

## **ABSTRACT**

ZHANG, XIQIAN. Cycling on G318 from Chengdu to Lhasa--Body, Modernity, and Masculinity. (Under the Direction of James Wallace).

For three months in the summer of 2017 I did research on the journey of cyclists who ride China's Route G318. This is an arduous, one-month, 2200 km., high altitude cycling journey from Chengdu to Lhasa. My study explores what the journey consists of, as well as the riders' motivations for the journey, and the gender relationships that emerge during the journey. My data is primarily qualitative, gained from participant observation as a cyclist, in addition to interviews and questionnaires. Tourism itself is a phenomenon that has natural links to modernity. The special touristic journey is one way of constructing a self-identity through bodily movement. In my analysis I reflect on earlier research on existential authenticity and tourism re-examining it in the light of my own data. The research shows that the risks and bodily suffering from the journey is one way to demonstrate male cyclists' masculinity which is hard to find in their regular lives, wherein female cyclists who complete the journey are usually viewed as "manly" women. I conclude that cycling G318 is a journey for challenging, enjoying, and contemplating one's place in life, transcending oneself, and escaping modernity temporarily, through the efforts being made by one's body as he or she completes the journey.

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Cycling on G318 from Chengdu to Lhasa--Body, Modernity, and Masculinity

by  
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## **DEDICATION**

To my parents.

## **BIOGRAPHY**

Xiqian Zhang is from China. She obtained her undergraduate degree in history at Anqing Normal University in China. She joined North Carolina State University as a graduate student in cultural anthropology in 2016. She interests in tourism anthropology and historical anthropology with a central concern what is modernity. To seek the answer, she continually her study in anthropology by enrolled into a PhD program.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

Thank you for cyclists who are willing to share their stories with me. Special thanks to my teammates who accept me as a researcher and their teammate at the same time.

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## CHAPTER 1: Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to explore a special cycling journey on route G318 from Chengdu to Lhasa. This study aims to explore the meanings and experiences of this cycling journey. Why do people want to travel this route by bike? Why do they choose to cycle, rather than take a train or other modes of travel? Does this cycling journey have connections with modernity? After meeting a group of cyclists in Lhasa in the summer of 2016, I formed these questions in my mind, and they subsequently became the topic of this project.

About 30 years ago, the bicycle was the most common mode of commuting in Mainland China. With rapid modernization and the rise of economic development since the opening-up policy, cycling is now a popular leisure activity, especially in urban areas. Urban people choose cycling, because it promotes overall health and relaxation. In urban areas, local cyclists join cycling clubs and hold cycling races. Cycling travel also becomes popular especially for cycling enthusiasts. I met some experienced cyclists who join long-distance cycling travels every year with the local cycling club. Generally, they cycle along national routes, the most famous and popular of which are cycling around Hainan Island, around Taiwan Island, around the Qinghai Lake, the route G318 from Chengdu to Lhasa<sup>1</sup>, the route from Tibet to Xinjiang, and the route from Yunnan to Tibet. The most famous of these routes is G318 from Chengdu to Lhasa, according to the online information and my data collection.

Cycling around Hainan Island, Taiwan, or Qinghai Lake is a relatively easy route compared with cycling on G318 which is challenging and exhausting. However, as a minor form of travel, it has become popular within the last decade. Currently, there are about ten thousand

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<sup>1</sup> The following use the brief form G318 instead of G318 from Chengdu to Lhasa, since cyclists generally use G318.

people cycling on G318 per year. Generally, it takes about one month to finish the journey (see in the Figure.1.1)<sup>2</sup>. Cyclists need to cross 12 mountains over 130,000 feet and overcome other difficulties. Cycling on G318 is not only appealing to cycling enthusiasts for the challenges it provides, but also appealing to cycling newcomers. Why, then, is this appealing to cycling newcomers? It is one question I want to solve in this thesis.

### **Brief Introduction of the G318**

G318, or the south route of the Sichuan-Tibet road (the north route is called G317) scratches from Chengdu to Lhasa. Generally, it is an important transportation route linking Tibet with the hinterland. It is also a route for Tibetan Buddhists in Sichuan to embark on pilgrimages to Lhasa. It is the most famous scenic road in China with splendid and diverse landscapes that attract driving, trekking, and cycling tourism.



Figure 1.1. The map of G318 from Chengdu to Lhasa (Southern Route).

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.tibettravel.org/tibet-overland-tour/sichuan-tibet-highway-southern-route-altitude-peaks.html>

The entire G318 (5476 km) links Shanghai to Zhangmu, a border town between China and Nepal. Very few people cycle from Shanghai to Lhasa, and even fewer people decide to cycle from the beginning to the end. Most commonly, this cycling journey is from Chengdu, the metropolis, and the capital of Sichuan Province, to Lhasa, the capital of Tibet.

The Sichuan-Tibet road was built from 1953-1958 by the army. Despite the complex geographic elements of the road and the lack of construction technology, the road was still built quickly, and it soon became legendary among people who are very interested in G318. Because of the high rates of casualties, one statement I heard about the route is “one kilometer one life”. Some cyclists are familiar with the road itself, like my team leader Cui (male, 21, undergraduate student)<sup>3</sup> When we crossed the Nujiang Bridge, Cui showed us one bridge pier and told us there was a road builder who died inside, which was the reason the bridge pier had been carefully preserved.

G318 from Chengdu to Lhasa is one of the most famous landscape routes in China. To most cyclists, the attractions of the road are the diverse landscapes, such as the grassland, forest, snowy mountains, grand rivers, the blue sky and white clouds, and even unknown flowers along the road. The beautiful scenery is the chief attraction for cyclists. It is not only appealing to them, but also appeals to other tourists to want to experience the cycling journey on G318.

### **Research Questions**

Why do cyclists choose to cycle on the G318? Put simply, it had two different motivations based on cyclists who are cycling enthusiasts or not. According to data collected, almost all the cycling enthusiasts told me that G318 is the highest goal for them because of the

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<sup>3</sup> All the names of informants in the thesis are pseudonyms.

long distance, high altitude, and long slopes to climb. G318 from Chengdu to Lhasa is the most difficult cycling route that they want to challenge. On the other hand, to cycling newcomers, cycling itself is unlike driving which isolates travelers from surrounding nature and they can only catch a glimpse of sceneries. The bicycle gives cyclists relative freedom to enjoy the sceneries, as many cyclists told me, “You can stop when you want to.” However, cycling on G318 can brings more to cyclists. As Guo (female, 27, white collar) told me, “using my own strength to climb the mountain, when I finally arrived at the pass and looked down the road behind me, at that moment I felt excited and had sense of fulfillment. I felt that I conquered one mountain. The feeling cannot be acquired from driving”.

Also, as Hui (female, 22, undergraduate student) said “cycling is the way to use your own power to demonstrate yourself.” Nowadays, human mobility mainly based on techniques. It is ordinary to travel by train, airplane, or car, in the modern world. Cycling makes travel special, or as cyclists told me, “it makes the journey more meaningful through cycling.” Some travelers choose to walk on G318; however, because it requires about three months’ time, and more energy and perseverance to finish it, it is not realistic for most travelers to do it, and only a tiny minority could indeed walk from Chengdu to Lhasa. Thus, cycling seems to be the most realistic method of performing a journey using your own strength through bodily movement.

Is the cycling journey related to modernity? Specifically, the alienation and anxiety among urban people are the results of modernity (Giddens 1990). Thus, one aim of this research is to understand the modern Chinese, especially young Chinese’s inner mind and existential situation by exploring this special phenomenon – cycling on G318. In order to explore this, the motivation for this journey is the most crucial aspect to explore.

The motivations and expectations of this arduous journey are diverse: to enjoy the splendid scenery (though by driving or trekking one can also enjoy it), to have unique experiences to remember and show off, to escape, redemption, to challenge oneself, to improve oneself, and to expect life to be different after the journey. One thing is certain: travelers challenge themselves, no matter whether they have completed the journey or not, because it is so tough and risky even for expert cyclists. They may be injured or even lose their life during the journey. During my research period, I knew three people died during their journey. One cycling hostel owner told me, “About five cyclists died on the road because of the dangerous of the road per year”.

Why do they want to challenge themselves? It is possible that mass media incites some people. They make rash decisions without sufficient preparation, which can partly explain why many tourists give up quickly. However, these ultimate “quitters” still want to undertake the challenge at the beginning. Cyclists leave comfortable, relatively safe environments, go to remote, unknown areas away from their family and friends, and may face dangerous situations. Why? “If modernity is vulgar and materialistic, crass, and noisy, it is also soft, routinized, and boring. In this dull, modern world, the self loses its definition, its edge, its purpose, its honesty” (Ortner 1999, 37). To Ortner (1999), mountaineering is difficult, dangerous, and challenging, makes the self-sharper, tougher, more honest, and more real. Do the deep motivations for cycling on G318 look the same for mountaineering in the Himalayas? In order to check the relationship between this arduous journey and modernity, we need to ask the following research questions.

The first is about the journey. How is the journey defined? What is the nature of the journey? How do cyclists perform the journey, and what is going on during the journey? Indeed, some cyclists use the word “Chaosheng” (pilgrimage) to describe the journey. However, some

cyclists think they simply perform a cycling journey. If so, why do they choose Tibet or Lhasa as the destination, which is often viewed as a holy land? As well, the rigorous physicality of the journey may make people feel as though they are pilgrims. As Victor Turner put it, “The tourist is half pilgrim, if the pilgrim is half tourist” (Vukonic 2005: 84). Chinese have their own traditional holy mountains to which they can make a pilgrimage journey, while Lhasa, as a destination, is a sacred city to mainly Tibetan Buddhist pilgrims, who usually do full-body prostrations for the entire pilgrimage from Sichuan province to Lhasa. The question I am asking is why Han people also choose Lhasa. How do they view Lhasa? Cyclists choose cycling as the arduous way to finish the journey. Besides, some cyclists strongly insist on cycling for the entire 2200 km journey. Here I want to find out how the touring cyclists feel about their trip, and whether they see it as a secular, or quasi pilgrimage. It might be that we need to find whether they transformed, and if they enter the *communitas* or not (Turner 1966). Does Tibetan culture have a strong attraction for cyclists, or do cyclists view this area as a holy or mysterious land? Do they have the motivation to find authenticity from simple and ‘pre-modern’ life viewed by cyclists?

Secondly, what are the motivations for the journey, i.e. why do cyclists want to do it, what are the attractions of the journey to them, and what do cyclists expect from it? By observing and interviewing cyclists, this study wants to understand the motivations from the perspective of cyclists with emic and etic views. What are the root reasons for the journey within the context of rapid-modernization in China? Urban Chinese are living in an alienating modern society lacking in personal trust, and the sense of community decline on top of the ubiquitous and abstract social manipulations from the political scenario of China make most people feel powerless (Giddens 1991: 122). They want to find out “who they are” in order to construct a self-identity by

reflecting modernity from the outside world, such as Tibet usually viewed as pre-modern place (Giddens 1991: 123). This study asks the question if the cycling journey is a means of finding self-identity. Is the journey a way to demonstrate that cyclists can still control their lives by escaping from their feelings of anxiety, powerlessness, and deficiency?

My third research question aims to answer whether gender difference plays a role in the outcome of this cycling journey. Cycling on G318 is very demanding physically. The body itself has to adjust different natural conditions and the mechanical issue of cycling techniques. Thus, a key test of this research must examine the interplay between gender relations and gender identities during the journey.

The following parts of this thesis are attempts to solve these research questions. In Chapter 2, I will build a theoretical framework through a review of the literature. Specifically, what are the roles of self-identity, authenticity, and modernity in tourism anthropology? How can we best apply the ideas of “body” from the phenomenological perspective into this research? How does the body play a role in gender relationships among cyclists? In Chapter 3, I will illustrate the process and results of the three-month fieldwork and the research methods I used. In Chapter 4, I will illustrate the journey using my personal and my teammates’ experiences and view the journey itself from a phenomenological perspective by distilling common themes from diverse personal experiences, perceptions, and meanings of the journey. In Chapter 5, I will explore the motivations of the journey and rethink relations with modernity. In Chapter 6, I will view G318 as a gendered space and a symbol of embodied masculinity by exploring the relationship between risks of the journey and masculinity, and the gender relationships between male cyclists as a dominant group and female cyclists as a marginalized group. In the last chapter, Chapter 7, the thesis concludes by seeing this cycling journey as a temporary way of

escaping modern life for a while and constructing the self-identity of cyclists using their own bodily movements.

## **CHAPTER 2: Modernity, Authenticity, Body, and Masculinity**

According to the research questions and purpose of the thesis, the literature review focuses on the following theoretical aspects: modernity and self-identity, authenticity, the body in the phenomenological sense, and masculinity through the lens of tourism anthropology. It also considers the question of why cyclists would want to take the risks associated with such arduous journeys. This section bridges related theories through the lens of tourism anthropology to build a theoretic framework for the cycling journey on G318.

### **Modernity and Self-Identity**

Numerous theorists have linked tourists' motivations with modernity (Bruner 1991; Cohen 1995; Dann 1977, 1981; Hughes 1995; Oakes 1998; Wang 1999, 2000). Usually, they view modern life as dull, meaningless, isolated, and perhaps with a sense of anomie, and they assume that modernization greatly changes people's daily lives and interpersonal relationships and makes modern life more fragmented and less authentic (MacCannell 1976). These changes result in an anomie in individuals' lives, which forces them to escape their home and seek self-enhancement through tourism (Dann 1981). They attempt to escape a seemingly materialistic and high-pressure society to find alleviation and authenticity in "authentic" and relaxed tourism (MacCannell 1973).

Modernity relates to industrialization, individualization, institutionalization, and capitalization (Giddens 1991: 15). It is based on industrialization and instrumental rationality, emphasizing the logical order of life, utilitarianism, and fetishization of technologies. Modern life separates humans from nature. Modern technologies also destroy natural amenities and sentiments in daily life. As Heidegger wrote, modern industrialization made humans' lives

inauthentic (Wang 1999); (Shepherd 2015). Weber (2005) also had a similar attitude, suggesting that modern people exists in an iron cage of rationality.

The core feature of modernity is rationalization, which asks individuals to obey reason, order, and efficiency: “The rationality that is intrinsic to modern technology imposes itself upon both the activity and the consciousness of the individual as control, limitation and, by the same token, frustration” (Berger 1999: 81). Individuals need to curb their emotions and impulses in order to subdue the rational order of modernity. Such utilitarian rationality also impacts human relationships and humans’ very relationship with the self. Individuals need to obey the collective rules and standards that lead them to lose their personality and differences and thus become anonymous.

Individuals are living in vast agglomerated structures in states of anonymity and abstraction. Modernity liberates individuals from their families, clans, or tribes while also alienating and isolating them; this is especially true for urbanites, who function with more mobility and faster pace of life than living in rural areas. “Alienation” is the price of individuation (Berger 1999: 89). Individuals feel alone and lack a sense of security in their impersonal, abstract, and vast institutions. Meanwhile, institutions perpetuate abstract power over individuals (e.g., welfare, public education, etc.). Individuals without longstanding ties and protections must depend on these abstract, often indifferent institutions. Modernity frees individuals from their old social ties. For Max Weber, modern identity means a coherent and measured acceptance and taking on numerous demands, which means individuals must construct their own identities and be held responsible for the consequences of their actions. Thus, such tension has made modern society anxious, insecure, and uncertain, forcing individuals to

consider who they are, how to live in the world and demonstrate their existences, and what their life goals and purposes are.

Daily life “tends to become separated from ‘original nature’ and from a variety of experiences bearing on existential questions and dilemmas” (Giddens 1991: 8). In the modern and disenchanted world, individuals are losing religion as refugees from the tribulations of day-to-day life, which has become a source of anxiety (Giddens 1990: 107). Modern society is an anxiety-producing institution that threatens individuals’ security. Modern social structures force people to become self-determining individuals who need to take full responsibility for themselves and develop a reflexive self (Giddens 1991). The construction of the self is part of the reflexivity of modernity. However, as the bureaucratic institutions are becoming more ubiquitous and powerful as a result of modernization, there is little room for modern individuals. Self-fulfillment is partly a defense against the external world individuals have little control over (Giddens 1990: 124). Meanwhile, social institutions determine that contemporary individuals cannot float free in their search for and construction of a unique self, thereby causing them to succumb to a life of individual conformity (Hansen & Svarverud 2010: 4). Individuals are not passive beings; they are capable of developing strategies to cope with the negative aspects of modernity. Tourism is one of these strategies.

### **Modernity and Authenticity with the Lens of Tourism Anthropology**

#### *Modernity and Tourism*

Modernity provides individuals with a safe, comfortable, and convenient environment. Meanwhile, these people must conform to modernity’s rules, depend on institutions, and repeat tedious rhythm of modernized life day after day. Tourism, however, provides people a means to escape the dull, meaninglessness isolation of modern life (Dann 1977, 1981). Tourism is an

escape from the alienation of modernity. Meanwhile, tourism, as a modern phenomenon itself, is a product of modernity (Cohen 1988). Tourism is a mirror of modern life and makes modern existential conditions visible and clear (Wang 1999: 222). Wang views modern tourism as a way of seeking authenticity in response to the structural inauthenticity of modernity (1999: 138).

Only in tourism, which positions an individual in the liminal zone<sup>4</sup> (Graburn 1989), which is an individual kept from social constraints and familiar environments and social relationships. Individuals' identities as tourists become temporary, causing them to lose their original social status for a period. Thus, by peeling away the shell of social roles and status, individuals are able to find their true self or existential authenticity through tourism. "The institutional dimension of modernity, particularly Western modernity, brings about inauthenticity. Tourism, by contrast, is a form of 'authenticity-seeking' and of searching for meanings, not only in the sense of seeking authentic objects, but also in the sense of a quest for existential authenticity, by escaping from mainstream institutions" (Wang 2000:215).

### *Authenticity*

In the field of tourism anthropology, there are multiple ways of classifying authenticity (Selwyn 1996a; Cohen 2012). MacCannell (1973) first formally introduced the concept of authenticity of touristic motivations and experiences. He borrowed Goffman's back-front division and developed the concept of "staged authenticity" and use Boorstin's concept "pseudo-events". Boorstin (1964) discussed the destruction of local culture through the commodification of mass tourism, which Boorstin viewed as "pseudo-events", which is kind of inauthenticity. The basic assumption is that authenticity suggests an originality that is lacking in the home society but exists in other places and cultures. In this view, authenticity equates to originality. It is

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<sup>4</sup> It is a concept borrowed from *Liminality* (Turner 1969).

improper to seek such authenticity in tourism, because staged authenticity is an inevitable consequence of the commodification process (Cohen 1988). It also requires consideration of who has the power to define authenticity (Bruner 1994) (Steiner and Reisinger 2006). Authenticity, to Steiner and Reisinger (2006), is viewed as a constructed concept. Anything viewed as authentic is constructed according to social viewpoints, beliefs, perspectives, or powers, which inherently require personal judgements. However, not every tourist wants to have authentic experiences. In this study, some want to feel the authentic Tibetan culture and blame its Chinese-ization for tarnishing its authenticity. Some cyclists view Tibetans as more authentic than Chinese citizens living in urban cities. However, such a quest is based on imagination and fleeting encounters with local people. Many travelers who have never before interacted with Tibetans viewed them as barbarians. They do not seek objective or constructive authenticity. Thus, this research focuses on existential authenticity.

#### *“Existential Authenticity” and “Self”*

“Existential authenticity” is borrowed from existentialism. To Heidegger (2010), modern industries and technologies conceal individuals and stop them from arriving in the world of authenticity. It refers to the existential condition of being, which involves asking about the meaning of being in order to look for the meaning of authenticity (Wang 1999). Turner, Cohen (1988), and other scholars have already applied existential philosophers’ ontological notion of authenticity to tourist experiences. Handler and Saxon (1988) pointed out that “an authentic experience ... is one in which individuals feel themselves to be in touch both with a ‘real’ world and with their ‘real selves’. People feel that they are much more authentic and more freely self-expressed than they are in daily life because they are engaging in non-everyday activities, free from the constraints of daily life” (Wang 2000: 49-50).

