows: How is CRH conceptualized in the Chinese context? Which Chinese cultural routes have been identified? How are they currently managed?

Method

In order to clarify the research questions raised above, a systematic literature review on the topic has been conducted. To focus on quality scholarly work, this paper focuses on research articles published about the topic from the most reliable sources in both English and Chinese. It gathers information and generates insight from both Chinese and non-Chinese scholars. For literature in the English language, the articles were identified and selected from international databases such as WOS and Scopus; for literature in Chinese, this process was carried out from the largest full-text scientific journal database CNKI. The identification and selection process is illustrated in Figure 1.

In the search for literature in Chinese, the key words "cultural route" (in Chinese 文化线路 *wenhua xianlu*) were used. The last search for articles was made in January 2021. The time range is thus up to the end of 2020 but without terminus a quo in order to find all the relevant articles since the earliest time possible. The articles related to the "Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI) were not included, since this paper discusses the Silk Road as a cultural heritage and

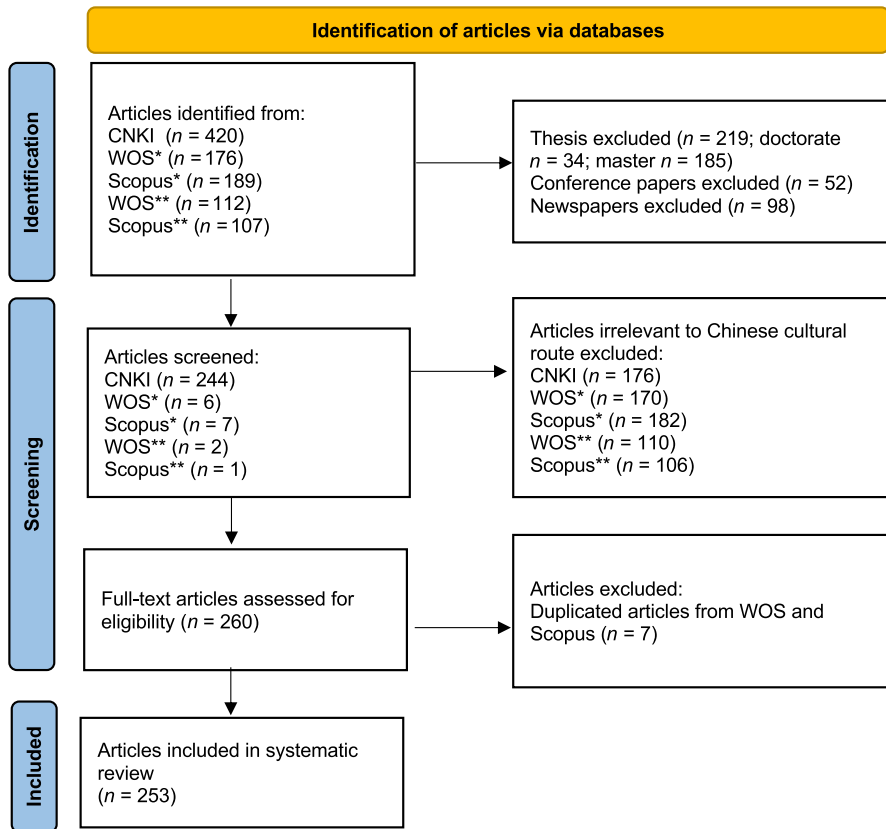


Figure 1.
Identification of
articles

Note(s): *under the key word phrase “‘cultural route’ AND China”
**under the key word phrase ‘Chinese cultural route’

this is not the focus of BRI. The search initially generated 420 articles. After careful screening, irrelevant results were removed, and 244 articles were finally chosen and analyzed.