Modern individuals' lives follow regular routines and lack stimulation, adventures, and surprises. Such routinization and over-predictability of modern life gives rise to the "feeling of loss." Modern people lose their "true self" in public roles and public spheres in modern Western society (Berger 1973:82). Essentially, existential authenticity means that "one is true to oneself" (Wang 2000: 58). Cycling on G318 with surprises and simulations gives people opportunities to give up public roles and social duties, maintain a distance from their daily lives, and explore themselves.

Yet "modern freedom and autonomy centers us in ourselves, and the ideal of authenticity requires that we discover and articulate our own identity" (Tylor 1992: 81). Identity means knowing who we are: "Defining myself means finding what is significant in my difference from others" (Tylor 1992: 36). Self-fulfillment and self-actualization are aspects of authenticity based on "being true to oneself," which means being true to one's own originality; that is something only the individual can articulate and discover (Giddens 1999: 178); (Tylor 1992: 29). Modern society emphasizes instrumental reason and requires individuals to maintain a rational and utilitarian perspective. Under the trend of the fetishism of technologies, materials, and consumption, material procurement becomes the main sign of self-fulfillment. However, the value of self-fulfillment, apart from material procurement, can be achieved through obtaining rare experiences and objects, such as a cycling on G318.

We need to know that authenticity is not a true social fact but an ideal which requires us to discover and articulate our own identity. Playing a crucial role in one of the directions of authenticity, self-discovery requires a (re)making of oneself (Taylor 1992:28). The point is not whether existential authenticity is true or not. Finding one's true self is a personal quest for experiences and feelings. Existential authenticity comprises personal or intersubjective feelings

that are activated by the liminal process of tourist behaviors. The methods of finding the true self through tourism are nostalgic and romantic (Wang 1999). “Existential authenticity can consequently be viewed as an experiential reflection of the individual’s performative participation in the process of ‘hot’ authentication” and is emotionally loaded and based on belief (Cohen 2012). Some individuals believe that they are locked in an iron cage constructed by instrumental rationality and technologies, and they want to self-exile and escape the modernity; yet, some people feel comfortable in and appreciate modern and urban life. Whether the iron cage is real or not, existential authenticity, as a quest and an experience, opposes instrumental rationality and is a way of exploring self-identity.

Tourism as the personal strategies for coping with existential threats (Hughes 1995), this confronts an authenticity of experience that may enable individuals to (re)discover a lost authentic self (Taylor 2001). Tourism, as a journey, is the passage of time and liminality period. Temporality is an important dimension of authenticity in tourist experiences. Tourism as a temporary activity, regarded simply as a leisure activity, is a means of ridding one’s self of normal routines. The traveling self has to constantly negotiate between the familiar and the unknown, between a here, a there, and an elsewhere (Minh-ha 1994:9). About the issue of self-transformation during tourism, Bruner (1991) thought there were two types of self (tourists’ self and a native self) in tourism: “The tourist self is modified very little while the native self-experiences profound change.”

In sum, tourism provides outlets and opportunities for the quest for self-representation, self-realization, and self-development. Tourism is also linked to nostalgia, romanticism, and leisure. Tourism involves personal experience and personal constructions. In temporary time and space, tourists depart from their daily life, familiar but unsatisfying social environments, heavy

workloads, and social obligations. Different tourists from different social statuses and cultures enjoy the same sceneries and have a sense of community through similar goals and activities. They are facing and exploring themselves during this temporary period. Tourism is thus an effective means of escaping modernity for a temporary period.

### **The Particularities of Chinese Modernity and Individualization**

Basing on the three dimensions of economic production and reproduction, the nature of political authority, and sociocultural integration (individualization, cosmopolitanization, and religion), Beck (2010: Xvi) refers to four basic types of modernity: European, American, Chinese, and Islamic. Chinese modernity has the following features: state-regulated capitalism, post-traditional authoritarian government, truncated institutionalized individualization, and plural religious society. Thus, it is necessary to consider the particularities of Chinese modernity and individualization.

Modernization in China has been rapid. In China, there is a rupture between tradition and modernity. Modernity seems to be a result of the development of western civilization; China, however, has experienced a more abrupt transition from traditional to modern society. On an ideological level, China progressed through pre-modern, modern, and postmodern eras in a relatively short time—about 150 years. Thus, in China there are more serious conflicts between differing values, thoughts, and ideologies. Modernization brings modern problems with it, such as alienation, anomie, value confusions, environmental issues, etc.; rapid modernization has exacerbated these problems in China.

Searching for self-identity is rooted in Western individualism. In medieval Europe, identity was fixed, as God took responsibility for individuals. Modern individualism asks people to take responsibility for themselves and believe in themselves. This dynamic has been different

in China. Individuals are embedded in family, kinship, clan, community, the broader society, and the nation as a whole. There is little room for the self, and the individual is denied (Kleinman 2011:280). Liang Qichao argued that the self as having two levels in China: big self and small self. Under the background of Confucianism, nationalism, and collectivism, the “small self” (individual) must be subordinated to the “big self,” which includes families, communities, and the nation. This idea and its practices regarding the “small self” and its submission to the “big self” were continually popular in Mao’s era.

Individualism as the heritage of the Enlightenment is valued naturally or even highly in modern Western society. However, in China, even after many years of modernization, individualism and the value of self exists in a negative sense. “Self” is often connected with selfishness, utilitarianism, and a propensity to put self-interest above an interest in groups or other individuals (Hansen and Svarverud 2010: 27). This leads to the paradox of the self and individualism in China: the self is linked with selfishness and utilitarianism but is influenced by Western individualism, as the Chinese view personal happiness, material achievements, and their personal fulfillment and enjoyment as primary goals of life, which is misunderstood as the core concern of individualism. It is preferable to be viewed as hedonistic. To Tylor (1992), this is not the means to achieve authenticity. As Yan (2010: 25-26) has argued, the Chinese understanding of the self in this discourse is mostly defined by the utilitarian functions and material interests of the individual and the group, instead of by ontological or existential terms.

In sum, one consequence of rapid modernity in China is that the old ties are broken down. Simultaneously, urban life is transformed by the immense concentrations of the population in modern metropolises. Personal relationships are hardly entrenched. Urban residents live in high-rise buildings and live separated from nature. Under the tension between individualism and

collectivism, beliefs of individualism and the concept of self are associated with hedonism. That means the Chinese have lost the essence of individualism in the existential sense. It also means they must find other methods of finding authenticity beyond material achievements.

### **“Back to the ‘Things Themselves’”—Why Body Matters?**

Motivations are diverse and personal, as expectations, experiences, perceptions, and thinking are all varied from person to person. No matter what their motives, life experiences, and reasons are, their definitions and descriptions of cycling on G318, their views of the road, and their relationships to this journey are also individual. Bear (male, about 40 years old, teacher), my interviewee, said that one cannot find the general rule of cycling on G318. Going “back to ‘things themselves’” (Husserl 2001, 168) is the starting point of this research, for it is essential for understanding individual experience. However, this study does not exclusively regard cyclists’ personal experiences and other individual, detailed facts; it also regards the essence and relationship of this dynamic phenomenon. These cyclists are “being there,” but, specifically, their bodies are “being there.” Cyclists are performing movement, experiencing their own perceptions of the journey, and constructing the meaning of the journey through their bodies.

Scholars have applied phenomenology to tourism studies. Cohen (1979) summarized five modes of tourism from a phenomenological approach. He argued that modern tourism has five modes: recreational, diversionary, experiential, experimental, and existential. These modes depict the tourist experience in a spectrum, ranging from that of the traveler in pursuit of “mere” pleasure in the strange and the novel to that of the modern pilgrim in quest of meaning in somebody else’s home (1979). However, Cohen mentions very little about phenomenological philosophy and its application to tourism anthropology. I agree with Cohen (1979) that scholars

should study tourist experiences further and more comprehensively. We should not only focus on tourists' motivations, but also their experiences.

Phenomenology as an approach that concentrates on consciousness and experience, to me, which is a good approach to help me explain and analyze cyclists' experiences.

“Phenomenology is the study of phenomena as they appear to the consciousness of an individual or a group of people: the study of things as they appear in our lived experiences” (Desjarlais & Throop 2011). “Phenomenology studies essences and clarifies the relationships between them; it seeks to delve into experiences and clarify the very grounds of knowledge” (Burrell & Morgan 1979: 233). As Wilson (2013) has argued, the phenomenology is a useful framework in tourism because it allows the voices of individuals to be heard within studies, it allows complex phenomena to emerge naturally in a manner that is personally meaningful to individuals, and it protects the subjective view of experience because it allows researchers to delve deep into the lived world of individuals.

Different cyclists provided diverse personal feelings, motivations, and experiences. There are gaps between what they feel, how they express their subjective feelings, and what I have heard and written into words. As Dann (1981) argued, tourists may be unable or unwilling to tell, reflect, and express their real motives. Some cyclists told me that they really do not know why they want to cycle on G318. Additionally, their experiences, motives, feelings, and thinking change throughout their journey. Non-fans, for example, may begin to love cycling during the journey. Anecdotally, I personally was afraid to climb the long slope and had no strong feelings about cycling at first, but after overcoming several mountains, I overcame my fear and began enjoying cycling.

Cyclists' personal definitions of cycling on G318 and their experiences and perceptions of cycling tourism are different. The phenomenological approach of focusing on the body is suitable for studying cyclists' varying perceptions of the G318 journey, diverse motives, and other subjectivities. It is a way to understand the essence of the phenomenon of cycling on G318 based upon individual experiences and purposes.

### **Masculinity and Tourism**

This arduous journey requires an immense physical ability. Strength and physical prowess have a perceptual link with masculinity (Connell 1995:70). According to Connell's definition, masculinity is simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality, and culture (1995:71). "True masculinity is almost always thought to proceed from men's bodies—to be inherent in a male body or to express something about a male body" (Connell 1995: 45). There are two approaches to masculinity: one is collective, physical, and embodied; the other is rational, individualistic, and disembodied (Kimmel, Hearn, & Connell 2005:170). This research pays more attention on the physical and embodied approaches to masculinity. Apart from testing their physical abilities, males view this cycling journey as a means of enriching their life experiences and broadening their views, which is also a means of demonstrating their masculinity.

Many scholars posit that an allure of tourism is that it offers a retreat from or an escape to certain experiences of masculinity. This journey provides a space for the assertion of masculinity consistent with the values of traditional hegemonic masculinity and where individual men may enact a masculinity no longer available to them at home. Many freedoms and benefits associated with travel and tourism are only open to men or, at least, are only available to women via a more

complex negotiation of problematic assumptions about the nature of danger, risk, and independence when travelling (Thurnell-Read, Casey & Macmillan 2014:5); cycling on G318 is one example of this because of the limitations associated with the social and spatial mobility of women. Thus, travel and practices like cycling on G318 offer a particular performance of masculinity.

Gender is not only a fixed social category; scholars also view it as a mobile and movable performance (Ateljevic, Morgan & Pritchard 2007: 19). Tourism is a metaphor for the way we lead our everyday lives (Wallace 2005). As a powerful cultural phenomenon and process which both shapes and is shaped by gendered constructions of space, place, nation and culture, tourism is affected and reshaped by gender relations. Tourism also embodies everyday masculinities within tourism's own space (Thurnell-Read, Casey & Macmillan 2014:1). The gendered nature of tourism is both shaped by and has the power to shape gender relationships and roles (Thurnell-Read, Casey & Macmillan 2014:45).

Tourism as a gendered space involves aspects of both masculinity and femininity. As G318 is arduous and dangerous, it is linked with masculinity in cyclists' minds. Gender relations in G318 are influenced by this masculinized space and do not simply mirror gender relationships found in their daily lives.

### **Further Thinking**

The above discussions are essential concepts in this research. Because of rapid modernization, Chinese individuals—especially young, urban ones who suffer from stress, loneliness, uncertainty about the future, and the mundanity of daily life—feel a sense of loss or as if their lives are meaningless. These feelings are shared by many cyclists, especially young cyclists who live or work in urban areas. According to related theories, they suffer from the

negative aspects of modernity. However, the question remains as to whether tourism is a liminal zone and a detached world. These individuals may embark on such arduous and difficult tasks as a means of gaining existential authenticity and alleviating the negative aspects of modernity. If existential authenticity allows one to be true to one's self and to discover and construct one's identity, then this journey perhaps helps cyclists construct their identities, and, further, male cyclists desiring to demonstrate and construct masculinity as an aspect of self-identity may be enacting this. In the following sections, I will argue that the aforementioned journey could help cyclists work through harmful aspects modernity through cycling as a bodily movement.

### **CHAPTER 3: Research Methods**

The research questions are what the cycling journey on G318 is and the reasons why cyclists want to do it. In order to answer these research questions, I conducted three-months of field work in the summer of 2017. This chapter explains where and when I did the research, what methods I used, how I applied these methods into specific settings; what kind of data I collected, and how I will analyze the data to approach the research questions. The research methods include participant observation, interviews, pure observation, and questionnaires.

#### **Participant Observation— my Dual and Temporary Identities: as a Cyclist and Researcher**

To understand cyclists' expectations, experiences, and feelings during the journey, meanings after the journey, I could not depend on interviews alone. Participant observation is a crucial part of collecting this type of data. My own experience allowed me to understand the whole journey and vividly helped answer these important questions: How does one prepare for the journey, including finding equipment and a proper team? What does one experience during the journey, such as the difficult and dangerous parts, the impressive moments, the beautiful scenery, the relations among cycling teams, and the self-reflections during and after cycling? At first, I was concerned that participating as a cyclist might waste time, resources, and energy, because completing the journey would take about one full month. But in the following stages, I never doubted my decision again, because my own experience not only helped me learn what happens on the road, but also became a useful tool to help build rapport with cyclists and to make proper judgments about interviewees' experiences of cycling on the route G318. When other cyclists found out I already had done the journey, they began to understand my determination to do this research. They were willing to be interviewed and inquired my suggestions about preparations, accommodations, and road conditions. During the journey, I also

observe other cycling teams except doing the participant observation as a cyclist with my teammates.

In addition to cycling on G318, I also did participant observation in other ways. I worked and volunteered at hostels and equipment shops, which was an easy way to build rapport with cyclists and interview with them. In May I observed two 11-member teams by buying equipment with them and attending their meetings before departure. In August, at the end of the fieldwork, I helped one woman to find a team with three females and attended their hostel safety meeting to compare it to the one I attended at the Freedom cycling hostel. Observing these three teams gave me a vivid understanding of a cycling team's activities before departure.

Before departure, I was like those cyclists without any experience, called a *Xiaobai*<sup>5</sup>, because I prepared everything from nothing. When I entered the cycling equipment shop, I was given a list of required equipment and other recommended equipment. I purchased supplies like tools for bike repair, suitable clothes, panniers, flashlights, helmets, and a spare tire. A *Xiaobai* usually does not have mountain bicycle. I bought one under shop owner's recommendation. Because of lacking experience and confidence, I hesitated to undertake the journey. Cyclists usually hesitated to travel G318 because of the risks of the road. Several experienced cycling enthusiasts advised me to give up since I was a female without any cycling experience. As an experiment, I cycled about 120 kilometers in one day by renting a mountain bicycle on the third day of fieldwork. It gave me confidence of cycling on G318.

At the end of May in Chengdu, I met a team with two females and two males, whose age ranged from 21 to 26 years old. After I explained the motivation behind my research, they

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<sup>5</sup> Translated directly from Chinese, *Xiaobai* means "little white." The term is used to refer to beginners without any related knowledge or experience.

allowed me to join them. We had a short meeting before departure as many teams did. The leader, Cui, talked about the plan, which was to cycle about 29 days. That is called ‘leisure cycling’ in the tour guidebook, which refers to a relative slowly cycling schedule. The night before we left, there was a small safety meeting hold by bicycle hostels owner. Another team from our hostel also attended the meeting. They called themselves the Nine Wolves and consisted of nine males ranging from 24 to 50 years old. The meeting provided important information regarding the most dangerous part of the road and how to cope with mountain illness. The main point of the meeting was to warn us to cycle slowly while going downhill, and the owner showed us bloody pictures of cycling accidents.

During the journey, I cycled with teammates to know team relations, to acquire personal experience of cycling on G318, and to observe and chat with other cyclists. I usually took head notes while cycling. Because cyclists typically stay at cycling hostels together, I found opportunities to observe and interview other cyclists along the journey. Every night when other cyclists went to sleep or played on their mobile phones, I opened my laptop and recorded field notes. When they took pictures of beautiful sceneries I observe them and took pictures of them from the perspective as a researcher. When they were thinking about their life and future during cycling, I was mainly thinking about my research.

Cycling is not the only means of participant observation during the journey, riding in a shuttle-van was another way to experience G318. An estimated ninety percent take a van for variety reasons<sup>6</sup>. Cyclists can take a free rescue van within 20 km distance from the hostel<sup>7</sup> or get

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<sup>6</sup> This estimation is based on observations and interviews, as well as the testimony of cycling service owners.

<sup>7</sup> The free rescue car service generally is provided in the Sichuan region.

from one destination to another is to find a van by themselves. On the first and second day, I took a rescue van because of my knee injury. Half of my teammates and I took the van from Batang to Mangkang to avoid the most dangerous and arduous section on the road. From this experience, I know how cyclists find a van and negotiate the price. Because I think we should cycle instead of taking a van, I felt embarrassed putting my bike on the van roof and sitting in the van. My team partner Chen and I decided never to take a van again. Since I had already experienced what it was like to travel G318 by the car, I never took one again during the rest of the journey.

At the beginning of the journey, I was concerned about my role as a researcher and did not enjoy cycling. I was not embarrassed for taking rescue vans or let hostels from the next destination take my panniers. As the journey proceeded, however, I began identifying as a cyclist after crossing over two mountains within six hours. After climbing two mountains over 4000 meters and gaining a strong sense of fulfilment, I approached a small village and was hit by hailstones. My shoes were wet, and my panniers had been sent to the next hostel. I had to get in the rescue van that was passing by to avoid catching a fever. When I was in the rescue van, I decided to keep my panniers with on the road. Because if I had my panniers, I could change shoes and continue to cycle. From that point on, I always kept my panniers with me. Maybe it was a sign of participating too deeply, I immersed into cycling in the middle of the journey and felt interested in cycling and discussing about cycling. My teammates and I also made jokes of cyclists who took the van. During the final days of the journey, I was a little bit tired of cycling and doing participant observation. After all, it had taken almost one month of constant cycling. As a researcher, I wanted to shift to another stage—interviewing with cyclists—because I felt I

had gained enough personal experience. However, when I took the van from Lhasa to Bayi<sup>8</sup>, I saw cyclists on the road and felt I was one of them; I wanted to cycle with them instead of staying on the van without fresh air. In brief, I came to view myself as a cyclist whose motivation is to do research of cycling on G318.

## **Interview**

In addition to cycling on G318 as participant observation, the main fieldwork activity was interviewing (see the interview protocol in appendix). I did about 254 interviews (see the timeline table in the appendix) with cyclists. Types of interviews ranged from informal discussions to formal interviews, 65 of which were in-depth. I began to interview people on the third day and did the final in-depth interview with a female cyclist on the last night, about 9:00 PM, before returning to my family's home (in China) on the next morning. During the cycling stage, I only did about seven interviews, four of which were in-depth. I also did in-depth interviews with cycling owners and workers who cycled on G318 before and informal interviews with some cycling hostel owners without such experience. I conducted informal interviews and facilitated short discussions with non-cycling travelers on G318 too. My questions to these travelers mainly focused on their attitudes toward cyclists and their feelings about the road. The aim of doing interviews was to acquire cyclists' motivations, experiences, and ideas about cycling on G318. The data from these interviews helped me understand cyclists' experience of the journey.

When in Chengdu I did about 40 interviews including 3 in-depth interviews during the first ten days of the field work. From these interviews and my observations, I acquired

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<sup>8</sup> I choose several cycling hostels along the road, which are in Bayi, Basu, Ranwu, Xiangkezhong, and Yaan. I took the bus from Lhasa to Chengdu, to do the interview in cycling hostels in these places.

serendipities that enlarge my understanding of this topic. After my team arrived in Lhasa, I had formed semi-structural questions by reflecting on my experience. The following formal interviews were based on these questions. The in-depth interviews revealed detailed information about individual experiences of cycling on G318, their motivations and meanings for the journey, and their life histories that I believe impacted their journeys and helped me understand them better. I never asked their life histories directly or purposely, but many interviewees felt compelled to share their stories with me during the in-depth interviews.