At WOS and Scopus the key word phrase “‘cultural route’ AND China” was used to identify the relevant literature. No time limit was set for the starting year up to the end of 2020, and the articles related to the BRI were also excluded. The search initially generated 176 results in WOS and 189 in Scopus, although most of the results were not relevant to the topic, i.e. they were not related to either cultural route or Chinese cultural routes. Only six articles from WOS results and seven from Scopus results were related to CRH in China. Another search with the key words “Chinese cultural routes” was performed with both databases and it generated 112 results from WOS and 107 results from Scopus. After removing irrelevant articles, only two from WOS and one from Scopus were left. Some of these articles appeared in both databases. Thus, the final outcome was only nine separate and distinct articles. Among them, there was one article published in Spanish and another one in French. Both articles were highly relevant to the research topic and, therefore, were kept in the reviewing process.

For the purpose of this research, a total number of 253 articles (from which nine were in English/Spanish/French and 244 in Chinese) were selected and reviewed to map the current status of CRH in China.

Results

Research themes and methods about the Chinese cultural routes

A total of 4 research themes can be identified from the 253 research articles on the Chinese CRH, namely conceptualization of cultural route, its identification and evaluation, conservation and utilization. The most widely researched theme is the heritage value assessment of the Chinese CRH, which accounts for more than half ($N = 133$, i.e. 53%) of all the articles, followed by conservation ($N = 66$, i.e. 26%), utilization ($N = 38$, i.e. 15%) and conceptualization ($N = 16$, i.e. 6%). In total, 221 articles (83%) are case studies focusing on one specific route or one of the sections of the route, and the other 32 articles (17%) discuss CRH as a general topic along the lines of the four themes mentioned above. In the case studies, the most commonly researched cultural route is the Silk Road ($N = 42$, i.e. 19%), followed by the Ancient Tea Horse Road ($N = 33$, i.e. 15%), the Grand Canal ($N = 32$, i.e. 14%) and Shu Dao ($N = 15$, i.e. 7%). The rest of the articles ($N = 99$, i.e. 45%) focus on ten other routes. The majority of the articles ($N = 246$, i.e. 97%) adopted a qualitative research design, with a few exceptions ($N = 7$, i.e. 3%) on heritage value assessment that used quantitative methods: the cultural route evaluation model (CREM) to assess the heritage resources of the Ancient Nanxiang Road (Liu and Cao, 2018); the Delphi and analytic hierarchy process (AHP) for mapping heritage resource distribution and evaluating the weight of key factors in an evaluation model (Li *et al.*, 2018; Li and Hu, 2019; Wang *et al.*, 2019); the ArcGIS layer group technique as a data management model to improve management of complex data on cultural route resources over the Tea Road (Ren and Jiang, 2019) and finally, chemical analysis or dendrochronology to examine the characteristics of the cultural relics found along a given section of the Silk Road (Liu *et al.*, 2012; Wang and Zhao, 2013). Scholars in Chinese CRH studies come from a variety of disciplines, such as architecture, geography, landscape, engineering, history, archeology and tourism (Lin *et al.*, 2017).

Evolution of the cultural route concept in China

Since the concept of CRH was first introduced in Chinese academia in 2005 (Li and Yu, 2005), it has undergone a development through several phases. Dai *et al.* (2016) refer to them as conceptualization and application and Lin *et al.* (2017) describe the phases as concept introduction, deepening and maturation. The current study proposes another classification: introduction, application and consolidation. The beginning of each phase was marked by some milestone events (see Table 1).

year	Number of articles published		%	Major events
	(CNKI)	(WOS + Scopus)	(100)	
2005–2008	20	0	8%	CIIC–ICOMOS conference held in China (2005) official document on cultural routes published by ICOMOS (2008)
2009–2014	79	3	32%	Inscription of the silk road and grand canal as UNESCO world heritage sites (2014)
2015 – present	145	6	60%	Updated version of regulative document on cultural heritage including cultural route heritage in China by ICOMOS China (2015)
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>244</i>	<i>9</i>		
<i>Total</i>		<i>253</i>		

Source(s): Authors' elaboration

Table 1.
Evolution of the cultural route concepts in China

The first phase (2005–2008) started with the official introduction of “cultural route” as a new cultural heritage category for academia in China by Li Wei and Yu Kongjian in 2005. In the official document of the ICOMOS international conference in 2005, the definition, typical elements and preliminary identification criteria of CRH were outlined. In the same year, “heritage routes” was added in the operational guidelines of the World Heritage Center (WHC, 2005). As a result, more researchers joined the discussion on this topic, although the term “cultural route” was used interchangeably with other terms such as “linear cultural heritage,” “route heritage” or “heritage corridor,” which sometimes caused confusion (Yao and Li, 2006; Wang, 2010; Tong, 2016; Dai *et al.*, 2016).