The informal discussions are mainly to build rapport with cyclists in order to interview with them and to acquire basic information. Sometimes, these discussions can be in-depth, gain a deeper level of insight. One day, at the Freedom hostel in Lhasa, I went back to the room that I shared with 5 males who were on the same team. They were drinking because Yao (male, 28-year-old male) was planning to leave the next day. They invited me to join them because we had shared the room for several days. I had had a semi-structured interview with Yao before, however nothing grabbed my attention from that interview. Like many other stories I had already heard, his story was of a young white-collar worker who had quit his job to travel without any planning. Maybe he was feeling inebriated and trusting, he began to tell us how he was dumped by his fiancée and how they ended a six years' relationship, and how his fiancée occupied the house he bought. We continued to drink and discussed his story. The topic soon shifted far beyond romantic relationships. We talked about young men living in China society and their beliefs. We ended up with an unhappy discussion because we had different beliefs regarding individualism and hard work. I did not understand Yao's insistence on hard work and taking heavy burdens willingly. Afterwards, I thought a lot about what he and others had talked about that night and how to interpret it. Also, another teammate, Bai (male, 24-year-old, ex-soldier),

who was thought of as innocent and naïve to other teammates, actually had an uncommon life history. I acquired this information not from a single formal interview, which he did not want to do, but from several informal conversations.

Because the cycling “team” is the common organization on the road, the focus group (typically comprised of three to four members and with no more than seven) is another interviewing strategy I used for several times. I asked the same question one-by-one to the group members, although they are often on the same team with similar ages and identities sometimes, the answers of the same question are diverse. Sometimes I focused on one interviewee while other teammates sat around and listened with the interviewee’s permission. When others listened to the main interviewee’s answer, they gave responses by linking a related scenario and usually added their own answers sometimes. The interactions among the interviewee and his or her teammates provided me more information about the team.

I paid attention on choosing interviewees with diverse backgrounds, such as from different age groups, occupations, and educational level, and keeping gender balance among interviewees, in order to acquire more diverse data and form a clearer picture of cyclists on G318. In addition to general questions, there were questions specific to different categories of cyclists (see the interview protocol in appendix). For example, I asked specific questions of gender difference depend on cyclists ‘gender. The questions were also varied according to the different stages of the journey, like before, during, and at the end. During interviews, I not only paid attention to the content, but interviewees’ gestures and expressions to gain solid understandings of them. Thus, I acquired convincing and diverse data from interviews about cyclists’ experiences, motivations, and reflections regarding the G318 journey.

## **Pure Observation**

I did observation of cyclists through social media. I used WeChat<sup>9</sup>, which is widely used in China, to do follow-up observations of cyclists, after I had a short encounter with them, who shared their travel journals and pictures on the app, which could be viewed as documentary materials. This allowed me to learn about the road conditions they faced, how many days it took them to arrive at Lhasa, if they quit the journey and why, and what their feelings were after returning home. Because of these follow-up observations I knew these cyclists beyond my short encounters with them. I also read the graffiti on the road and at hostels left by cycling travelers and I took pictures to document their impressions of the journey.

## **Questionnaires**

In addition to participant observation and interviews, I also administered questionnaires online through WeChat. The aim was to acquire basic information such as age, identity, gender of cyclists and their motives for cycling G318. I obtained 294 completed questionnaires from May 31 to June 5, and 215 in August, the majority from August 8 to 13. I also invited about 50 cyclists to do it personally by sending the QR code (see the appendix) to access to the questionnaire through WeChat. I posted the QR code (see the appendix) into chatting groups on WeChat made up members cycling, had already cycled, or were preparing to cycle G318. I also asked cyclists to help me share the questionnaire with their teammates and asked cycling service providers to help me to spread questionnaires on WeChat, since they had more social networks contact with cyclists than I had. Subjects completed questionnaires online which helped me save a lot time. For example, I began cycling since June 1st, while the questionnaire was available online and when I arrived at my hostel I noted that

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<sup>9</sup>A social media app is used by nearly one billion Chinese.

about 50 questionnaires had been completed that day. Doing questionnaires online also helped me analyze data efficiently and conveniently.

### **Field and the timeline of fieldwork**

“Field” does not only mean a fixed place. In this study, the G318 and places along the road from Chengdu to Lhasa were also the field. The fieldwork settings were the highway and the cycling hostels and restaurants along the road. The timeline of the fieldwork generally operates like the following.

I spent about ten days at home to have enough rest after taking a 21-hour flight back to China. I arrived in Chengdu in the evening of May 21. The second day, I found the place where cyclists gathered to do preparation for cycling on G318. There are two equipment shops and two cycling hostels in the Community called Wuda Park and the other two cycling hostels nearby. Other cycling hostels are in other areas in Chengdu, I checked into two cycling hostels after I came back to Chengdu in August, but there were not too many cyclists there. For fieldwork I selected the two equipment shops and one hostel called Freedom (see Figure 3.1) because its business is the best. From May 22 to June 1, I stayed in Wuda Park in Chengdu to observe and interview cyclists and cycling business owners, prepare for my own journey, and find a proper team.

When my team arrived in Lhasa, we stayed at a more comfortable hostel than the typical cycling hostels in order to get enough rest. The one week of post-journey rest and team activities after arriving in Lhasa, such as the farewell dinner, can be viewed as participant observation. During this period (June 27–July 2), I also interviewed nine teammates and some other cyclists, including two individuals I had interviewed before at Chengdu.

From July 3 to the end, my fieldwork focused on interviews. From July 3–15, I stayed at the Freedom cycling hostel at Lhasa; it and the Freedom hostel at Chengdu belong to one cycling service provider. On July 16, I took the van from Lhasa to Bayi, one big town located about 400 kilometers east of Lhasa. I stayed at one cycling hostel called Leile. It provides good accommodations which appeal to cyclists, encouraging them to stay for one more day. Some cyclists decided to stay another day to rest at Bayi considering the relatively low altitude. From July 22–25, I stayed at one cycling hostel called Pingan in the small town of Ranwu. It has a beautiful lake and glacier that entreat cyclists to spend more time in Ranwu. Because of inconvenient transportation, I wasted two days on the road and finally arrived at Xiangkezhong, a small Tibetan village in the west of Sichuan Province. I stayed at the cycling hostel called Buzhu Sisters from July 27 to August 2, which is the most famous one on G318. There, one can experience Tibetan culture and enjoy the owner's three beautiful daughters' singing and dancing. From August 2–5, I stayed at a cycling hostel that is the most famous one in Yaan, the first destination of the journey. These four fields were all suitable to do fieldwork considering their locations represented different stages of journey and made meeting cyclists easy.

I headed back to Freedom hostel at Chengdu and stayed until August 10. The feelings I experienced upon returning to Chengdu were totally different compared to the beginning stages of my research. I was not a *Xiaobai* anymore. I knew the journey well, and I gave suggestions to cyclists who seemed to trust me and take my suggestions, for I had experience cycling on G318.

### **Ethical Concerns**

As I met cyclists and others I would interview, I explained what my research was. I got permission from them after I told them my statement of consent. In China, informants, even educated ones, are unfamiliar with the idea of consent and permission, so I carefully explained

my role as a researcher and my ethical responsibility to everyone I interviewed, including the members of my cycling team. I never initiatively asked questions about their private lives and only focused on questions about their experiences cycling on the road. I told them that I would not use any private information they might reveal to me in any of my writings and that I would further protect their identity by using pseudonyms and other strategies. I encrypted my field note files on my laptop and related documents. When I was typing field notes, I was careful not to show the information on the screen to others. Since many cyclists were curious about what I was writing, I explained to them the ethical responsibilities of a researcher and the reasons I could not show the information to them. I also explained the aims of my research and my identity clearly before starting any interviews, and I included my personal information and the goal of my research in the heading of the questionnaire.

Before joining the team, I told my teammates my research goals. My teammates accepted my role as a researcher completely. Li told me, “You are our eyes,” which meant I observed and recorded my team’s daily activities. During cycling, when something happened, and I was not there, they told me the situation and said, “You can record it into your notes tonight.” One day, when I was feeling lazy and did not want to write field notes, my teammate Shi urged me to finish before I went to sleep.

### **Limitations and Accuracy**

As a Han-Chinese doing research about other Han-Chinese travelers, I might have been constrained by cultural stereotypes and other limitations. However, in this case, people saw me as a cycling newcomer without any experiences who was curious about everything regarding cycling on G318. Cycling on G318 gives cyclists temporary identities as travelers. Thus, the other cyclists and I shared the same temporary identity on the highway. I believe my participant

observations gathered plentiful and convincing data. There was no language barrier hindering me from communicating with informants. The language I spoke in the field was Mandarin which was used by all informants.

I admit that mobile ethnographic research did not give me enough time to get to know interviewees well. The information acquired from shorter encounters with interviewees may not be as reliable. However, I was not completely dependent on interviews, for I also depended on participant observation. Participant observation gave me vivid experiences about cycling on G318. I talked to more than 200 cyclists and related individuals and collected about 510 questionnaires. According to cycling hostel owners' calculation, there were about 8,000 to 10,000 cyclists on G318 this year. The main cycling season on the road is from May to September, which was my research period. I collected enough data to gain a holistic understanding of the journey and formulate tentative thoughts about how this temporary event fits into the context of modern and urban Chinese society.

From the beginning to the end, I was immersed in the field for about 80 days, except for one day I wasted about one day on the road due to traffic blockage, when I ride a van from Zuogong to Xiangkezong. I rode with cyclists, ate with cyclists, observed with cyclists, chatted with, and interviewed cyclists, made jokes, and drank with cyclists, and shared accommodations with cyclists. I was also one of the cyclists. I talked to more than 200 cyclists, cycled 26 days to complete the whole journey, spent countless hours observing, and took about 500 pages of field notes (including recording transcripts). I can reveal these cyclists, with their diverse backgrounds, experiences, and motivations. I can use the data I collected to respond to my research questions.

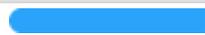
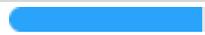
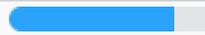
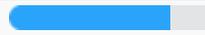
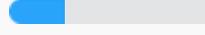
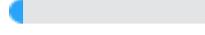


Figure 3.1. The *Freedom* cycling hostel at Chengdu.

## CHAPTER 4: Cycling on G318—the Journey Itself

G318 from Chengdu-Lhasa has diverse and beautiful scenery that appeals to cyclists and other tourists like drivers and trekkers to come. Every year, ten thousand people, about half of whom are cycling enthusiasts and the other half who are not have cycling experience or interests in cycling,<sup>10</sup> choose to cycle on G318 (2246 kilometers). What are the special attractions of cycling on G318? What is going on during the journey? What is the nature of cycling on G318? What is the journey itself? This chapter attempts to address these questions based on my personal experience and my teammates’ experience of the journey, and I will illustrate the perception of the journey from the perspective of phenomenology.

Table 4. 1. The attractions of G318 (multiple choices\*).

Options	Amount	Ratio
Enjoying scenery	356	 69.67%
Challenging themselves	351	 68.69%
Enhancing perseverance	302	 59.1%
Completing the dream of being a cyclist	293	 57.34%
Finding self	227	 44.42%
Tibetan culture	189	 36.99%
Sense of achievement	168	 32.88%
Purification/clearing their minds	155	 30.33%
Releasing stress	109	 21.33%
Team intimacy	103	 20.16%
Others (about 20 give detailed information)	23	 4.5%
Valid samples	511	

<sup>10</sup> This data is not exact but is based on my own data collection about the types of cyclists on G318.

## **The Attractions of Cycling on G318**

According to questionnaire data (see Chart 1), apart from the beautiful scenery along the road, the main attraction is the opportunity for cyclists to challenge themselves. G318 is the highest goal for cycling enthusiasts because of the long distance, high altitude, and twelve mountains above 4000 meters. About half of the journey is climbing mountains in high-altitude areas, which can easily lead to mountain illness. Imagine you are cycling on a long slope, which is seemingly endless, while lacking oxygen. If you also have mountain illness, which means you are suffering from nausea, headache, and fatigue at the same time, you will probably despair and break down after a heavy rain or snowfall. Cyclists suffer from the changeable weather and can be exposed to strong sunburns, heavy rain, headwind, and snow in one day. A popular saying about the weather on G318 is “we experience four seasons in one day.” Cyclists are limited to the narrow, half-meter wide space between the curb and the main road, which is full of huge trucks and fast cars, especially at the beginning of the journey. Because of the fragile geological environment, cyclists also face dangerous natural disasters such as debris flow.

Therefore, cycling on G318 makes cycling enthusiasts feel challenged, especially those without any cycling experience and those who lack regular physical exercise. The challenges and dangers of the road give people a sense of conquest and achievement. Because of road dangers, cyclists usually organize a team to help take care of one another. Thus, finding team intimacy from the journey becomes an attraction to some cyclists.

## **Demystification of Attractions of Cycling on G318**

In this section, I will focus on analyzing the attractions of cycling on G318 by the data collected by interviews and participant observation, the aim is to rethink these attractions of G318

of cyclists who prepare the journey, who are during the journey, or who have completed the journey based on data collected by questionnaires.

### *The Beautiful Scenery*

Is scenery always beautiful along the road? Do cyclists always enjoy it? The beautiful parts of the road shared by most of cyclists are Xinduqiao, Maoya Grassland, the Nujiang, the section from Ranwu to Bomi, and a small town called Lulang. The other parts of the road are not very appealing. Cyclists imagine the blue sky and fresh air on the road before departure; however, they have to suffer the heavy tail-gas and dust at the beginning of the journey because of the heavy traffic. After arriving in Lhasa, many cyclists think the scenery on the road is not as beautiful as they imagined.

### *Facing Challenges of Cycling on G318*

Challenges are the main theme of the journey, discussed by almost every cyclist. The level of difficulty varies from stage to stage as cyclists adapt to high-altitude areas. A cyclist who has finished it may think it is not difficult. However, one experienced cyclist with plenty of physical training still found the beginning stages of the journey very difficult. He told me he would not fear the difficulties in life after completing it because of the extreme challenges he overcame on G318.

More importantly, the perceptions of challenges and difficulties are based on expectations. Let me use a group interview to illustrate. Three male cyclists are a team. None of them are cycling enthusiasts or have long-distance cycling experience. They prepared for the journey for about six months by running and cycling to improve their strength, and they did not experience altitude sickness. Yet even though they were all in similar physical condition, their

responses to difficulties were different. When asked about their feelings about the journey, Yi and Que said the trip was too difficult and painful beyond their expectations. However, Guo said it was too easy. The condition of the road, in his imagination, would not be very good, according to pictures he had searched online. Like many young people, Guo felt the road conditions were too good—much better than he expected—and not challenging at all. He just felt tired sometimes. Guo, like some of my interviewees, researched basic information about G318 online before deciding to do it. Many young cyclists were inspired by online articles and statements about the attractions of the highway, as well as by stories of healing and transcendence experienced on the journey. This information formed their expectations about the journey. A lack of reliable information regarding the real road conditions led to diverse expectations of the difficulties of the road and varied judgments about the challenging level of cycling on G318.

### *Team Intimacy*

Teams are organized spontaneously online by cyclists or cycling service providers. Teams are loose organizations. One team rarely brings all the members to Lhasa, especially for the large team with more than 15 members. A team can easily separate because of different rates, aims, and schedules.

However, “team intimacy” and “sense of team” are still emphasized by cyclists. If one team recognized you as a member, they will offer you help if you need, like repairing your bicycle (see figure 4.1). One college student told me that one of his teammates was annoying, but he still insisted that “I could dislike you, but I will never abandon you.” It is true that cyclists share a common identity. They come from different places with different identities for one common goal: cycling to Lhasa. Another college student, Cainiao, told me, “When I was at school, I was always afraid of professors. However, I do not have such feeling toward Prof. Ma

in our team. I call him Old Ma instead of Prof. Ma.” Their chief identity during the journey was as a cyclist. There seemed to be an unspoken agreement that cyclists do not ask or talk about their personal information too much. However, despite their common identity as cyclists, there were other identities that linked or differentiated them, such as gender, age, occupation, and social status.

Team intimacy is one attractions of the journey that appeals to some cyclists. Orange was a college student who wanted to find close relationships and intimacy on her team. She told me, “I do not need to mask and expose the true self to others easily during the journey.” It is undeniable that the relationships between cyclists are simpler and purer than the relationships between colleagues in daily life, because there is no conflict of interest. It is easier to be honest during the journey than in daily life. That is not to say the relationships among cyclists are unlike the relationships in their daily life. Cyclists share one statement: “all cyclists belong to the one big family.” Yet teams still have conflicts, competitions, abandonments, quarrels, and even fights on the road.

The above sections list the most common attractions of cycling on G318 and demystify them based on interviewees’ experiences and opinions of the journey. The following section discusses my team’s experiences and provides further details about the journey itself.

## **My Journey on G318 with My Teammates**

### *The First Day of the Journey and the Next Morning*

At 7:00 AM, June 1st, Gang leads us out of town. About 40 cyclists including my team depart from the cycling hostel at Chengdu. After taking pictures, we begin to cycle. Tang joins our team at that time and brings up the rear. Our team cycles in line and keeps the average speed at 20 km/h. We need to cycle about 140 kilometers from Chengdu to Yaan. That is why we need

to cycle as fast as we can to arrive at Yaan before dark. Cui, as our team leader, leads the way. The online map misguides us to a bumpy country road. I am angry because Cui does not follow my suggestion to use the driving mode on the Map App. He uses the cycling mode instead of driving mode on the Map App to guide us and I worry about my laptop in the pannier since the road is too bumpy. My teammate Ying asked me, “Why are you so nervous?” Indeed, I am so nervous at that time and feel huge pressures about the unknown journey ahead.

Because I do not eat anything for breakfast, I feel dizzy and lag behind at the rear after riding for about two and half hours. Around 12:15 PM., I finally arrive at Qionglai with Tang. We begin to contact other teammates. However, nobody answers the phone and there is no information in our chat group on WeChat. They contact us and send the launch location by WeChat, and Tang and I decide to continue to cycle instead of finding them. It is a little embarrassing when we meet again. During the launch, we book the cycling hostel recommended by the tour guide.

We continue to cycle immediately after lunch. I feel frustrated that other females are so fast, which is not my expectation. I begin to push my bicycle up the first long slope I meet, which is not too steep and challenging compared to the following long slopes in the high-altitude region. My speed declines into 13 km/h on the flat road. Cui asks me to be the first in line to urge me to cycle faster. Tang tries to teach me to cycle efficiently, however, I still ride slowly and need to rest frequently. The team divides into small groups in the afternoon; Cui and the other two girls Xue and Yu are the fastest group. Another girl, Ying, and Chen, another male who is not very strong and without cycling experience, lagged behind. Tang and I are at the end. At that moment, as a researcher, I am worried that if I am always so slow, how will I be able to observe them?

At 4:00 PM, I finally catch up to Ying and Chen who are eating watermelon. A male nearly 40 sits around and joins in our then. We call him Bro<sup>11</sup> Sun. He is broken down and his legs are trembling. When I get off my bike, I feel my legs are stiff and I cannot bend my knees. After eating watermelon, we continue to cycle, and I lag behind again.

After nervously cycling a long downhill, at about 5:30 PM, Tang and I arrive in downtown Yaan, where our teammates are waiting for us with the cycling hostel owner, Bro EQ. Xue (female, 24, waiter before resignation), the fastest of our team, has waited for nearly 2 hours. Bro EQ asks us whose knees hurt and I say mine. Then he suggests that I get in his van because I need to cycle tomorrow, and the road is more difficult than today's. I think I lost face for taking the van on the first day. I only give him my panniers, though the others even do not take theirs off. I try to keep up with them, but my right knee hurts. After cycling for about 5 kilometers, Bro EQ, stops the van and says to me "you have arrived in Yaan and fulfilled today's task. There are 15 kilometers left and a long, steep slope. Your knees cannot bear it, so get on the car!" He then helps me put my bicycle on his pick-up truck. Tang catches up to the team quickly after I get on the van. Due to a traffic jam, we arrive at the intersection near the hostel at the same time. The narrow slope nearing the hostel is very steep and about 500 meters long. The van follows my teammates on the slope. Ying is the fastest, and Chen begins to push his bicycle. When they finally arrive, they begin to complain about the torturing slope. Another team, Nine Wolves, has already been there for more than 3 hours. When we eat the dinner offered by the hostel, we do not wait for Bro Sun because we are so hungry, and forget we have a new member, Bro Sun.

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<sup>11</sup> Bro means brother. Here, bro is closer to the Chinese meaning of *ge* than Brother.

After eating, we talk about tomorrow's journey. Bro EQ holds a safety meeting, the content of which is like the meeting at Chengdu, covering the cautions of going downhill, coping with mountain illness, etc. At about 10:00 PM, after washing with cloth and taking a bath, most of the cyclists go to bed, since we all need to wake up at 6:30 AM.

The next morning, after we have breakfast provided by the hostel, we load panniers on bicycles. Tang and I switch bicycles since he thinks his bicycle is easier to cycle than mine. A father, who we call uncle, and his son, who we call Chubby, join our team. Before departure, we take pictures together, which is the last time we took pictures with the team flag. Basically, except for the two days' break, we perform the same routine: get up, prepare, eat breakfast, cycle, arrive at the hostel, have dinner, take shower, wash with cloth, and go to sleep.

### *My Sufferings and Worries at the Beginning Stage*

On the second day on the road from Yaan to Xingou, I use my left knee instead of the hurting right knee to cycle. After lunch, we begin to climb the mountain under the strong sunshine. Both my knees do not hurt at that time. I find I am not lagging behind when I am climbing the long slope. There is a tunnel when we get close to Xingou, and a village on the hillside of Mount Erlang which is the first high mountain on the road. Our teammates are waiting for Tang and me to cross the tunnel together, since it is dark inside with heavy traffic. My teammates cross most tunnels on the road together. Under the dim light from our flashlight, we cross the tunnel in a line. When I enter the tunnel, my left knee hurts so much but I cannot stop, so insist on cycling until I am out of the tunnel. Since some teammates are behind me, it is too dangerous to stop or slow down. Xue and Yu have been waiting at the exit of the tunnel for a long time. Cui calls the cycling hostel to have them take me to the hostel first. When the van arrives, Ying and Chen put their panniers on the van, and continue to cycle for about 20

kilometers. When I get out of the van, I cannot bend my knee. One cycling traveler tells me I cannot continue to ride. I get diverse medicines from my teammates and other cyclists and put them on my knees. I feel much better the next morning and continue to cycle with my teammates. The knees hurt from time to time in the following days.

On top of my knees, I also get a heavy cold in the high-altitude areas because of the changing weather. I am worried the heavy cold might lead to fever which is very dangerous in high-altitude areas. Apart from physical suffering, I feel the embarrassment of lagging behind. I gradually adapt to cycling in this condition and catch up to the middle group of my team. During the first ten days of the journey, I was suffering from knee pain and a heavy cold, and like many cyclists, I am also scared about black tunnels and heavy traffic. As I gradually adapt to cycling and acquire confidence from it, I begin to enjoy cycling which brings me the sense of achievement. I feel free, relaxing, and enjoying the scenery while cycling.

### *The Perceptions of Beautiful Scenery*

At the beginning of each day, my feelings, shared by most cyclists, are that the road is crowded, noisy, dusty, full of off-gas, and that the scenery is not very appealing. After cycling for about one-week we reach Mount Zheduo, which is the divide between the Han and Tibet-regions and the first climbing ordeal we face, we arrive at Xinduqiao. The landscape changes and looks like a fairyland after passing the mountain. It is tranquil and beautiful. The yaks are eating grass on the meadow; the clean water reflects clouds and sky. The road is slick pavement, with beautiful and special Tibetan style houses all along. There are not too many cars and trucks, unlike at the beginning of the journey. I feel peace and delight on the section from Mount Zheduo to the town of Xingduqiao. It is the first time I begin to enjoy cycling. Chen, Tang, and I are quietly enjoying the scenery along the road.

I experience the same feelings on the way to Bomi. We cross through the forest and villages on the slick pavement. “It is so quiet,” Chen, my teammate, says to me, to which I reply, “Yes!” We then continue to cycle quietly and slowly, since want to stay in the tranquil environment as long as possible while still enjoying the free and relaxing feeling brought by cycling.

When our team first sees the snow mountains on the way to Kangding, we feel excited. My teammates as well as many interviewees share their excitement when they see it at the same time. After that, they do not have such excitement anymore. For the second half of the journey we just want to cycle, even when we get to and see the beautiful Ranwu Lake. At this point our team leader Cui says, “I have aesthetic fatigue already.” The other teammates all agree with him. We do not stop to enjoy the scenery and cycle quickly, even though we are not in a hurry.

#### *The Differentiation and Changes among Team Members*

On the first afternoon, the team divides into fast, middle, and slow groups. As cycling becomes more and more difficult, the slow group becomes the group of taking the van. In my team, the group taking the van and the group insisting on cycling cannot understand each other. Sometimes, there are quarrels between these two groups. Teammates who insist on cycling slightly scorn the teammates who take the van and view it as cheating or a sign of lacking perseverance and bravery. Meanwhile, teammates who take the van think they do not need to insist on cycling for the whole journey.

In Kangding, on the fourth day, Bro Changsha is abandoned by Team Nine Wolves and joins our team. Xu has a heavy cold and gives up cycling. She stays at a hospital for a few days and joins a team combining trekking and free ride. On the seventh day, Chen and I finally arrive

at the cycling hostel in the village Xiangkezong exhausted. Tang and Ying are disputing over taking the van or not. Shi tells me that Xue wants to join the Nine Wolves. She worries about Xue being the only girl on that team. Xue has made her decision, and since she is always the first no one can accompany her. She is worried about her safety. Xue continues cycling the next day. BC, Bro Sun, the father and son, and Ying take the van and have a short trip to Yading, a tour site far away from G318. They plan to wait for us in Litang. The five remaining males and I stay in Xiangkezong and continue to cycle after a one-day break. We need to climb two mountains over 4000 meters in one day which is an extremely difficult section during the journey. After completing it, I feel confident cycling.

After the team reunites at Litang, we continue to cycle for about 3 days. Chen, the group taking the van, and I take the van together from Batang to Mangkang, while the other males continue to cycle on the most dangerous and arduous part of the road. We need to negotiate the fare with a Tibetan driver and the van is overloaded, which is not safe especially on such a dangerous road. Chen and I feel embarrassment about taking the van. We insist on cycling the rest of the journey.

On the way to Jueba village, Bro Changsha is injured because of his fast speed. The next day, Bro Changsha, Ying, Chao, Zhou, and the father and son take the van to Bangda. They promise they will wait for us in Bangda, but the altitude is too high, so they continue to ride. The father and son take the van for about 800 km from Bangda to Lhasa directly. The remaining five males and I continue to cycle day after day. Sometimes we make jokes about the group taking the van ahead of us. They wait for us in Bayi, and we merge the two days' routes into one to catch up with them. It is exhausting because we have to cycle for about 15 hours in one day,

including climbing a mountain over 4000 meters. Given this, I am angry with the group who took the van, but I feel happy when I see them again at Bayi.

*Quarrel and Intimacy among Teammates from Luding to Kangding*

On the third day, when we arrive at Luding, a big town during the journey, Cui and Xue have arrived much earlier and ordered a hostel not recommended by the tour guide. We are worried about our bicycles put in the storehouse. Then, Cui says, “I do not undertake responsibility for losing it.” We feel unhappy about his reaction, because we just want to make sure it is safe. We have a little spat. After we get over it, we go out and have a heavy dinner. We meet Xue on the road, where she eats alone. Li, who joins the team at Luding, and Cui find us, we eat together, and make peace again. When we get back to the hostel, we begin to discuss how to guarantee our safety and strategies for coping with emergencies. The next day, because of the quarrel, everybody attempts to build intimate relations with other teammates. Cui, our leader still, waits for the slow group. We have a picnic together during lunch time. Xue, who can cycle very fast, chooses to cycle with us, and encourages the slower teammates.

However, by the end of the journey, our friendship is closer than it was at the beginning, though it has frayed, and we are less willing to share our thoughts and intimacies with each other. Perhaps different personalities, motivations, and physical abilities has led to this. But we are still a team. We had excluded other cyclists beginning in the first week because we viewed each other as teammates. Zhou joins our team on the third day of the journey. None of us like him, but we still take him as a member. I remind him of the dangers when we cycle together. He also views me as his teammate. One day, I lag behind my regular companion, Tang and Chen, who run ahead of me. Zhou accompanies me voluntarily. As I told Cui at our farewell dinner, “we are not close, but we do not abandon teammates. All of us arrived in Lhasa at the end.”

### *Arriving in Lhasa*

For about three days, during the journey from Bayi to Lhasa, the whole team cycled together. During the last day, we cycled together at first, but after taking pictures with my team on the last mountain, they rushed downhill like crazy people into Lhasa. For many reasons I cycled with Tang and two other people not on my team. At 9:30 PM., we arrived at Potala Palace, the final destination of the journey. Ying and Zhou were there, and we took pictures together. The others arrived about one hour ahead of us. Because we had to merge the two-day routine into one without taking breaks, it took us 26 days to finish.

### *In Lhasa*

After we arrive in Lhasa, I cannot sleep and feel both slightly excited and empty when I am lying on the bed. Like other cyclists, I do not know what to do tomorrow because I have lost my usual routine during the journey. I feel that, although the journey is hard, you move forward little by little so long as you keep cycling. Cycling on G318 brings a sense of achievement and conquering to cyclists. There are too many frustrating things in life that you work so hard to achieve but still fail in the end. Compared to other tough things we meet in life, cycling on G318 is not that difficult.

During the next day, we take pictures together before the Potala Palace and have a farewell dinner. My teammates leave Lhasa one after another. When we were approaching Lhasa, we began to further plan the trip after we arrived. However, instead of going somewhere else in Tibet, such as Mount Everest, we just hang around the street and buy local products after arriving. We do not even go to popular tourism spots such as Jokhang Temple or Potala Palace. Most of my teammates want to go home and have lost the desire to visit places or enjoy the

splendid scenery. As my teammates said: “I have seen it on the road.” All the other teammates have left Lhasa within only one week. I remain in Lhasa to continue my fieldwork.

### **The Nature of the Journey**

Lamont (2009) lists definitions of bicycle tourism and gives his own definition of bicycle tourism in Australia based on factors such as distance and time. In this research, according to questionnaires (511 samples), 166 responses view it as cycling-travel (*qixing*)<sup>12</sup>; 108 responses view it as travel, 46 responses view as cycling-tourism (*qiyou*)<sup>13</sup>, and 160 responses agree it has both dimensions. Thirteen respondents do not know how to define it. The responses from interviews also concentrate on “travel,” “cycling-travel” or “cycling-tourism”; very few responses use “pilgrimage” or “pilgrimage to cyclists” to describe it.

Cyclists have their own definitions for cycling on G318, and generally know the distinction between tourism and travel. Travel has deeper meanings than tourism to them, which means a need for more effort and perseverance. For example, when some of my teammates chose to take the van in order to avoid arduous sections, another teammate, Li, commented on it: “They are doing cycling-tourism, not cycling-travel.” Like other forms of tourism, most cyclists want to experience and gain knowledge about local people and culture, to relax and refresh, to get away from daily life and responsibilities, to do something meaningful, and to satisfy curiosities. But more than these, cycling on G318 is also for self-exploration, self-discovery, and self-reflection. Cyclists viewed it as an opportunity to grow up, to make an unforgettable life experience, and to transcend themselves. Then, given this perspective, how should we define this

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<sup>12</sup> Qixing in Chinese is the abbreviation of cycling and travel, which means have a travel by cycling.

<sup>13</sup> Qiyou in Chinese is the abbreviation of cycling and tourism, which means have a tourism by cycling.

journey, and how should we understand the nature of the journey? Is it an adventure? Is it a pilgrimage? Or is it a personal journey with the meaning and experience of the journey varying from one cyclist to another?

First, cycling on G318 is not an adventure. The road is full of challenges and even dangerous in some sections. For example, many cyclists enjoy the excitement of going down a steep hill with the speed above 60 km/h which is very dangerous for cyclists, especially for those lacking adequate experience. Several deaths and numerous serious injuries happen on G318 every year. However, I never heard anyone define it as either an adventure or adventure tourism. Cycling on G318 can be relatively safe when travel speed is below 35 km/h with full concentration.

Second, cycling on G318 is not a pilgrimage. Numerous popular online statements view cycling on G318 as a pilgrimage which can purify a cyclist's mind. However, only 18 responses from questionnaires view it as a pilgrimage. The interviews and observations also show it is not a pilgrimage. We need to mention that "pilgrimage" is not a pilgrimage in a religious sense, but an expression that the dream of cycling on G318 has finally come true. For those who choose to use "pilgrimage" to define it, they also do not agree they are pilgrims like those Tibetan pilgrims who share the same road with them. Cyclists generally express that the main difference between themselves and pilgrims is that Tibetan pilgrims practice Buddhist religion, while they do not. They usually respect pilgrims for their unimaginable devotedness and piety.

For those cyclists who are Buddhists, they also do not view this as a pilgrimage. One college student, a Han-Chinese, believes in Tibetan Buddhism. However, he clearly points to the journey as "cycling-tourism". Another interviewee is a genuine Chinese Buddhist who once

planned to be a monk. He plans on doing ten thousand kowtows<sup>14</sup> before the Jokhang Temple after arriving in Lhasa. He also views it as a time to relax and escape from reality for a while. Another aged cyclist, a Han-Chinese Buddhist, aims to observe a special totem<sup>15</sup> on the back wall of the Jokhang Temple by repeating a special incantation. He also views it as cycling-tourism.

If we view the pilgrimage as a religious performance, cyclists and I share the same opinion that it is not a pilgrimage. Is it a sacred journey or a modern pilgrimage from the perspective of tourism anthropology? This is a further question to discuss. In short, it is a movement done by cycling. It is a long-distance cycling journey, no matter if cyclists view it whether as cycling- travel, travel, cycling-tourism, or pilgrimage. Specifically, it is a long distance (2246 km) cycling journey, which takes about 15 to 30 days to finish. It is also a personal journey that can only belong to each individual cyclist on this road.

### **The Journey—Transferring the Road into a Personal Journey by Cycling**

The journey is the interaction between cycling and the road. What is the special part of cycling on G318? Li said, “If you were only cycling, you would experience nothing, no dead wind, no haunting by wild dogs. If everything is going so smoothly, then it is no different than cycling at home.” On G318, cycling is more than cycling.

The experience of the journey does not exactly reflect the attractions of the road. The journey is a complex phenomenon interpreted by cyclists. Cyclists produce personal meanings of the G318 route, and their journeys are based on individual experiences. We cannot deny that there are no common patterns or objects from the journey, however, the physical movement----cycling,

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<sup>14</sup>*Kowtow*, here, means kneel and touch ground with the forehead in worship.

<sup>15</sup> I am not sure “totem” is a proper term. But it is his original word.

and the interactions with the road make the journey itself a combination of subjectivity and objectivity. Merleau-Ponty (1968) argued that perception is not a representation but participation and engagement with the environment, which constitutes simultaneously both subject and object. Cyclists use the body to cycle, to perceive, and to produce personal meanings and experiences about the journey.

### *Landscape—as a Cultural Process*

For the cyclists, even though they share the same road and landscapes with other tourists, they experience them according to their unique perceptions. Natural landscapes do not exist. Landscape should emerge as a cultural process. The road, as an object, is there, but how physical surroundings are constructed and perceived is different and varied among individual cyclists, drivers, trekkers, pilgrims, and local people.

How space and spaciousness are experienced when cycling versus driving on the same road is also different. Cycling enlarges the human sense of space, which is why cyclists told me they enjoy the broad view of cycling over driving. Different feelings and experiences about the same road depend on different body perceptions and expectations about that road. From the beginning of the journey, the road is never only a natural object.

Regardless of whether or not they have the motivation of loving and enjoying scenery, cyclists are in diverse landscapes. Cyclists who want to come are told by travel notes, news, and social media stories from friends who cycled on 318 once, construct their personal imaginations about the road, and construct their own landscape while they are both on and after the journey. There are objects, including the road itself and scenery along the road, but they require the body to perceive and construct it. After all, the impressions left by experiencing the road are interactions

between subjects and objects. Our relationship to space is not that of a pure disembodied subject to a distant object, but rather that of a being which dwells in space relating to its natural habitat (Merleau-Ponty 2004: 55). The landscape can be read in multiple ways while the meanings of the road are diverse and individual. Cyclists produce their own meanings and experiences by bodily movement—cycling.

### *Body*

Only body and bodily movement, and path making, then can make a meaningful and cultural landscape (Chronis 2015). Cyclists with different life histories, occupations, ages, and gender have diverse motivation, expectations, experiences, and perceptions of the journey. Two things we cannot deny are that they are there as the result of using their bodies to execute the movement, and they make their own meanings about the journey. Thus, this study chooses to use the body as the entry point under the theoretic framework and methodology of phenomenology.

Rather than the mind-body dualism in Descartes's sense, man is a mind with a body away from the Cartesian division between subjects and objects, material and spiritual, facts and fetish, and a being who can only get the truth of things because its body is, as it were, embedded in those things (Merleau-Ponty 2004: 56). However, this does not represent cyclists' view. Most of them agreed with the mind-body dualism. The general view is that "the body is suffering, but the mind is relaxing during the journey." Only one interviewee told me that body and mind were interlinked. A popular phrase regarding G318 is that "the body is in hell, while your mind is in paradise." I still agree that the mind is also in the body, and not an oppositional entity to body as the cyclists thought.

The body is not only used to cycle and bear suffering, but also to think, feel, see, and experience. The living body is situated in time and space. During this short period, cyclists' bodies create a special space—the road and surrounding areas—by engaging in repetitive cycling. As one cyclist said, “Cycling on 318 is traveling alone, even though you have teammates.” Most of the time, while they are riding mechanically, the brain is thinking about their lives. According to many responses I collected, cyclists think randomly or concentrate on one thing when they are cycling, especially while climbing a long slope since they do not need to pay too much attention to the road and safety because of their low speed; it is boring and arduous. Except while thinking about how far it is to the pass, their thoughts are meandering everywhere, and vacillating from their past, to present, to their future. Some respondents said the reason they came on the journey was to figure out one specific thing. Cycling on G318 is viewed as an ideal way of thinking. Some cyclists want, but not aim, to think about something, fix some problems in reality, or to decide about their future. It is not simply a physical movement, even for cyclists whose only aim is cycling; their mind is concerned with how fast they can cycle, how far they can cycle that day, and are also trying to satisfy the desire of challenging and conquering the G318.

“By thus remaking contact with the body and with the world, we shall rediscover ourselves, since, perceiving as we do with our body, the body is a natural self and, as it were, the subject of perception” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 239). It is our “bodily” intentionality which brings the possibility of meaning into our experience when we are surrounded with references to the past and future, to other places and other things, to human possibilities and situations (Merleau-Ponty, 2004: 10).

Body is man's basic mode of being in the world; body is a medium of exploring and involving the world; body is a medium for connecting the worlds of reality and illusion (Radley, 1995). Without body, there is nothing. Unlike viewing tourism as liminality with sacred centers (Cohen, 1979), body is the center from the beginning to the end of cycling on G318. Cycling as a bodily movement and performance is a movement in space.

### **The Journey: Space, Place, and Body**

A cycling journey, like other forms of tourism, is always based on spatial-temporal flows and mobility. Tourism always involves space. Inspired by phenomenology and some Polish scholars, Kowalczyk (2004) views tourism spaces as including real geographic space and abstract space or the anthropological space defined by Merleau-Ponty. Except for the multiple-layers of tourism space, I am more concerned with the relationship between spaces, place, and body. Body is the lived body; world is the perceived world; space is humanly construed space (Tuan 1977: 35). Body and space are mutually defined (Pons, 2003). "My body's space is much more than this, and rather than space enabling my body to be understood, it is my body that brings about space. It is the body that is the condition for their being space." (George, 2008: 103).