The second phase (2009–2014) began after the official release of a technical document prepared by the International Committee on Cultural Routes (CIIC) of ICOMOS in 2008: *The ICOMOS Charter on Cultural Routes*. Chinese scholars responded enthusiastically to the *Charter*. In 2009, some scholars in the field gathered in Wuxi, China, to call for high-quality research on Chinese CRH resources for more effective conservation (Tong, 2016; Ma *et al.*, 2019). During this phase, China was actively preparing for the inscription of two cultural routes into the World Heritage List. All those initiatives and projects boosted further research to assess the heritage values of the Chinese CRH under the ICOMOS framework as reflected by an increase in research articles published on CRH, from 20 articles from 2005 to 2008, to 82 articles from 2009 to 2014.

The third phase (2015–present) was marked by the inclusion of CRH in the official regulatory document on cultural heritage in China: the updated version of *Principles for the Conservation of Heritage Sites in China* (ICOMOS China, 2015). In this document, the 38th principle applies to the conservation of cultural landscapes, cultural routes and heritage canals and emphasizes the holistic protection of these types of heritage as well as all their heritage elements. This phase witnessed a wider application and deeper reflection of the concept of CRH in the Chinese context. The amount of research conducted on CRH during this phase reached 151 articles, doubling that of the previous phase. In China, the term “cultural route” became the mainstream terminology and framework for conceptualizing and guiding the work on identification, evaluation, conservation and development of the route-based heritage.

Nonetheless, throughout the different phases of conceptual development, the application of the CRH concept in the Chinese context has been accompanied by some challenges. Some CRH scholars claimed that the ICOMOS definition was not clear enough to differentiate cultural routes from a wide range of linear heritage in China or to reflect its non-Western values and cultural diversity (Tong, 2016; Chen and Jones, 2020; Xu and Xiang, 2020; Zhang, 2020). Some authors attempted to address this lack of clarity by introducing non-ICOMOS concepts such as those of the COE or NPS especially in the tourism development of CRH, since other frameworks offer more successful application examples of meeting socio-economic needs and incorporating complex heritage elements and their diverse contexts (Li *et al.*, 2015; Wang and Li, 2019; Meng *et al.*, 2019).

Identification and characteristics of cultural routes in China

In their review on Chinese cultural routes, Dai *et al.* (2016) summarized a list of 30 cultural routes in China. The authors adopted multiple concepts of linear heritage; for instance, some of the routes documented on their list such as the Three-Gorges Heritage Corridor, the Li River Heritage Corridor or the migration routes would not reunite enough criteria to be identified as cultural routes according to the ICOMOS but could instead be labeled as heritage corridors of the NPS. On the other hand, cultural routes such as the Tibetan (Buddhist) pilgrimage routes and the China Eastern Railway were not included, although similar routes such as the Mazu (Daoist) pilgrimage routes and the Yunnan–Vietnam Railway were listed.

This paper summarizes 19 Chinese cultural routes according to the framework described in the ICOMOS Charter on Cultural Route (ICOMOS, 2008) as illustrated in Table 2. The listing of 19 routes draws from several sources where some of the said routes were featured (Ding and Song, 2015; Dai *et al.*, 2016; Lin *et al.*, 2017; Tsohla *et al.*, 2019; He and Chen, 2020).