"Spaciousness is closely associated with the sense of being free. Freedom implies space; it means having the power and enough room in which to act." (Tuan, 1977: 52). Cycling gives a different experience of moving. Cyclists use their physical power to achieve a fast movement in space. They successively gain in speed, and conquer space, all while space continues to open out for them (Tuan, 1977: 53). "However, conquest of space can mean its diminishment. The speed that gives freedom to man causes him to lose a sense of spaciousness." (Tuan, 1977: 54). Therefore, driving does not have a similar sense of broad spaciousness to cycling.

“When we look at a country scene we almost automatically arrange its components so that they are disposed around the road that disappears into the distant horizon. Again, almost automatically we imagine ourselves travelling down the road; its converging borders are like an arrow pointing to the horizon, which is our destination and future. “(Tuan, 1977: 123). When cyclists are cycling, their view is focused on the endless front until the day’s destination is reached. Their minds are wondering; their past lives and imagined futures emerge in their minds. The future, past and present are all temporally compressed in this temporary space-time. Cyclists feel they transcend the physical space. Maybe, that is the reason they are longing for hope from the road.

They are not only in space, but also involved with the place. “Space is transformed into place as it acquires definition and meaning” (Tuan 1977: 136). “Places are produced by a dialogue between cultural fantasy-making and geographical landscape.” (Bishop 1989:9). Places on the journey are usually the destinations cyclists arrive at every day. Space is the road and along the road, places, like hostels, are centers of felt value for biological need (Tuan 1977: 4). Like the relationship between body and space, body and place also belong together; there can be “no place without bodies” (Casey, 1993: 45, 103). "The living body for Casey is essential in the process of emplacement” (1996, 44), and it is the body that serves as the “vehicle of being-in-place” (2001, 413)" (Chronis 2015). As Casey (1993) argued, “it is the body-place interaction that provides orientation, directionality, and the potentiality for movement that transforms unmarked space into a meaningful place" (Chronis 2015). Wineman and Peponis (2010) argue that the meaningful places come into being not only through verbal-narrative articulation, but also through bodily practices in space.

The road, G318, is an empty vessel to hold diverse and individual meanings. Bishop thought sacred places are imagined as benign places for healing and contemplation, which then became a utopia (1989:10). “In the phenomenology of the imagination, utopias and scared places are different. Sacred places are entrances to a paradox: they embody tension and contradiction; utopias resolve these, eliminate them.” (Bishop 1989:216) To cyclists, there is no scared place during the journey, and Lhasa is more than a final destination than a holy place. Thus, the road is a place of hope and aspiration for cyclists. Or we can say the road it is a utopia.

G318 from Chengdu to Lhasa is full of diverse challenges, and the continuous cycling over such a long distance can cause extreme suffering. Cycling on G318 is a journey of awakening, contemplation, healing, and transcending such suffering from bodily movement. This paper views cycling on G318 as a journey and an entire phenomenon created by cyclists. The performances, meanings, and attractions of the journey vary from person to person based on their motivations, which I will discuss in the next chapter.



Figure 4.1. My teammates are repairing a tire.

## **CHAPTER 5: “Why We Want to Cycle on G318”—Motivations and Modernity**

This chapter aims to explore the cyclists’ motivations. The chief motivation of this study before I began to do the fieldwork was to determine why travelers—the majority of whom are amateurs—want to do this. After about three days’ fieldwork including both observations and interviews at cycling hostels in Chengdu, I quickly realized how diverse and personal these motivations were. As my teammate Ying put it, “one hundred people have one hundred different characters, and one hundred ways and ideas of cycling on G318.” For example, one middle-aged woman with three years of cycling experience told me that she wanted to cycle on G318 because her birthday is March (3) 18. Facing the diverse and individual motivations of cycling on G318, do these cyclists have anything in common? Cyclists’ motivations are difficult to identify, analyze, and summarize. This chapter attempts to define common motivation by linking it with modernity. Before discussing the relations with modernity, this chapter attempts to present the main types of cyclists and related motivations at first.

### **Typology and Motivations**

Motivation is the ultimate driving force that explains individuals’ actions. Motivation-based typology is valuable in identifying types of tourists and generating profiles of travel patterns (Fodness 1994). Dann (1981) noted that tourist typology was useful in providing a meaningful classification within the complex phenomenon of tourist motivations. Thus, linking diverse motives with different groups is an efficient way to understand and present cyclists’ motivations of cycling on G318. At the first day of my fieldwork, Bro Si, the owner of Freedom cycling hostel in Chengdu, told me “everyone who comes here has a particular motive.” However, he still made rough classifications and related motivations by himself:

Some have frustrated feelings because of broken romantic relations or failures of careers, who wanted to release these negative feelings through this journey. Some want to transform themselves to be better, such as improving perseverance. Some feel uncertainty about future and being lost, and feel their life is meaningless. Some simply like cycling. When I (Bro Si) wanted to do this, I was 24 years old and I worked at my family shop and met the same people every day. I felt life is dull, I did not know my next life stage. I want to transform myself by cycling on G318. But after the journey, I still had to do what should be done when I came back.

### *The Profiles of Cyclists*

Among the 254 cyclists I interviewed, 48 cyclists were over 40 years old (13 women), which includes 13 cyclists' age ranges from 41 to 50-year-old, 12 from 51 to 60-year-old, and 23 people are over sixty. Two people in the age group from 41 to 50-year-old have no cycling experience; only one cyclist in fifties and another cyclist who is over 60 have no cycling experience. The others over 40 years old all have long-distance cycling experience. Only 2 among these 254 interviewees are under 18. One is 17 years old who is a factory labor without any cycling experience. The other one with about three years cycling experience including long-distance cycling is a male student (16 years old) who prepares to transfer to the high school in U.S. Eighteen interviewees are 18 years old, most of them just graduated from high school and finish the College Entrance Examination. Only one of them does not like cycling, the others are all cycling enthusiasts. There is no female interviewee among the age group of 18 or under 18. About 46 interviewees' age ranges from 19 to 22-year-old (7 women), the majority of whom are college students. Nearly half of them do not have any cycling experience. There are 108 interviewees in the age group from 22 to 40-year-old (19 women), half of them quit their jobs or do not have jobs; half of these 108 interviews do not have any cycling experience. Thirty interviewees age are from 30 to 40-year-old (4 women), only one third quit their jobs and about 10 interviewees have no cycling experience or love it.

According to the 511 completed questionnaires, 24 respondents (5 women) were under 18 years old; 261 respondents (34 women) were from 18 to 25 years old; 129 respondents (9 women) were from 26 to 30 years old; 43 respondents (4 women) were from 31 to 40 years old; 27 respondents (5 women) were between 41 and 50 years old; 19 respondents (2 women), were from 51 to 60 years old; and 8 respondents (1 woman) are over 60 years old. Females comprised about 12% of the total samples. Half samples show they love cycling, about one third of samples show they are interested in cycling, and the other is not interested in (see in Table 1 and table 2). There is no obvious gender difference of the interest level of cycling (see in Table 2). Nearly 40% of respondents have no cycling experience, while about 32% have more than 5 long-distance cycling journeys (see in Table 3). The questionnaires show that about 25% respondents are students, 35% have jobs, 22% quit their jobs or are unemployed, only 2% are retired, the others are freelance workers. About one third of these respondents from 18-30-year-old are resigned or unemployed. To those who have jobs, their occupations vary from different kinds and incomes according to interviews and questionnaires. Why do questionnaires reflect people with less experience and who are younger than interviews? Because questionnaires made online, I worried aged cyclists were not surveyed. Thus, I attempted to interview more aged people in the field.

Table 5.1. Crossing-tabulate of gender, age, and interesting level.

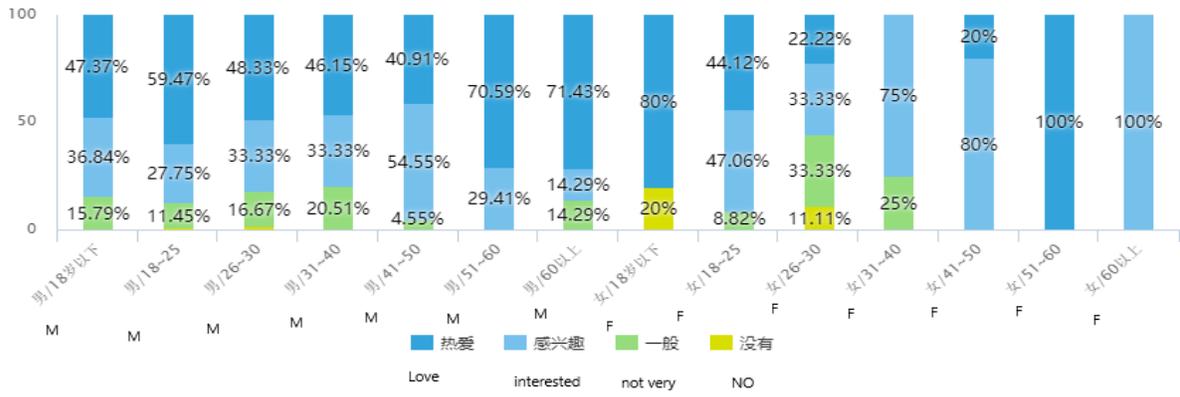


Table 5.2. Gender and interesting level.

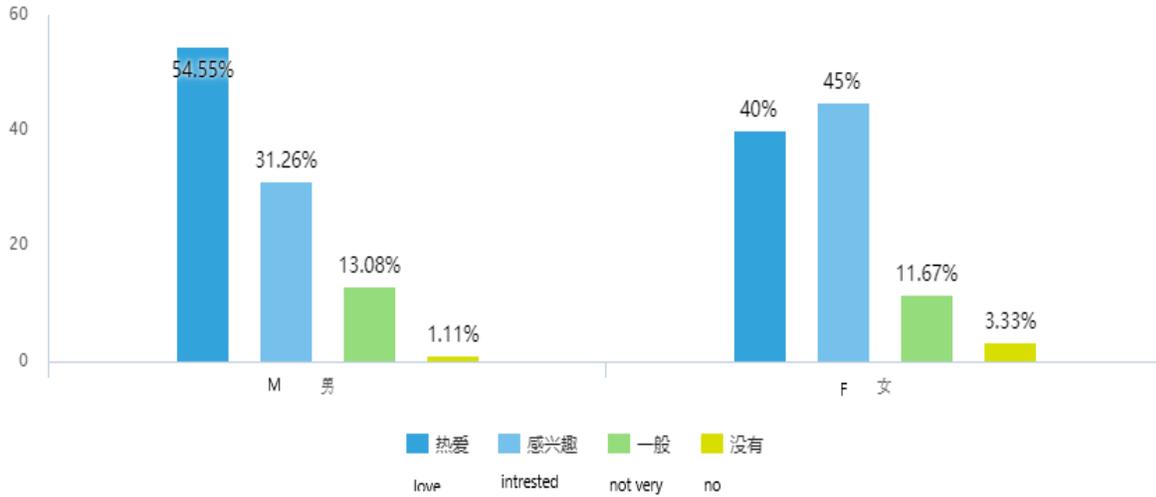
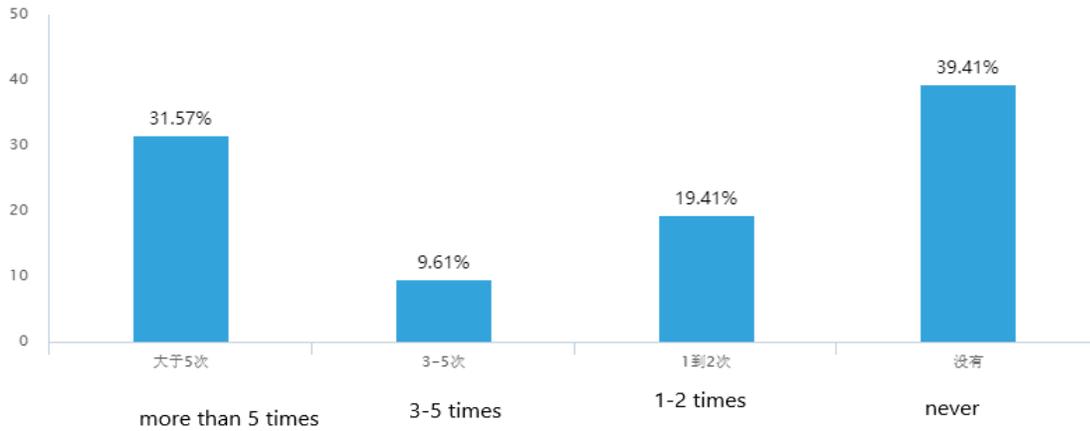


Table 5.3. Times of long-distance of cycling.



Cyclists come from almost all provinces in China, two interviewees had worked in Tibet for about 30 years and live in Chengdu now. Most of them live and work in urban areas from metropolises to small towns. Only two interviewees live in rural regions. About the ethnicity, there were no Tibetan cyclists. Five interviewees are Zhuang people, a minority group in Guangxi province, one is Hui people with Muslim religion, and one is Manchu. One cycling team from Guizhou province is most diverse in ethnicity I met: about four teammates are Buyi people, one is Miao and three are Han-Chinese.

In brief, more than half cyclists are young people (see in the Table 4) living and working in the urban areas. Nearly half of them are interested in cycling and have cycling experience. To those over forty years' old and under 18 years old, they basically love cycling. More than half of the cyclists from 18 to 40-year-old are not interested in cycling, but still undertake this arduous journey. It is an interesting issue to explore. About the gender ratio, my data basically demonstrate the statement heard from hostel owners “the ratio between male to female close to

10:1” (seen in table 5). Besides, the female ratio is lower in age group from 26-40 than other age groups, I will discuss the gender issue in the next chapter.

Table 5.4. Age distribution.

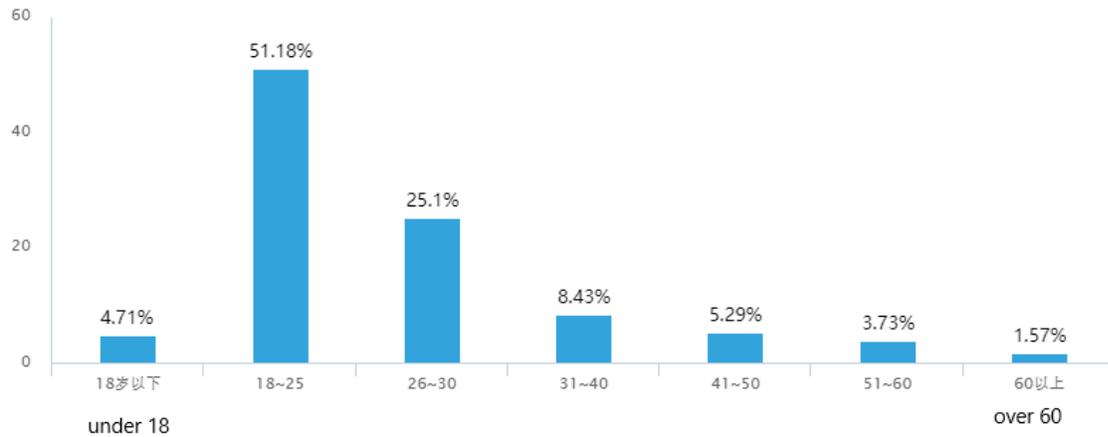
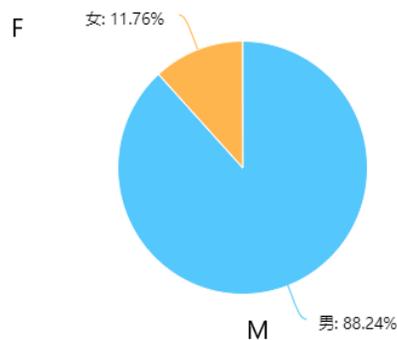


Table 5.5. Gender ratio.



*Patterns and Motivations*

For almost all cyclists, the scenery is the most common motivation of their journey. For this huge number of cyclists, my basic strategy is to divide cyclists into cycling enthusiasts and cycling newcomers. Among cycling enthusiasts, cycling on G318 is the highest goal or dream because of the challenges mentioned in the previous chapter. Meanwhile, cycling newcomers

have diverse motivations, such as experiencing novelties, meeting different people, exploring themselves, escaping their daily lives, going on a quest for self-representation, self-realization, and self-development. Cyclists in the age group above sixty are retired, and in the group of eighteen generally are high school students, most individuals in these groups are cycling enthusiasts. Their main motivation is to fulfill their cycling dream. To the cycling newcomers, in the age group from 30-60, except freelance workers, mainly do the journey by using their vacation. For example, 22 to 30-year-old cycling newcomers, feel anxiety in their daily lives and want to relax for a while. The majority of 18 to 22-year-old, are college students who usually are organized by college cycling associations to do the journey. As college students, they do not have much pressure to escape; they want to increase their life experience or enjoy cycling. About half of 22-to 30-year-old cyclists who quit their jobs or are unemployed cycle on G318 without any long-distance cycling experience. This group compose half of cyclists on G318. Their motivations are the most intriguing part.

For individual travelers, motivations can be combined. For cycling enthusiasts, in addition to fulfill their dream, they also want to relax for a while. Besides, many of them become cycling enthusiasts because cycling as a leisurely movement helps them to relax, and cycling is good for their health. For cycling newcomers, they may become to love cycling after the journey. Honestly, it is hard to capture motivations for they are in flux and are subjective from the emic view. As a researcher, I found a common identity and common motivation: as modern people, they want to relax and be away from their regular lives for a while. Indeed, they choose a unique and exhaustive way to experience one special journey instead of participating in mass tourism or another leisure approach. Maybe it sounds too simple, but I think it is the proper approach to analyze the common motivation without considering their diverse life stories, occupations,

gender, or ages, etc. The following part is to illustrate my teammates' diverse backgrounds and motivations to find one common motivation of the journey. In this way we can see how motivations are constructed and changed.

### **My Teammates' Profiles and Motivations**

Graburn (2002) argues that the ethnography of tourists in the temporal space is full of temporary encounters between tourists and researchers. Cyclists voluntarily shared their life stories with me. Their recounting of vivid life experiences helped me to fully understand their journeys. However, these short encounters increase the difficulty and risks to use their narratives to illustrate cyclists' motivations. Thus, I choose to use my teammates' narrative to discuss this issue.

I got along with my teammates during the month of the trip, developing deeper understandings with them than other interviewees, whom I usually knew for only a few hours or a couple of days. In addition, as a team with about 10 (sometimes 14) teammates, my team is a representative sample because of its diversity. Their ages range from 21 to 55 years old. My team members with diverse identities include undergraduate and graduate students, young unemployed men, and freelance workers. More importantly, they have diverse reasons and motivations to undertake the journey with different expectations and attitudes toward the journey. Now I will discuss my teammates' detailed information and their motivations as reliable examples to give readers the vivid information of cyclists' profiles and their motivations.

*Cui (21, male, team leader, college student)*

Cui was the team leader and he had just graduated from college. He began to cycle in high school. He successfully finished the journey by following the "three-no" principle (no-

pushing bicycle, no taking panniers off, and no taking a van). Although he thinks others can take a van if they need to, he often makes jokes of those who do. He is not good at climbing long slopes, and has slight mountain sickness, but he insists on following the “three-no” principle. When Cui is not cycling, he is talking with his girlfriend and sometimes taking pictures. It seems his body is on the road while his mind is still at his daily life. As the leader, Cui seldom plays nor eats with us. He has stayed in Lhasa for one day and lived in cycling hostel where we do not want to live for the shabby condition. He is the first to leave. Although he does not share close relationships with us, he fulfills his responsibility as a team leader, finding hostels and explaining the next day’s road conditions based on tour guide (seen in the figure 3) and safety cautions for us. For a young man, only 21, who successfully brings the team to Lhasa, Cui does a good job. As a cycling fan, his main motivation is to fulfill his dream of cycling on G318.