Some linear cultural heritage might be arguably added to this list, but they are not included because they do not fulfill one or another of the basic criteria of the ICOMOS definition. For instance, the current list does not include the migration routes that lack clear delimited courses (e.g. the migration routes of the Hakka people, of the population of Guangdong and Hunan to Sichuan, of the population of northern and eastern China to northeastern China); some military routes with clear itineraries but not much cross-regional, mutually fertilizing communication (e.g. the Long March routes); the routes that are part of a larger route network (e.g. Nanxiang road as part of the Qin national road network); some religious pilgrimage routes without definite physical delimitations (e.g. the Buddhist, Daoist or Christian pilgrimage routes) or some small-scale cultural trails (the Chongqing city trail)

No	Name	Time frame	Spatial range	Main function	Form
1	Northern silk road/ Desert silk road	3rd century BC - 16th century	Trans-continental: Eurasia	Trade	Land
2	Southern silk road/ Plateau silk road	5th century BC - 17th century	Trans-national: China, Nepal and India	Trade	Land
3	Steppe silk road	5th century BC - 16th century	Trans-continental: Eurasia	Trade	Land
4	Maritime silk road	7th - 16th century	Trans-continental: Eurasia and Africa	Trade	Water
5	Qin national road system	3rd century BC - Qing Dynasty	Trans-provincial	Transportation/ military	Land
6	Sichuan salt road	5th century BC - 20th century	Trans-provincial	Trade/transportation	Land
7	Shu road	5th century BC - 20th century	Trans-provincial	Transportation/ military/trade	Land
8	Lingnan road	2nd century BC - 20th century	Trans-provincial	Transportation/ trade/military	Land
9	Tang-Tibet road	7th - 10th century	Trans-provincial	Transportation/ political	Land
10	Hui-Hang road	7th - 20th century	Trans-provincial	Transportation/trade	Land
11	Tea Horse road	7th - 20th century	Trans-provincial	Transportation/trade	Land
12	Grand canal	7th century - present	Trans-provincial	Transportation/trade	Water
13	Baiyue ancient road	12th - 20th century	Trans-provincial	Transportation/trade	Land
14	Courier road	12th - 20th century	Trans-provincial	Transportation/ political	Land
15	Jingxi road	12th - 20th century	Trans-provincial	Transportation/ trade/military	Land
16	Huai salt road	14th - 19th century	Trans-provincial	Trade	Land
17	Tea road	17th - 20th century	Trans-continental and Eurasia	Transportation/trade	Land
18	Yunnan–Vietnam railway	19th - 20th century	Trans-national: China and Vietnam	Transportation/trade	Land
19	China eastern railway	20th century	Trans-national: China and Russia	Transportation/trade	Land

Source(s): Author's elaboration

Table 2.
Cultural routes
in China

that may not reflect the dynamic interactions across different cultures or groups but nevertheless possess significant cultural values and bear witness to major influences or traditions in history and culture (Ding and Song, 2015; Dai *et al.*, 2016; Liu and Cao, 2018; Chen and Jones, 2020; He and Chen, 2020).

The heritage value of the Chinese cultural routes was assessed according to their historical, esthetic, scientific, ecological, touristic, social and spiritual significance (Lin *et al.*, 2017; Wang *et al.*, 2019). The studies demonstrated that most of the Chinese cultural routes are ancient, large in scale, multi-functional and representative of very dynamic reciprocal cross-cultural exchanges throughout history (Sun, 2011; Dai *et al.*, 2016; Ding and Song, 2015; Xu and Xiang, 2020). Discoveries from archeological excavations have shown that some routes existed as early as the period of the East Zhou Dynasty (8th century BC) and lasted a very long time right up to the 20th century when they were replaced by modern transportation. These cultural routes usually expanded in a linear or radial form, crossed various regions in China or connected China with its neighboring regions and even reached out to other continents, stretching over thousands of miles. Most routes are land based, except for the Grand Canal, the maritime Silk Road. Most cultural routes were opened for transportation and trading purposes, whereas others functioned initially as military, religious, political routes or courier infrastructures. It is also worth noting that more than half of the Chinese cultural routes identified operated in the western regions of the territory, which is characterized by challenging geographical environments, diverse ethnic groups and abundant Indigenous cultural heritage (Ding and Song, 2015; Dai *et al.*, 2016; Tong, 2016; Wang, 2019).