Cui can partly represent the group of cyclists who like cycling and have cycling experience before. Their motivation is simple. We can generally attribute the motivation as to fulfill the goal of cycling on G318 given the challenges of the road. They also want to enjoy the scenery and other attractions on the road, but this is not their first concern. “I come here for cycling.” They insist on cycling the whole journey and compete with each other about the speed.

*Ying (26, female, quit job)*

Ying was inspired by a documentary about cycling on G318. In the documentary, one girl without any cycling experience cycled on G318 with her boyfriend was the one who wanted to do it. They became engaged during the journey, which Ying found especially touching. Because Ying’s new husband does not have time to come with her, Ying views this experience as her first time travelling alone. She has planned to do it for about 4 years. But she has never practiced

cycling before, and she just bought a new bicycle. She views the journey as cycling-tourism. She tells me:

I will take the van. I am not coming for competition or for religion, which are meaningless to me. I do not want to travel to metropolises, like Beijing and Shanghai. They are similar without fun, just full of shopping malls. If you let me choose where to go on my first trip, I would like to go to the West (of China). If you wanted one reason for this travel, the reason is that the journey is a leisure period, when I can do what I want to do without the burden of my family, children, or job.

I do not feel shameful about taking the van. Sometimes, I take the van because the sceneries are not good, and I am tired. The journey should not be a challenge. I want to be more independent by traveling alone and meeting within new people in a different environment. I do not have a serious religion or beliefs. Lhasa is not a holy place to me, just a destination. When I get back to reality, life just goes on. I view the journey in an ordinary way. I do not believe it can purify my mind. I want to do it just like you love someone without specific reasons.

*BC (28, male, unemployed for several years)*

BC is from a wealthy family and lives in a metropolis. He does not need to worry about making a living. He liked cycling when he was little, but he has not cycled for many years. His bicycle is also newly purchased. He takes vans frequently with Ying. As a healthy young man, however, it seems to me he easily breaks down and takes the van instead of cycling, especially when he is the last one or facing a headwind and long slopes. But he gives me a different explanation for taking the van instead of cycling:

I come here to experience friendship, scenery, food, and all the other things I have not experienced before. I do not think cycling on G318 is full of suffering. It is an experience. Continually cycling on difficult sections is eating bitterness. Cycling, pushing my bicycle heavily uphill, and taking the van are all experiences for me. I came here mainly for the experiences. Bearing hardships, including hail, rain, muddy road, and sunburn, is part of these experiences. I want to finish it comfortably, and to enjoy the journey. I prefer to cycle, play, chat, and take pictures at the same time instead of purely cycling. I come here not for the challenge of G318 but to experience it. Maybe next time I will challenge it.

*Zhou (23, male, quit job)*

Zhou and BC were abandoned by their team for cycling too slowly and joined my team together. Zhou was born to a poor family in a village and works as a seller of second-hand electronic devices in Shenzhen, one of the biggest metropolises. He does not have any cycling experience. His bike is newly purchased. He views the journey as cycling-tourism. “I came here just to play and enjoy the sceneries. If I can cycle, I cycle; if I cannot, I push the bicycle; if I cannot push it, then I take the van.” His knees hurt in the beginning, like me, which is why he takes the van frequently. He, BC, and Ying usually take the van together. He will continue cycling after his knees recover.

Ying, BC, and Zhou can represent the group of cyclists who come here with a relaxing attitude. They usually do not cycle and have long-distance cycling experience. They do not want to insist on cycling. They do not understand why they hold the “three-no” principle like Cui and Li. They also do not have the expectation of insisting on cycling to help them to transform or demonstrate their physical abilities and perseverance. They want to relax for a while and experience something different.

*Chen (24, male, college student)*

Chen lacks confidence of his competence in the job market because he graduated from a common college. The reason for his journey is inspired by the movie *Kora*, a popular film about cycling from Yunnan to Lhasa.

I was so addicted to the movie and wanted to do it like the hero after watching it. Cycling on G318 became my dream.

I want to experience those sceneries I have never met before, like Snow Mountains and primeval forests, which my hometown does not have. However, seeing similar scenery once is already enough.

I feel lost about the future and bit anxious about it. But it does not relate to the reasons I want to cycle on G318. Some people had a lot of expectations on the road and wanted to solve the troubles after the journey. It was impossible! I just want to play and relax. On the road, I think about my job sometimes or think about nothing. It is relaxing. After relaxing enough during the journey, I will find a job and work hard when I am back home.

Chen can represent the group of college students who do not like cycling and lacking experience. These cyclists usually knew G318 from the online narratives, films, short videos, and documentaries, then they want to do it. One college student found cycling on G318 online accidentally one night, then he could not sleep and felt so excited about it and wanted to do it. Like Chen who watched the film about cycling and could not stop to thinking about cycling on this road. Since Chen and other college student do not enter society, comparing to those cyclists who have jobs and other burdens, they have not too much pressure. But they still view it as a good way for relaxing and acquiring different experience.

*Bro Sun (37, male, driver)*

Bro Sun has a happy family with two cute daughters. He sold his truck and came to Chengdu to do the journey after being a truck driver for about 20 years. Before selling it, he became more and more upset and easily lost his temper. He used curse words when he was driving. He felt anxious and did not know why. The day he left home, there was a huge explosion accident near his house, but he still left as planned. At first, he prepared to cycle alone without a tour guide. He joined my team because he viewed our team as having a sense of community. He had wanted to cycle on 318 for the beautiful scenery since 2010. He did not think the sceneries were as beautiful as he expected after finishing it. He does not want challenge himself through the journey. Bro Sun did not like cycling and told me he would never cycle again. He wanted to change his career but hesitated about it. He did not know what he could do except as a truck driver.

How difficult it is to change your career in the 30s! I want to see my perseverance through the journey. If I can survive the tough sections on G318, I might be able to change my career.

I do not know why I want to do the journey and I do not know other people who also want to do it. It is not about a belief in cycling or Buddhism. I just think I need to cycle to the place (Tibet or Lhasa). Other ways, like by van or train, do not count. Life needs to be experienced a lot, I need to feel it, here, and I mean physical experiences. I do not have religion. I do not like to visit temples. I do not like to visit Tibetans' home and eat Tibetan food.

When I was cycling, my brain was empty, and I was only thinking how long it was to arrive at the destination. I enjoy it. When I am cycling every day, I do not feel anxiety, just cycling. My heart is much more at peace than at home. This month I do not need to think about anything. I am very comfortable, just physical tired. I felt peace on the road. When I get back, my anxiety will be relieved.

Bro Sun can represent cyclists who do not like cycling and feel anxiety and pressure of their lives. They want to escape and relax for a while. The reason they do not choose other leisure forms of tourism, because they have other motivation of doing it. They, like many other cyclists, view cycling on G318 as not only a tourism or cycling. It has other meanings. As I mentioned before, because of the extreme challenges for cyclists who lack cycling experience, some cyclists think they can have some changes of their life if they can finish this challenging journey. Like a cyclist, OB is in the same age with BroSun. The first time he planned to do it, he wanted to quit his stable but dull job and start his own business. He shared the similar idea with BroSun, "If I can finish the journey, then I will start my own business." After he finish his first journey about three years ago, he quit his original job and start his business, which brought him large pressure. He continued to come to cycle on G318 every year after the first time. This is his third time when I met him. When I asked the reasons, he told me, "all in all, I only want to relax for a while, then back to work."

*Tang (24, male, brings up the rear, quit job)*

Tang is willing to be the last and take care of the weakest. He may be the fastest one in the team, but he chooses to accompany the slowest patiently. His duty is heavier than the leader's. He is so energetic that cycling is not difficult for him, and he has the energy to help others. He fulfills his duty and helps almost all teammates, although he occasionally complains about the team and wants to quit and cycle alone. He is the only one we toast together at the farewell dinner for his responsibility and ability. Tang has loved cycling since childhood. He learned about the journey about four years ago. He feels the G318 is mysterious.

I insist on cycling on G318, not taking the van or pushing bicycle. I am not good at planning and insisting on one thing. I have not insisted for one thing. If I insist on cycling on G318 successfully, (he view it as a starting point), I probably could insist on doing what I want to do in the future.

I felt lost and pessimistic. I stayed at home for about two years: eating, sleeping, and playing video games. I was lounging at home; here, I feel so excited. Following my heart, I never feel tired. When I was cycling, sometimes, I thought I wasted my youth and regretted it.

I like to be in nature alone. I do not like to stay in the city. I like places surrounded by mountains and rivers. I also like historical architectures instead of modern architectures, such as the Bird's Nest.

I think I am a bit selfish and want to escape responsibility and reality. I do not know who I am and what I want, I just want to make a difference, so my life would be different from others. Cycling on G318 is facing myself and thinking about my life. However, after one week of cycling, my brain is empty; I do not have any deep thoughts so far. I do not expect G318 to bring something for me. I just want to relax.

*Xue (24, female, quit job)*

Xue is an introverted, independent, and strong woman who prefers to live in nature. Because her family wants her stay in Beijing with them, she has a job in Beijing. However, Xue is unhappy and depressed. She wants to escape the metropolis. That is why she quit her job and wants to do the things she wants to do first.

The thing I want to do most right now is cycling on G318, because it looks mysterious, which will probably change me. I do not know what my true self is, and I feel lost and confused. Cycling on G318 can give me more time to think about who I am. The other main expectation is the sceneries. The medium speed of cycling is a proper way to enjoy the sceneries.

I know I am not sociable; I hope to be more enthusiastic about life, the future, and myself. When I was working in Beijing, I felt like my life was meaningless. I felt conflicted in my mind and failed to decide whether to stay in Beijing or go outside to see the world. Staying in Beijing is only for my parents, because I do not like living in the city. Although I worked hard to adapt to life in Beijing and tried to find the beautiful parts of living in Beijing, I usually cycled in the suburbs when I had time.

Cycling for about one week, I do not feel confused anymore. I have decided to learn to make porcelain in Jingdezhen (a city famous for porcelain) after the journey. Cycling on G318 has positive effects. I was very confused before, and I could not figure it out at home. When I am on the road, it is easy to think clearly. I feel I cannot continue my previous life, which is irresponsible for my family and myself. I need to have my own life, live comfortably and free instead of the depressive life. I want to see the outside. I am willing to take risks to achieve it.

Tang and Xue can represent the young cyclists, usually 22 to 30 years old, who have a feeling of uncertainty. They usually like nature and dislike metropolises or urban areas. They usually do not want to follow the regular life path. But they do not know what they exactly want to do. Thus, they cannot get rid of the anxiety and the sense of losing the goal of life. Unlike Ying and BC, they have more expectations of the journey and have more serious attitude to the journey. They hope they can transform or improve themselves from the journey, also make an important decision during the journey, because it is a relaxing time to help them think their life by getting away from their regular lives.

*Li (26, male, quit job, Zhuang minority group)*

Li was an engineer before quitting his job. He and Cui successfully insisted on following the “three-no” principle. Unlike Cui, he does not have too much cycling experience. The reason he insists on following this principle is because of a promise to his dead friend. Li and his friend were supposed to come to Tibet together, but his friend died accidently. Like Chen and I, Li’s

knees hurt heavily at the beginning, he endured the pain and insisted on cycling. He joked himself that “I came here to abuse myself.” He viewed this journey as self-exile. After finishing it, Li felt that the burden in his heart was take off because he successfully finished the journey.

Some cyclists like Li do the journey due to heavy burdens or tragic stories. One high school student came to do it for his best friend died accidently like Li. I heard a story from a cyclist who had cycled on G318 years ago as a team leader. He told me the only female in his team was very quiet and insist of cycling although she did not have any cycling experience. Cycling on G318 with unfriendly road condition years ago is much tougher than today. When she successfully completed the journey, she told him that her child died accidently months ago, that was the reason. Yao, as I mentioned before (Chapter 3), wants to move on after ending his relationship with his ex-fiancé. They believe the journey has the function of healing.

Briefly, the other teammates have different motivations to do it. Yu (22, female quit job) quit the journey due to sickness. She told me she did not know why she wanted to cycle on G318. Bro Changsha has cycled for years and wanted to cycle around China, including cycling on G318. As a cycling fan for about three years, he began loving cycling for it is a health leisure activity. Li and Bro Changsha quit their jobs because their jobs do not have a promising future, and both tired their jobs after several years. The father and son in my team finish about half of the journey and take the van to Lhasa, they want to lose weight by such intense and arduous physical movement and enjoy the sceneries by cycling.

From my teammates’ statements, we can find diverse motivations. You can also be told from their statements that they have one common feature beneath these diverse motivations -- they want to be relaxing for a while. Given that they are modern Chinese, I attempt to explore a common motivation --longing for relaxing, by linking with modernity.

## **Cycling on G318—a Therapeutic Pause**

Before I did my fieldwork, I wondered why people would want to take such an arduous journey. People who are not cyclists seldom understand why people want to do it, even when they may meet on the same road. For example, these travelers who drive on G318, they basically know nothing about cyclists. These drivers view cyclists as crazy men or heroes because they do not know why people want to eat bitterness. Some cyclists could not figure out the exact reasons, they just told me “We are weirdos,” “I do not know why, I probably come eat bitterness on G318,” “I want to be different without following the regular life steps: finding a job, getting married, raising children, and taking care of parents”—these statements are frequently heard and shared by cyclists. As an unpopular and challenging form of tourism, the journey brings cyclists a unique experience to construct their personal identity. Travelers undoubtedly find themselves and build their identities against conformity by such physical suffering. The sufferings easily give a sense of achievement which is difficult to obtain in daily life. However, it is inappropriate to view cycling on G318 as a liminal zone or as a polar contrast with one’s boring regular life.

### *Being “in there” and “out of there”*

Being “on the road” means entering a space different from their common life space. They repeat the same activity—cycling—day after day. Things are simplified into riding the bicycle from one place to the next, with the most common thoughts being how do they overcome the long and steep slope, how many kilometers are left to the pass, etc. From my participant observations and interviews, the most common topics are cycling, mountain illness, and taking the van or not as well as the most difficult sections of the journey. Almost everything involved day-to-day cycling issues. Cyclists usually used “I am going back to reality” to describe the journey’s end.

Whether they claim to be escaping reality or not, they are being there, relieving themselves of the tensions of regular life. Regardless of whether they are cycling enthusiasts or not, their bodies are kept away from their daily settings. Loving cycling while viewing the road as a challenging and demanding road does not mean they do not want to escape their regular lives for a while to take a rest. Lots of cycling enthusiasts also view the sport as a way to relax and leave their daily lives behind, enjoying the pleasures and challenges brought from the journey.

Tourism is a special “pressure valve” for modern people. Regardless of the motives, imaginations, and expectations of the G318, these cyclists leave their regular lives for about one month to do simple cycling activities. Although it is arduous and can hardly be tolerated at times, cycling on G318 is still a way of escaping the boredom and meaninglessness of routine. Most cyclists return to reality feeling recharged and energetic for a while. Is it true? Indeed, some cyclists respond to me that because their lives are so boring or tedious, they want to take a rest for a while and to try something different. Some want to search for the meaning of their life through the journey. Some want to escape the reality. According to other interviewees and my follow-up observations and interviews on WeChat, cyclists generally agree with one statement, “When you get back to reality, you still do what you need to do and face troubles in reality.” But, they leave their regular life settings and daily routines for about twenty days to one month when they are cycling on G318.

Cyclists are not entering an isolation space. I agree with Pons (2003) that tourism is not a detached world. Despite the temporary separation from their regular lives, cyclists still have a connection with their families and friends through mobile phones and social media. Their bodies have escaped regular routines only temporarily while their social connections with regular life

still exist. This unique life-world is not an isolated space. We do not need to equate the journey to the liminality. The traditional binaries—home/away, authentic/inauthentic, extraordinary/mundane, present/absent—should be reconsidered (Hannam, Butler & Paris 2014). Under the influence of modern technology, Cohen also changed his view: “The increased intimacy afforded through new technologies is also interrelated with the blurring of the distinction between the extraordinariness of touristic experiences and the mundaneness of everyday life” (Cohen & Cohen 2012).

### *An Unusual Routine during Cycling on G318*

Many formal researchers think tourism “is compensatory behavior for a life that is, compared to life on tour, unpleasable, flat and dull”; however, the separation between life on tour and everyday life should not be this invidious division (MacCannell 2001). It seems that the assumption of a traditional division between tourism and everyday life is that one’s daily routine lacks change, is dull, and is boring whereas life during tourism is exotic, exciting, and never boring (MacCannell 1976; Cohen 1979; Urry 1990, 2002). Based on the research discussed herein, I doubt this division between life on tour and daily life.

The journey repeats the cycle for about 20 to 29 days on the same road. It is an unusual routine because modern human beings seldom have the opportunity to cycle for about one month. It is another kind of routine because it is based on the tour guide and repeats the same activity. Cyclists agree that they have a regular routine. “Every day, I get up, eat breakfast, and begin cycling, take pictures and have rest on the road; after I arrive at the hostel, I eat dinner and take a bath, go to bed, and chat with friends or family through mobile phones. Tomorrow just repeats it again.” Indeed, from my personal experience, even the food provided on the road is similar (i.e., Sichuan cuisine). That is why we lose our sense of time and space, because the daily

activity is so similar on the road. Although teammates accompany you, we are cycling alone or not talking too much. Thus, cyclists feel boring when the scenery is not appealing. After cycling for a long time, when we came close to Lhasa, we all felt tired and wanted to end the journey quickly. In this unusual routine, repeatedly cycling day after day became dull too.

On the other hand, is the daily routine boring? Some interviewees told me directly they came here because life is boring. However, it also has creative and unexpected part. Quebao, a sophomore, began to miss his regular daily life on campus after cycling for about 20 days. He told me he once thought his campus life was boring, but “actually it is good when I am recalling my life on campus.” Also, with modern technologies, in this time–space compression era, our daily spaces are not physical spaces, but other spaces, like online spaces where we connect with people, which means “our everyday spaces are full of exotic and spectacular signs” (Larsen 2008).

There is no detached world; all aspects of social life are infused with elements of everyday life, and no practices escape “everydayness” (Lefebvre 1991). Tourism should not be viewed as the liminal space and the opposite of the “dull everyday life.” However, spending so many words on this unique routine is to rethink the theoretical framework of tourism and modernity. Is cycling on G318 a therapeutic pause (Brown 2013), or a liminal space for searching existential authenticity?

### *Rethinking Existential Authenticity*

According to Wang (2000), existential authenticity has two dimensions. The first is intro-personal authenticity (bodily feelings and self-making or self-identity); Self-realization is not from daily routine and work, but by challenging themselves, for example, adventure tourism.

Inter-personal authenticity is family ties and touristic *communitas*. Because in these two spheres, people shed their social statuses temporally, thus, they can be authentic (1999).

If we applied Wang's concept of existential authenticity on this research, we can view such arduous journey as a way for cyclists to challenge themselves, to have uncommon experiences, to find themselves, to quest for authenticity, to close to the nature, and to enter the *communitas* by putting themselves into extreme situations. Continuing Wang's idea, authenticity does not only mean to quest for ideal community and to be close to the nature, which are lacking in modern metropolis. The other is self-development or shaping my life to make a difference by sublime, significant, different, and courageous things, like cycling on G318. I suppose this cycling journey as a way of constructing identity by self-realization and self-fulfillment. However, is it a way to demonstrate that they can still control their lives and get rid of their feelings of anxiety, powerlessness, and deficiency? Self-realization in this sense is the need to escape role-playing, and to be authentic (Handler 1986). "As the full development of authenticity, it is expressed as identity, autonomy, individuality, self-development, and self-realization" (Berman 1970). Do cyclists really have the clear aim of finding existential authenticity (true self) in such extreme way?

From the data collection, finding the true self is not the chief concern for majority of cyclists. I also admit that I met several cyclists who have the motivation of finding authenticity from the journey. However, I do not think their motivation can represent the majority of cyclists' motivations. More importantly, do we become authentic by completing an arduous journey in a less modern way? Do we stay in the inauthenticity made by modernity? Even if it were true, can we find existential authenticity through extreme activities (Wang 1997, 1999)?

From the motivations and expectations, cyclists may wish to find their true selves and meanings of their lives, and to make a difference through cycling on G318. They may enjoy the sceneries, make important decisions, improve themselves, meet with lots of people, and have novel experiences. However, they may change a little from this journey and still need to face reality after the journey. Cyclists who have the motivations of escaping reality, dullness, meaninglessness, and alienation still have such feelings when they are back to regular life, which are supported by my follow-up observations. One interviewee (male, 35) was a painter before. However, he has to be a bus driver to support his family. He is very sensitive with the negative sides of modernity. He tells me he lives like a zombie and wants to be free of family responsibility and modern life. He still expresses such depressions on his social media when he is back home. Based on his experience, existential authenticity cannot be found from physical sufferings of this special journey or any other kinds of tourism. Tourism is not an antidote to alienation at home or cultivating or encountering true self during travel (Shepherd 2015).

Besides, not all of the cyclists have the quest of finding true self from this arduous journey. As Lucy (38, female, white collar) told me “I just choose bicycle as the transportation tool to perform the journey, then, nothing is special. I do not give the journey too many meanings, and I do not expect the journey can bring me something. It is suffering, but still a simple travel to me.” Some cyclists shared the similar idea with me. Thus, I doubt the previous theory framework of existential authenticity in tourism from this research. However, the key point in this thesis is the way of this journey-- cycling instead of using modern transportation mode is already a way against modernity, which I will discuss in the last chapter. And the journey is a therapeutic pause by doing the simple bodily movement—cycling to temporarily escape their regular life and relax.

## Conclusion

In brief, the general theoretical framework of existential authenticity as tourism motivator seems not the core part of this thesis according to my data collection. I admit that my hypothesis in the proposal of this research focused on pilgrimage and existential authenticity. After several days of fieldwork, I began to realize that motivations or the question of “why they want to do it” may not be as important as I thought before. And, honestly, it is difficult to present and analyze their diverse motivations in this thesis because of my limited ability. As I mentioned the difficulties of collecting and analyzing motivations before, I attempt to analyze cyclists’ motivations from different age groups and interesting level in cycling. However, cyclists usually have combined motivations, such as those people who love cycling and want to fulfill the dream of cycling on G318 also want to relax for a while.

Here, I do not deny this special journey has no connection with modernity or Chinese rapid modernization. I hesitated to apply the conceptual ‘authenticity’ (Shepherd 2015) into this cycling journey according to the interviews and the participant observation. Simply put, from an etic perspective, no matter what cyclists’ motivations are, the journey gives them a chance to relax and make a tiny difference compared with others. We are modern people and women sharing a common fate and feelings. Although some travelers may feel motivated to escape modernity for a short time, any kind of tourism, including cycling on G318, cannot dispel the negative side of modernity.

## **CHAPTER 6: Cycling on G318-- Embodied Masculinity**

This chapter discusses the journey from a gender perspective. According to the previous discussions, G318 is a risky space closely associated with masculinity. When people think about G318, they will link it with risk, toughness, and all other features of masculinity. As ideas about dangerous and arduous cycling on G318 are repeated again and again, it gives cyclists a strong sense of conquering and achievement. Thus, male cyclists, especially young men, want to pursue a masculinity usually lacking in their regular life.

Cycling on G318 is used to demonstrate and construct masculinity. Because this arduous journey involves demanding physical conditions, to many male cyclists, it is usually viewed as a sign of masculinity. The risky journey also represents a sense of fear and excitement rarely found in regular life. Thus, male cyclists can construct identity and masculinity through this unique bodily movement.

This journey is an embodiment of masculinity. The body plays a role in gender difference, which is inescapable in the construction of masculinity (Cornell 1995: 56). This embodiment is a way to describe the manner in which the bodily basis of an individuals' actions and interactions are socially structured: this embodiment is a social as well as natural process. (Ateljevic, Morgan & Pritchard, 2007: 7). This special journey provides an opportunity for male cyclists to demonstrate physical ability and acquire a special life experience in order to construct masculinity. Meanwhile, female cyclists the absolute minority group on this journey, have their gender image changed as a result of the journey. More importantly, the male cyclists are inclined to endow female cyclists with a masculine identity— 'manly woman'—because of the risky, arduous journey, and the gender stereotype they hold. In short, cycling on G318 is a physical challenge whose successful completion reinforces a masculine identity within participants.

Apart from the discussions of about embodied masculinity, this chapter also intends to address the following questions: How do female cyclists view themselves performing the journey? If tourism is a metaphor for the way we lead our everyday lives, how do masculinities and gender relations present themselves in this unique space away from home, and how are gender roles and identities carried over into this tourism practice?

### **Risks of the Journey**

The toughness and dangers of the G318 journey are voluntary risks. Cyclists probably need to consider for years whether they should undertake it. Before doing it, they need to argue with their family members for a long period. Even older male cyclists who are the heads of their families will still find it necessary to argue with family members, while some young college students do not tell their parents at all. The majority of cyclists who are under 18 have to tell their parents in order to get money to do it. Young, economically independent cyclists do not want to tell their parents because their family members will prevent their journey due to the imagined risks, including the stereotype of “barbarian Tibetans.” Even those cyclists with much long-distance cycling experience will still need to argue with their family. Generally, cyclists’ fathers will support riders as they view the journey as an opportunity for self-improvement, while their mothers usually do not understand and remain against it due to the risks.

For only children the pressure from their parents is generally much stronger as families with only one child face a higher risk. The only-child experiences over-protection, as seen in Xing (27, male, engineer). When I was interviewing him, he was solving a Rubik’s cube. He told me, “See like the Rubik's Cube, I live my life in the center of the cube surrounded by the four walls of my family’s protection.” After being an engineer for roughly three years, Xing felt tired and the need for a long vacation in order to relax. As a cyclist who views cycling as his lifestyle,

the G318 was the first vacation destination that came to mind. However, his parents were strongly against this trip due to the risks. He had to go to Lhasa by train with his father at first, though, after the short trip they went back home. He left home again with his bicycle, which is the most interesting strategy of negotiating with family members.

Before and during the journey, like the majority of cyclists, I was also worried about the risks of the journey, and afraid of the accidents I might face according to travel notes and other online information. As my teammate Ying asked me at the night before us departure, “If you do not need to do your research, do you want to do this?” I told her I would not do it because of the suffering and risks, but especially the risks. As an only-child, I understand Xing’s situation.

Although cyclists may feel that it is not so dangerous after completing the journey, a majority of them hesitate to do it. They imagine the risks of the journey as a double-edged sword: one aspect endows cyclists with a sense of fulfillment and conquest, while they are also afraid of performing the journey because of the risks. I met many cyclists who had hesitated for several years to do it, not only due to lack of time or money, but also to the risks of the road. I know one cyclist who gave up before departing because of the risks.

Cyclists view this voluntary risk journey as crazy. Male cyclists laugh at themselves for undertaking this journey, but also enjoy displaying their masculinity during the journey. Masculinity is no longer demonstrated in their daily lives. The traditional divisions between male and female in China are disappearing, and men’s masculinity is not as easily embodied through being a breadwinner and sole leader of the family. Like adventure tourists, backpackers, and trekkers, male cyclists use the journey to demonstrate their courage, strength, identity, and cultural capital (Thurnell-Read, Casey & Macmillan 2014: 32).

## **Masculinity in the Journey**

### *Taking the Van and Masculinity*

Once male cyclists want to demonstrate increased masculinity through this bodily movement, their masculinities will then hamper their desire to take the van, unless they are injured, sick, or facing other emergencies. Taking the van generally indicates that they are too weak to endure the risks and tough conditions, and this damages their masculinities. Some male interviewees are reluctant to admit that they have taken vans before, and some even lie about it. Only because I learned they had from their teammates, did they have to admit it. One interviewee who undertook the journey impulsively with a rented bicycle insisted on denying he had ever taken vans, even after his teammates demonstrated that he had with them. Perhaps because he is from Fujian Province where the patriarchal system is deeply entrenched, his identity as a male has more gender privilege than others. This would influence his performance of being a man, since admitting to taking the van would damage his masculinity.

Some male interviewees, like BC, prefer to use their enjoyment of the scenery or the seeking of different experiences to explain taking the van. It seems that there are male cyclists who agree that the journey is undertaken to demonstrate masculinity. Without this, you need to find alternative explanations for taking the van. While males will tend to think that taking the van is damaging to their self-esteem, female cyclists usually admit it openly. For example, according to the questionnaires, about 50% of male respondents said they won't take a van, while only about 25% of female respondents said they won't take a van.

### *Cycling Speed and Masculinity*

Cycling speed is one aspect of masculinity. Young male cyclists care seriously about achieving high speeds and who is the first to arrive at the destination. “How many hours did you spend today,” and “what is your speed when climbing a mountain” are the most popular topics of conversation among male cyclists. Male cyclists who lack strength, perseverance, or proper techniques for cycling the long slope may boast about how fast they can reach when they go downhill to demonstrate their courage. I met two males who take vans for roughly 800 km who boast about their fast cycling speed when they go downhill. One said his speed could reach 67 km/h, which is very dangerous. I only found this among male cyclists. Female cyclists never boast about speed when they go downhill. In fact, they are usually very prudent when they go downhill. And female cyclists generally are inclined to downplay the risks and toughness associated with the journey.

Competition is unique to young males. Older male cyclists do not have the intention of competing with other cyclists, but rather seek to follow their cycling tempo. Masculinities are shaped by differences of age. Older cyclists reported that if they were still young they would demonstrate their masculinity by competing with others. Chen was usually viewed as the weakest male in our team due to his slim body. He was my companion during more than half of the journey. He is very gentle, accepts the fact he is not strong, and becomes fast in the last stage of the journey. In Lhasa, I asked him how he feels about cycling with me, a female. He initially downplayed the time we cycled together and explained that his reason for this is that he lacks cycling experience. He decided to continue cycling as a hobby, and he wants to compete with other males in the future.

### *The Skin Color and Masculinity*

Skin color is another way to use body to construct masculinity. After the journey, cyclist's skin would be much darker than when they were at home. Males usually like to post their pictures through social media, one before the journey, and another after to demonstrate the toughness of the journey. My teammate BC takes vans frequently, but he refuses to use any skin protection. Thus, his skin became coarse and dark quickly. It appears on his skin that he had a tough time during the journey. Like many males, he also posted pictures of himself before and after the journey on his social media accounts. Even though in the high-altitude areas with strong ultraviolet rays it is easy to suffer sunburn, some males are reluctant to apply sunscreen or cover their skin, because females are usually associated with this action. They believe that males should be rough. Because of gender stereotypes wherein females should have white and smooth skin, some males even discourage females from joining because female's skin would be darker or get scarce on their faces during cycling. Also, because of a general aesthetic inclination, female cyclists overall did their best to protect their skin.

### *Bitterness and Masculinity*

Young males view the journey as an opportunity to mature by enduring tough and bitter conditions usually lacking in their regular lives. Some young cyclists want their sons, if they should have any in the future, to also do it. This is a result of males usually thinking that the bitterness of the journey will steel themselves, hone their characteristics, and improve their will power. Being tough and strong are key features of masculinity, which is why males usually have the need to "eat bitterness" which refers to a Chinese traditional value for young men. As Gu (male, 23-year-old, quit job) told me, "Young men should endure hardships. I do the journey because I want to eat bitterness. However, I only feel tired since the road condition is so good

and the related service are developed so well.” Not only do young males have such thoughts, but elderly males also think the journey is a good opportunity to improve young men.

Males describe the journey as bitter and tiring, while females usually describe it as a tiring journey. Female cyclists tend to view the journey more calmly than males, do not endow diverse meanings to it, but do have diverse expectations for the journey. Female cyclists usually view it as tourism: “I just choose to do it by bicycle.” Females usually do not have the need to eat bitterness as a result of the journey or experience the bitterness of cycling on G318. I only met Jiang (female, undergraduate student) who wanted to eat bitterness during the journey as a way to improve herself. As one female, Mao, said, “The feeling of tired varies from person to person, however I never think cycling on this road is bitter. I only feel tired. Cycling from Tibet to Xingjiang is bitter, and that is why I dare not to cycle on that route”.

#### *“Niubility”, “Zhuangbility” and Masculinity*

*Niubility*” and *“Zhuangbility”* are not special terms in this journey, but coarse, popular words among young people, especially males. *Niubility* is a Chinglish noun describing formidability, incredibility, or awesomeness.<sup>16</sup> *Zhuangbility* means “to boast.” On this journey, *“niubility”* is a word used among cyclists or outsiders like drivers on the same road to admire cyclists’ physical ability and cycling techniques or the will power needed to insist on cycling. It is relatively easier to acquire *niubility* through this bodily movement than it is to acquire it in a cyclist’s regular life. This may be, in part, the reason it appeals to young males who have such a need to demonstrate their masculinities from the journey. As one young interviewee explained to

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<sup>16</sup> -bility is English suffix, while niubi literary means cow’s pussy. Retrieved from <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=niubility>

me, "Young men in 20s want to be confirmed their values by others." I only know males who did not have any cycling experience who made the impulsive decision to undertake the journey. Some of them cannot complete it, as they expected, so they have to mock themselves through *zhuangbility*, like BC who came to do it impulsively. I took the van with him when we went to Mangkang. He told me, "I came here just for *zhuangbility*." It was his self-mockery, which means he only could pretend to have *niubility*.

In brief, male cyclists expect that the journey endows the male body with esteemed qualities, and that a deeply meaningful and transformative experience awaits the male hero after overcoming the obstacles (Ateljevic, Morgan & Pritchard, 2007: 51, 56). Male cyclists aim to transform themselves from everydayness to sublime through the journey by acquiring masculinity from it. If this is the case, do female cyclists share the same expectation(s) as male cyclists? How do females view themselves performing the journey? What is the gender difference and mode of gender relations during the journey?

### **The Gender Difference in the Journey—from Female Cyclists' Perspective**

Gender is constructed as an act (Butler 1990) because of contrasts in the stereotypes of women's vulnerability and their need for protection. Patriarchal discourse gives the impression that female bodies are vulnerable (Marcus 1992). Gender difference constructs or deconstructs the masculine and feminine as opposite poles. The risks and suffering of the road are 'naturally' associated with masculinity, and also reflect and reproduce hegemonic norms of gender behaviors.

Tourist space is gendered (Thurnell-Read, Casey & Macmillan 2014:4). Gender plays an important role in the construction and experience of tourist sites. This journey seems to naturally belong to the male, while shopping tourism in metropolises seems naturally linked to the female.

Female is the minority group on G318 as only about 10% of cyclists are female. Females face more obstacles than males when they decide to do the journey. Although the division of traditional gender space is disappearing, it is still expected that women will stay at home. However, naturalizing the female body, as a social practice, still works. Females have less mobility than men. In tourism spaces with unfamiliar settings, the general idea is that the female body is open to danger due to the fragility of the female body. Female cyclists themselves also think it is dangerous to cycle G318 alone.

I met several male cyclists who cycle alone on the road, but only met one female who had cycled alone for several months around China and decided to remain alone on G318. I interviewed her before her departure, I was not certain that she in fact still cycled alone on G318. Fu (female, 27, quit job) decided cycle alone. She is a lesbian who dresses like a man. She cycled the north Sichuan-Tibet (G317) route at first, then shifted to G318 from Litang. G317 is more difficult than G318 because of the awful road conditions. When she cycled alone, she endured snowstorms, and a bumpy, muddy road. She needed to take care everything by herself, such as repairing her bicycle. She did what the majority of cyclists probably dare not do since she prefers to cycle alone in order to enjoy more freedom. Cycling the road from Chengdu to Lhasa is part of her long journey, though she travels from Tibet to Nepal, and to India by airplane and by van. After about five years of arduous work, she quits her job and plans to take a roughly two-month long journey. Even though her cycling journey is arduous, she takes it as normal travel, and she did not have expectations that she would transform or improve herself from it. Unlike some male cyclists who insist on not taking a van, if she wishes to, she does. She had no intention of improving her perseverance or of demonstrating herself by cycling on the arduous section. Her main reason for taking the van is that the scenery in some sections is not beautiful. For another

girl, Wan (21, work in family business)<sup>17</sup> who cycled with different teams, taking the van depended on her mood. She cycled from Batang to Mangkang, the most difficult section of the journey, but she may also choose to take the van because of the unappealing scenery, “I do not understand those who are against taking the van.”

Female cyclists generally do not have a strong motivation to demonstrate physical ability or a desire to improve themselves from the journey. However, no matter how female cyclists view themselves, they were usually titled as “tough girls” or “manly women” for doing this arduous journey or entering the risky space that usually belongs to men. The desire among male cyclists to display masculinity, as well as general gender relations in daily life affect and develop a temporal mode of gender relationships among cyclists.

### **The Mode of Gender Relationship on the Road**

Cyclists take the structure of gender roles that support everyday routines into the journey. “These social relations of gender are both realized and symbolized in the bodily performances” (Cornell 1995: 54). Mainly because of the demanding physical strength required for the journey, female cyclists are marginalized by male cyclists. Some female cyclists also highlight their masculine aspects and present as tough girls. Because the general view is that the female body is weaker, males have the responsibility of taking care of females on the road, and females are seldom blamed or mocked for taking vans. Gender relationships during the journey do not simply echo the structures of inequality in reality but display in more dynamic way.

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<sup>17</sup> Wan and Fu are lesbian with masculine signs, however, they do not want to show or demonstrate their masculinity through the journey. This thesis focuses on the embodied masculinity. That is to say, it more focuses on physical masculinity.

*"I am a male chauvinist." ----Li (male, 27, quit job)*

Li admits that he possesses male chauvinism (*Ch. Da nanzi zhuyi*). My teammates, especially female teammates do not like Li because of it. Sometimes his arrogance may offend female teammates including me. For example, when we were close to Lhasa, he told me that the conditions of the road were going to be bumpy the next day, so he suggested I take the van. This was not the first time he said something like this to me. It was reasonable for him to suggest that I take the van if I was uncomfortable, however, it was unacceptable to suggest that I take the van just because the road conditions were not good in a few sections. When I interviewed him in Lhasa, I paid attention to his ideas regarding gender difference during the journey.

Xiqian: How do you view males and females during the journey?

Li: Male cyclists can cycle alone. However, I suggest females should not cycle alone. It is not gender discrimination but a consideration of safety. Females cycle with males, thus they can fix problems together, like a blowout. Basically, female cyclists do not have these skills. For example, Xue's tire is flat, but she doesn't know how to fix it and depends on us (male teammates). When females are in such situations, they need companions. Female endurance is better than male, which is recognized by almost everybody. Because females can bear more pain than men, such as in childbirth. However, females need companions, especially in emergencies. Even if the companion cannot help solving problems, they can make sure she feels safe. When male cyclists face problems, they are inclined to fix them by themselves. Otherwise, they will lose face. Because they do not want to others to think they lack the ability to fix them (bicycles), which is a sign of fragility. Thus, if male fixes something alone this shows to others how *niubility* he is. The difference between males and females on the road is that males who cycle alone will learn a lot from the journey and help them to earn face and esteem, while females, except tough women, need somebody to help them on the road.

Xiqian: What do you think about taking the van when male and female cyclists do not want to cycle?

Li: If they do not feel well, they can take the van. However, if they have physical ability and still want to take the van, I cannot agree, no matter the gender. Because I think you have to be prepared and have the expectation of difficulties. (Of course, you (Xiqian) are a female, weaker (than males), so you can take the van). I think G318 or the road from Tibet to Xingjiang there is no difference between male and female (on the issue of taking the van).

Xiqian: How do you think females decide to take the van because of dangers? For example, I choose to take the van to Mangkang because the road is so dangerous. Meanwhile Chen worries that he cannot catch up with you guys, so he takes the van with me.

Li: We all want to have a safe journey. It is reasonable to take the van because of dangers. Chen's decision is also reasonable. We do not have the energy to take care of him and wait for him to consider the situation that day. Your quitting affects him, so it is reasonable for him to take the van.

Xiqian: How do you view the competition between you (male teammates)?

Li: I think most males have the desire to compete with others to earn face. This is influenced by social environment. Maybe it is the heritage of Confucianism. We (male cyclists) are close (in physical ability) to each other, why do you go ahead of me? Men feel the need for superiority, especially those who have failed in their lives or are unsatisfied with reality. They need to find someplace to release dissatisfaction and to acquire achievement and superiority, like racing with others.