Conservation of the cultural routes in China

At the present time, the priority of China's cultural heritage management is conservation. The emphasis on conservation is also in line with China's overall cultural heritage management strategy as a tool for social cohesion, cultural identity and national image, and these subserving goals of cultural heritage explain the enthusiasm China shows for world heritage application projects (Wang, 2009; Ma *et al.*, 2019; Sigley, 2010). The same emphasis on conservation applies to CRH management in China (Shan, 2009; Ged, 2013). Despite the progress in overall heritage conservation over the last few decades, the major challenges cultural heritage faces in China bear relation to heritage integrity and authenticity. Rapid urbanization; massive infrastructure construction; industrial pollution; the deterioration of the natural environment around cultural heritage sites; lack of attention to the intangible dimension of CRH; overtourism; insufficient research into heritage resources and conservation technology and scarce staffing all pose a threat to the conservation of CRH (Yao and Li, 2006; Ged, 2013; Wang *et al.*, 2016; Luo *et al.*, 2019; Chen and Jones, 2020). Although China has incorporated into its national management system the conservation of CRH (ICOMOS China, 2015), a lack of clear operational guidelines and cross-regional coordination makes conservation insufficient when it comes to CRH because of its integral, complex characteristics (Tong, 2016; He and Chen, 2020; Chen and Jones, 2020). The key strategies for CRH conservation proposed by scholars include further investigation into CRH conceptualization; more systematic assessment of heritage values and resources through research; drafting of new laws and regulations; development and implementation of a comprehensive monitoring system over major heritage sites and application of relevant technology such as geographic information system (GIS) and archive and information management system (AIMS) and coordinated management (Shan, 2009; Wang, 2009; Feng, 2016).

Utilization of the cultural routes in China

Another major theme in the literature is how CRH in China has been utilized and developed. The topics covered by scholars include heritage display (Yang, 2015; Ma *et al.*, 2019; Zhao, 2019), tourism development (Li *et al.*, 2015; Gao, 2017; Fang *et al.*, 2018; Yu and Mei, 2019; Wang and Xie, 2020; Yan, 2020) or rural and urban development (Long, 2017; Liu *et al.*, 2018; Meng *et al.*, 2019; Wang and Li, 2019; Xu *et al.*, 2020; Chen and Jones, 2020). Most of the discussions were conceptual, and most authors avail themselves of the ICOMOS concept of cultural route. However, about one-third authors used the concept only as an innovative methodology to integrate multiple local cultural heritage resources to develop a tourist route with some elements of the cultural route in focus.

The most widely researched line was that of CRH tourism development, where the current development status of a specific cultural route or a section of it was discussed and some measures were recommended. The most pressing issue faced by some historic cultural routes, such as the Silk Road, the Tea and Horse Road or the Salt Road in their tourist development, was the absence of overall planning and operation, fragmented administration and regulation, which resulted in an unbalanced development as a route and a lack of consistency among the key locations along the route in terms of route theme, features and embodied values (Li *et al.*, 2015; Wang *et al.*, 2016; Yan *et al.*, 2017; Tan and Yang, 2017; Gao, 2017; Yan, 2020). A few authors also identified a lack of social and emotional connection of the CRH with the people in its tourist marketing (Ren, 2017; Liu, 2019; Zhang, 2016; Shang, 2017). The authors usually made some recommendations as a response to the problems identified with tourism development of CRH, which involves two major aspects: (1) improve heritage preservation and management in a holistic manner, enhance infrastructure and consider application for world heritage as an effective way for raising awareness and funding and (2) adopt specific tourism development models such as connecting key cities and areas with rich heritage resources along the cultural route; designing more engaging, experiential tourist activities to increase visitor satisfaction; integrating tourism into local industries and landscape or the “route plus” strategy to increase attraction; promote local economic and social development; contribute to economic diversification and avoid homogeneity of tourist products (Li *et al.*, 2015, 2017; Liu, 2015; Gao, 2017; Fang *et al.*, 2018; Liu *et al.*, 2018; Yu and Mei, 2019; Wang and Xie, 2020; Yan, 2020; Wang *et al.*, 2020).

Deterioration of natural landscape and ecological environment, aging and shrinking population are common challenges faced by many rural areas in China as a consequence of rapid industrialization and urbanization in the last few decades. This often left some villages along the cultural routes with risks of losing its traditional lifestyles and cultures, compromising the authenticity in some heritage elements of the route. Case studies on rural revitalization along the cultural routes recommended a development model capable of integrating local industries in which the tourism industry would act as a catalyst for other sectors, with local community stakeholders' interest prioritized, following preservation of traditional buildings and intangible cultural heritage as immediate measures (Long, 2017; Liu *et al.*, 2018; Meng *et al.*, 2019; Xu *et al.*, 2020).

After having presented the results of this systematic literature review, this study wants to engage in a discussion to assess those points that still wait for a satisfactory response in the field of CRH in China.

Discussion

Chinese scholars have invested much effort in research and witnessed much development since the introduction of the ICOMOS' concept of cultural route in China, which can be seen in the successful inscription of the Silk Road and the Grand Canal in the World Heritage List. However, they have also pointed out some major difficulties for a further development of CRH

in China, among which lack of conceptual clarity and operational guidelines, under-utilization and lack of cross-provincial coordination and of collaboration among stakeholders are the top concerns.

Proposed framework for CRH development in China

In order to develop Chinese CRH more effectively, it is necessary to introduce some breakthrough perspectives in addition to the conservation plans so that the heritage will not only “survive” but also “live” (Liu, 2019; Ma *et al.*, 2019). To help achieve the aforementioned goal, this study proposes an innovative and comprehensive strategic framework. However, the precondition for this strategy to be meaningfully implemented would be that all stakeholders reach a common understanding and consensus on the end goal for cultural route development in China. A plausible goal can be formulated as “let Chinese cultural routes fully play their role in promoting environmental integrity as well as sustainable and inclusive economic, socio-cultural advancement; let them function as a resourceful tool for personal wellbeing, cultural inheritance and social cohesion and let them serve as an inspiring platform for cross-regional, cross-national and cross-civilizational mutual understanding and reciprocal exchange.”

The innovative strategic framework for effective development of Chinese cultural routes comprises four building blocks, i.e. selective development, integrative planning, inter-sectorial collaboration and gradual proceeding.

(1) Selective development

It is noted that, although most Chinese cultural routes possess a high degree of heritage values and not all of them fit best for immediate, large-scale touristic development due to poor conservation conditions, low-scenic value, fragmented landscape or low accessibility in some sections. A selection of itineraries can be made to focus on those routes that can best fulfill the objectives with fewer obstacles. This does not mean that some routes should be ignored but rather that a prioritized development schedule would help things move forward more efficiently.

(2) Holistic planning

It refers to the inclusion of an array of elements in the recovery, construction and development of a given route. The development plans should holistically consider cultural and environmental aspects, tangible and intangible heritage elements, heritage authenticity as well as aesthetics and the interests of tourists as well as those of the host communities. It should also maintain a balance between the underlying thematic consistency of the route and its sectional highlights. Because this requires collaborative effort among relevant provincial administrations and stakeholders, holistic planning could also serve as a platform to foster collaboration across regions and sectors.

(3) Inter-sectorial collaboration

As a step toward a smoother and more sustainable implementation of any planning of CRH, this point requires not only coordinated actions across provinces, but the collaboration between public and private sectors as well. This is perhaps the most complicated part in fully developing CRH in the Chinese context. One can learn from best practices of CRH management around the world. Here the Saint James Pilgrimage Routes can provide some inspiration. In the successful development of this world cultural heritage route that is still in use in the modern time, the dynamic collaborative effort between the Galician government, academia, the touristic sector, the Catholic Church and the frequently non-confessional International Associations of Friends of St James demonstrate a great synergy in the

promotion and preservation of the tangible and intangible heritage of the route and of the local culture and also in responding to the needs of pilgrims/tourists (Tilson, 2005; Zabbini, 2012).

(4) Gradual proceeding

This refers to a step-by-step implementation of the integrative cultural route development, for instance choosing the most accessible section within one specific province with the most available resources to initiate development actions. Evaluations can be conducted before and after the intervention, and lessons can be learned from success and error to improve the following proceeding until the entire route is fully operative. This could on, one hand, lower the barrier of cross-provincial administration and, on the other hand, lower the cost for initiating such projects.

Four principles need to be observed while implementing this framework. First, the principle of integration: as explained in point two of the framework, the design and management of a cultural route should be holistic. Second, the principle of sustainability: the evaluation criteria for the implementation strategies and measures should include environmental indexes (biodiversity, water quality, air quality and natural risk management) and socio-economic indexes (host community involvement and employment prioritization, preservation of local cultural traditions and values and positive experience and well-being of the visitor). Third, the principle of scientific research and action: in-depth research into conceptualization, methodology and technology should be introduced in the whole process of route development including planning, operation and evaluation. Lastly, the principle of innovation: breakthroughs from regular ways of proceeding that have stagnated. This requires a creative and critical mindset. In the case of the cultural routes in China, conservation-oriented practice and fragmented management must be modified to allow individuals and groups to “live out” the routes like their ancestors did in a sustainable manner instead of letting the value of such historical richness stay “frozen” in literature or in museums. In order for this to happen, it is worthwhile learning from the global experience of CRH development (Yang, 2015; Zhang, 2016; Ma *et al.*, 2019; Gao, 2020). These principles do not only apply to the existing cultural routes, but also to emerging cultural routes – those that are fostering reciprocal exchanges in the contemporary era.

Conclusion

This study aims to understand the current situation of Chinese CRH through conducting a systematic literature review. According to the literature, Chinese scholars adopted the concept of “cultural route” as a new category of cultural heritage at the beginning of this century. Since 2008, the ICOMOS definition of cultural route has been the most widely studied and applied; however, the conceptual frameworks of the COE or NPS have also been employed when it comes to utilization and development of Chinese CRH. Following the ICOMOS definition, nineteen cultural routes have been identified and listed as the most representative Chinese CRH. Many other routes are yet to be identified as the conceptualization of CRH acquires more clarity. The common characteristics of China’s cultural routes are their long-time span, their large spatial scope, their multi-functionality and their having witnessed active cultural exchanges between peoples and cultures. The conservation of CRH has been incorporated into China’s national heritage management system, which generally prioritizes preservation over development. Utilizing cultural routes for touristic or rural development is still in a theoretical phase and presents many challenges in practice. In the future, China’s CRH needs to be developed with a clarified goal, following the principles of sustainability, integrity, scientific methodology and innovation. If this is achieved, cultural routes can play their role afresh in the new era to respond to the needs of

individuals and societies while functioning as a tool in achieving the UN 2030 sustainable goals. As the old Chinese saying goes, friendship between nations lies in the closeness of the people and the closeness of the people lies in the communication of hearts. This is the value and function of CRH: it is a bridge that connects peoples and cultures and a gateway that opens to new perspectives and possibilities. The richness of CRH resources should not vanish into oblivion.

Some limitations of the current study come from the fact that this research focuses on Chinese cultural routes from a heritage perspective rather than from a historical, geographical, cultural, geopolitical or touristic point of view. Thus, it only focuses on research articles published about the subject of CRH. Nonetheless, other conceptual frameworks of route-based heritage and other relevant academic sources such as graduate theses, conference papers or newspaper articles could also contribute to the depth of CRH conceptualization and application. Continuous interdisciplinary investigation, more quantitative research and more case studies on best practices of international cultural routes, especially on their cross-administrative mechanism and stakeholders' involvement in management and utilization, would all contribute to a prosperous and sustainable development of CRH in China and generally of the CRH around the world.

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