Xiqian: Have you had such consciousness of competence?

Li: Of course. I do not know Tang's speed when he climbs the long slope, because he brings up the rear at the end of the team. My speed is not the fastest when climbing slopes, but I insist. My speed is slow in the downhill. I need to surpass others. I have a sense of competence. After all, I lose face when I am going downhill, I need to earn face when I am uphill.

Li has a strong consciousness of competition and self-esteem, so he always competes with others in his heart and wants to be the fastest. He is usually the first to arrive at a destination. During his interview he emphasizes "face" which plays a crucial role in Chinese society, which is focused on self-esteem. To him, I think "face" refers to one aspect of masculinity. He laughs at himself, "I come here to find enough bitterness to eat." Li takes the journey seriously and had expectations for the journey. He waited a relatively long time to decide to come because of risks of the journey. He also had expectations of improving himself from the journey because of the challenges and risks, thus he insists on cycling with "three-no" principle, even though his knees hurt. This insistence is not only due to a promise made to his dead friend.

He inclines to enjoy the freedom of the journey and focuses on his own cycling. Although he joins our team, he does not want to take on more responsibility considering his ability.

Actually, before Xue left, Xue was always the fastest. As Li said, Xue is alone on the team because of her fast speed. Li has a strong consciousness of competition among males. He did not comment on Xue's speed, just worried about her safety considering that nobody can be her companion on the team.

When I took the van with Chen and other teammates from Bantang to Mangkang, only five males Li, Cui, Tang, Bro Changsha, and Bro Sun cycled the section. Tang usually needed to bring up the rear, however Tang became the fastest on that day. Li arrived at the bicycle hostel about three hours later than Tang, and Li's bottom was very hurt from the continuous cycling. He was uncomfortable being the last. When Tang tried to teach him how to cycle, Li became angry, "I do not want to you teach! Do not force your idea on me!" Tang also became angry about Li's misunderstanding of his kindness.

I met Li on the first day of the journey when he became my teammate. His behavior, personal interpretations of cycling on G318, and views about females' cycling on this road made me eschew his words and think about gender roles and difference during the journey. His thoughts about gender difference were shared by other male cyclists I interviewed, thus, are representative.

*"You are crazy", "I am not crazy" --Mao and Bear*

I did a group interview with Mao (female, 23, graduated from college) and Bear (male, about 40, high school teacher) in Lhasa. The interview shows the tensions between males and females during the journey, and reflects male cyclists' gender stereotypes toward females, i.e. that females have a delicate body, should not do this, or if they do, that they are crazy. However, female cyclists without any cycling experience do not view themselves in this manner.

Xiqian: If you are just here to enjoy the scenery, why can you not ride easily? I feel you insist on cycling and taking risks sometimes.

Mao (smile): I did not take risks in my life, even though I think I had the ability to do it. If something was very dangerous, I would reconsider. I had considered cycling to Mangkang. The weather was good, which is why I choose to cycle that day. The feeling of being tired varies from person to person, however I never think cycling on this road is painful.

Her own definition is to view it as tourism, and to just choose cycling as a transportation tool.

One reason for her insistence on cycling is she did not want to miss scenery. She took an easy attitude toward the journey:

If you have enough physical ability, there is no difference between male and female. The speed between male and female is still different, however, looking at gender as a whole, there is no difference. I do not think the journey is more difficult for females. If you have strength, then you keep cycling; if you cannot, you can choose to take the van. Taking the van is a personal choice. There is no gender difference.

Bear, the leader of the team, told me that the team was large and so was separated into different groups. Some males who cycle fast chose to take vans because of rain and low temperature, but the two girls (Mao and the other girl Quan (about 22 years old)) continue to cycle. Bear admits he also wants to give up, but he followed them and continued to ride until 8:30 PM to the destination. Bear views the two girls highly, but still thinks they are crazy. However, Mao's responded to that day, "Quan and I think it is the happiest day during the journey," even they met rain and hailstones when they were climbing the hill. "We cycled slowly at the end, took pictures and enjoyed the scenery. Others may think I am crazy, but I feel it was fun, I enjoy taking pictures with diverse postures, enjoying the scenery and the companionship with my teammates."

Mao does feel a little uncomfortable about Bear who thinks she is crazy for insisting on cycling. "I cannot change his mind, when he is at this age. He has stubborn ideas about

differences between males and females. They think females are weaker than males. He cannot change his idea; hence I do not care about his idea.” She repeats her idea again at the end of the interview: “only crazy men want to use this road as an outlet. I came here just for fun. I enjoy the whole journey”.

Regarding gender difference, Mao agrees a female’s speed and physical ability is weaker than a male’s. Bear thinks there is a psychological and physical difference between male and female, but he also thinks females have stronger endurance than males.

*Su (48, female, dormitory staff)’s Voice—Reflects the Gender Relationship in Reality*

As mentioned before, female cyclists in the age group 40 to 55 years old are very few compared to females in other age groups. Su’s narratives provide us the explanation. Su, as a middle age woman, needs to weigh her age and physical ability for a long time in order to make the determination because the Chinese tend to think physical ability declines in middle-age. Last year she unintentionally joined the local cycling club after her son’s college Entrance Examination. In China, the Examination is one of the most important events for the whole family and they think the student should do the best, especially the mother. She felt relaxed while cycling. If she was annoyed, she would be happy again after cycling. She also joined a local cycling race and received a good ranking.

She yearned for Tibet for many years, but never imagined she would go by cycling. She viewed it is a good opportunity to cycle with her local cycling club this time. She, like many middle-aged women, worried that if she did not do it then, she would have no physical ability to do it in the future. Before she came, she persuaded her husband and son, and told some of her family members and friends. Her son did not agree with her decision:

“Tibet is not a place you can go. Why didn't you go to Tibet when you were younger?” My son said this to me. Before he went to college, I was always accompanying him. The journey has great meaning to me, especially for a woman at my age. It is very challenging, and I want to transcend myself. My life is worth doing this. This is a crazy decision, and no one can stop me. I listened and obeyed my family before, never thinking about myself. It is time for me to follow my own decision to challenge it.

Another middle-age female, Runan (female, 54, retired) is the first woman her age to cycle on G318. Others viewed her as a manly woman and played jokes on her: “you should be written into the county history (gazetteer).” While she said:

I am not that kind of manly woman. At the beginning, I was worried about cycling with 9 males. Then, others would say something if I went out with only one man. It is OK to be with 9 males.

The road is difficult, a great challenge for women, because of the physical demands. Females can compete with males in other aspects, however, we cannot compete with them in strength.

Middle-aged female cyclists are influenced by their gender relations in regular life. They have stronger consciousness of gender difference than young females. As Runnan told me, the biggest reason for her hesitation to do it was because she would be the only female surrounded by males, which is different with young female cyclists like myself, who usually do not mind the close relationship with male teammates. Female cyclists usually do not mind sharing the same room with male teammates. Young females view themselves as tough women from a psychological perspective.

*“Manly girl is independent” –Jiang (female, 22, graduate from college)*

This statement is shared by female and male cyclists. Jiang, an undergraduate, organized a team by herself. She admits that gender difference exists during the journey because of biological difference. As a woman with strong character, she feels she does not need extra care, however she has never been cycling alone. She viewed the journey as a means of improving

herself because of the bitterness. She simply notified her parents she was going to do it and did not care about their opinions. On the way to Bangda, the five male cyclists worried about robbery and decided to take the van, but the girls were against it, given that the road to Bangda is easy to ride, and they were not afraid of robbery. Because of her strong character, the other male cyclists all listened to Jiang's opinions.

*"I am the manly girl" -- Echo (26, female, graduate student)*

Like Mao and many other female cyclists, Echo held a low-key view of the journey without expectations of self-improvement. She had three-years cycling experience. She explained her reasons for coming on the journey, "I came here because it is a long journey that will kill time, and it is challenging." She also holds a rational view of gender difference on the road, however, is also influenced by the gender stereotypes toward females. She viewed herself as a manly girl in another way, which is different from male's view female cyclists as manly women.

Echo: Many people ask me why I do not take the van. I do not want to demonstrate my strength, just think there is no need to take the van. Today I do not feel well, nearly broken down because I am on my period. I feel very tired and in pain but never think about taking the van. Many people think female cyclists on this road are awesome and I agree. The road is not easy to ride.

Xiqian: How do you view manly female cyclists on this road?

Echo (smile): I am the manly girl. I mean I have a strong and independent character.

Xiqian: Do you think such character does not belong only to men?

Echo: Yes.

Xiqian: My teammates said that on the last stage of the journey, there is no difference between male and female.

Echo: I do not know why. A female who completes the journey still is female. Why is it only men can cycle on the road? Females also can.

Her teammate, a girl, shares the same idea with Echo. Many female cyclists have the same feeling, including me. Maybe female physical ability is weaker than that of males, however, this road is not extremely difficult. If you insist on it, you can complete it.

*“My personality is like man, an easygoing man” -- Hui (21, female, a college student)*

Hui, as the previous leader of the cycling association at her university, should lead a journey on G318 once, as dictated by tradition. Last year, she had to give up her attempt because the road was ruptured. She wanted to finish the journey completely. Cycling on the road brings her a sense of achievement and conquering. This time she came with the club members. She was the last one on the team to finish the section to Mankang. At first, she felt uncomfortable being last. “Then I accepted the fact and thought when I cycle by myself low speed is OK. There is no need to catch them and cause myself pain.”

I come here to conquer the road.

The female cyclists on my team have more toughness than the males. Because male teammates are easier to break down, males have a stronger explosive power than females, however, females have stronger characters and are good at insisting.

I think females play different gender roles in society. However, on this road, if females are going to cycle on this road, they need to cycle like men.

There is no difference between male and female. We are a team. Under most situations, females do not need male’s care, unless in some special situation.

Before Mankang, Hui cycled with other two females because her physical ability sagged after Mangkang. A male cyclist accompanied her. “Cycling with female partners, I feel we are equal, we can discuss when to rest, when to cycle. However, my male partner usually asks me ‘are you tired, do you need rest,’ which makes me feel a little bit uncomfortable.” Hui “suffers” from her male teammates care, because males usually hold the idea that the female body is

‘naturally’ more vulnerable than the male body, and therefore need men’s care on this dangerous and arduous road.

As a female cyclist, I always cycle with male teammates. They take care of me very well. When going downhill, crossing a dark tunnel, or in other dangerous situations, I am always in the middle of the line because male cyclists think females should not cycle alone considering the lack of gender mobility. The only one time I cycled along was when we met extreme headwind. My male companions felt nearly broken down. They wanted to wait until the wind became much weaker. I did not want to wait, especially since it was the afternoon, so I continued to cycle. They actually followed me after a while but could not catch up with me because of the headwind. I cycled alone until arriving at the destination. At first, I was afraid, especially because it is hard to find other cyclists. Then, I quite enjoyed cycling alone. There is no difference. Ying also had the experience of cycling alone, and she also did not think there was difference.

As we can see, these young females have more independence, strength, and other characteristics usually thought of as masculine qualities. Thus, they call themselves “manly women.” Though they admit the physical difference between males and females, this seems to be the only gender difference between male and female they acknowledge while performing the journey.

### **Cycling on G318—Embodied masculinity**

Female cyclists, in their marginalized roles, are excluded from the male’s competition on the road. To males, women are not suitable because of their physical ability, and those women who successfully complete the journey will be thought of by men as tough or manly women. The assumption is that the journey is not suitable for females, considering the vulnerability of the female body. Meanwhile females view themselves as tough women for emphasizing

independence and toughness of character, which they feel should not be seen solely as characteristics of men. However, female's "naturally" weak and delicate physical ability makes it easier for them to earn praise from others. Park (26, male, designer), a man who insisted on the three-no principle and finish the journey in 25 days, told me he met a *niubility* girl on the road. She was the lead-out rider of the team facing strong head-winds while the other males rode behind her. He could not catch her and viewed her as a professional cyclist. He thinks he has never before met a *niubility* man on the road. Because he viewed men as naturally stronger, he would not view a man as *niubility*, even those who are stronger or better at cycling than him. However, strong women he thinks of as *niubility* because the majority of females he met are delicate. Some male cyclists, especially older males, hold an unfriendly gender stereotype toward women. One male cyclist, a middle-aged government official, said: "I have never met a female who can finish the whole journey." However, he also took the van due to inclement weather. A male cyclist, because of his outdoor experiences, views females as more reasonable than men, with a better sense of detecting danger. For him, the only difference between males and females is physical ability. In other aspects, there is not much difference.

I am not sure if this physical gender difference has scientific evidence in part because I met several female cyclists, like Xue, who can ride fast, without much cycling experience, and who can exceed the performance of the majority of male cyclists. This long-distance cycling emphasized endurance, and females tend to be good at endurance, a fact which is acknowledged by most cyclists. However, males still hold the view that this is a journey exclusively for men. Males were motivated to demonstrate their masculinity by bodily movement, while female cyclists were viewed as "manly women" because the space—the route G318—is viewed as

tough, risky, and having other features linked with masculinity. Thus, this cycling journey itself becomes an embodied masculinity.

## CHAPTER 7: Conclusion

G318 is the most famous landscape road in China. Driving and enjoying the scenery on the road is popular, and when I was cycling, there were many vans from different provinces there to enjoy the scenery. Cyclists and trekkers, especially females, become part of the landscape for other travelers on the same road. People come not only because the route is so special, but also because people can use their bodies to travel it without many modern technologies.

Cycling on G318 continually displays use of the body. Cyclists experience beautiful scenery, exhaustive long slopes, the feeling of lacking oxygen, strong headwinds, snow and rain, sunburn, and other natural elements through their own bodies. Only the road, bicycles, and their equipment are modern products. Thus, the body is the core concept in this thesis.

Cyclists use their bodies to display themselves, and to construct self-identity. Cycling, over driving, taking vans, or other modern modes of travel is a means of rebelling against modernity, and highlighting individual power in this individually powerless era. The general physical body differences between male and female cyclists on G318, because of demanding requirements of physical ability, make body play a crucial role in the gender relationship during the journey. Men want to demonstrate and show their masculinity, while they marginalize females' participation due to the stereotype of the delicate female body with less bodily mobility.

“We are weirdos,” and “we are crazy,” were the most common statements about the journey I heard from cyclists. When I would try to explain the negative aspects of modernity using academic terms, they usually did not understand, and it is not only a communication problem. It is largely because they might be too much sensitive to feelings about the huge institutions that surround them, although they usually agree that society is no different if less a person. But they may not have the desire for an existential quest, even though they viewed

themselves as crazy. This journey costs more money and time than travelling by train to Tibet. Thus, this journey is in opposition to the rationalization and altruism emphasized by modernity. Cyclists react against modernity by doing something different and unreasonable.

Some cyclists view the journey as a significant and memorable event in their lives, and some cyclists even have expectations of changing their lives as a result of the journey. Although the majority cyclists endow the journey with different meanings, these meanings and perceptions are temporary. When cyclists look back, they will view the journey in a more normal manner. I enjoyed the excitement and thrilling moments of the journey. During and after it, I felt I was fantastic. As time passed, these feelings faded. I now view it as an unusual travel event and am glad I finished smoothly, but I have no other thoughts. The exhaustive feelings and gorgeous sceneries are now fuzzy in my mind. Indeed, it is a special event in almost every cyclists' life, but it is still just one-month's cycling journey. It is true that every cyclist's life is changed after this, even though it is a temporary event.

Thinking, decision-making, and adjustments are all made on the road, and are also temporary. Xue, who had made the decision to leave Beijing and to learn to make porcelain in a small city is, right now, back in Beijing and has a regular life as before. She may go on other special or long journeys when she feels tired and wants to escape Beijing again. My other interviewees, like Xue, are all back to their regular lives.

As one interviewee (male, 27, quit job) expressed: "I met different people who had different aims for cycling on 318. It is like a hodgepodge with diverse reasons and aims. Coming here, your life will not change, it is still as it is. The change is your temporary lifestyle: keeping away from metro-cities. Here, the nature and the local culture will not purify your mind but will provide you a new world view and lifestyle, which might shock you or change your thoughts.

The world is not only what you met previously.” Their lives may have huge changes after the journey; heavy burdens, like deaths of their close friends and relatives, may be taken away after the journey; they may feel pride in themselves, or disappointed after the journey; they may have close relationships with their teams, or be abandoned by their teams during the journey; they may be eager to enjoy the conveniences of modern life when they cycle from this remote village to another villages; they may disappointed by the modernization and development of passing regions that lack authenticity; some may feel the journey is too difficult, while some may complain that the journey is not challenging; some view taking the van as not a big deal, while some cannot tolerate this behavior. No matter how diverse the phenomenon on the journey, the only thing that remains is a journey to help them escape their regular routines and lives for a time, and to relax for a while no matter their motivations and experiences of the journey.

Cycling on G318 is never an ordinary journey. The uphill and downhill make some cyclists view G318 as a metaphor for life, which has hard, prosaic, and easy life periods. As White shared with me, “318 is like your life, (some interviewees were against such a view that 318 is like your life, while some agree with it) only one road, and only one life, you cannot give up during the middle by taking van or cycling. You need to arrive to the destination, Lhasa. Giving up in the middle is like giving up on yourself.” Xing thinks that life is like the road: full of uphill and downhill. If you cannot cycle a long uphill, you need to push your bicycle. When you finally achieved the apex, this means the downhill is waiting for you, with an uphill waiting next.

As Qiu (66, male, retired) said: “G318 is equal to your life. It has ups and downs, has suffering and happy moments at the same time. For example, when you are climbing down the slope very tired, you can enjoy the scenery. Life has bad and good moments, which are not

smooth, like the road. Youth should cycle or walk on G318 because it can improve physical ability and perseverance.... I hope youth can improve themselves and stand with the challenges in their careers. Some young cyclists share a similar idea. "G318 is like life, bitter first, and then sweet." "G318 is like life. Cycling on 318 can improve your perseverance, and it will help you in the future. Suffering on the road will let you learn to insist on doing something."

Eventually, G318 will become easier, as all 14 mountains will have tunnels, and there will be no need to climb mountains; the level of challenge is decreasing, while the sceneries are decreasing also. It is not a very challenging thing to do and has become less appealing over the last 10 years. "Everything is developed so well," as Li told me. The number of people who come to cycle on G318 is decreasing gradually. However, most cyclists, including me, still believe it will exist as a special journey.

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## APPENDICES

## Appendix A-- Interview Protocol

### General questions

1. How do you know the G318?  
When do you want to cycle on G318 and why?  
What are the attractions of G318 to you?  
What is your own definition of the journey?  
Is cycling on G318 to you as dream or a goal in short-term?
2. How do you prepare the journey?  
How can you have such long time to do it?  
Have you told your family and friends, what are their opinions? If you told them, how do you negotiate with your family?
3. Are you interested in cycling?  
If you love cycling, how many years have you cycled? Do you have any long-distance cycling experiences? What is cycling bring to you?  
If you do not interest in cycling? Why do you want to cycle on G318, but not in other ways?
4. How do you find your team?  
How many mates in your team? How about the relations in the team? Your opinions toward leader?  
If he or she cycled alone, then ask why? And what are feelings of cycling alone?
5. Do you plan to take van during road? (Asked before departure)  
Have you ever taken van? What is your attitude toward cycling? (Same questions apply to push bicycle).  
What is your attitude toward rescue van and carrying pannier free by bicycle hostels?
6. What are your imaginations of Tibetan? (To those have not been the Tibetan region)  
Is Lhasa to you a destination or sacred place?  
Are you interested in Tibetan culture?  
What is your opinion about Tibetan? Do you change your impression about Tibetans through the journey?  
What is your opinion about Chinesenization?
7. Do you think cycling on G318 is challenging or not?  
What are the difficult and challenging parts during the road?  
Have you meet with dangers during the journey?  
Have you ever breakdown during the journey? Do you have the thought of giving up?
8. What are you worried about the journey? (Asked cyclists who are before departure)  
Are you afraid of climbing the long slope?  
How fast when you in continual downhills? Have you pay attention on safety?

9. To those done the journey, (askes in Lhasa) how many days you cost on cycling on G318?  
What is the most impressive moment during the journey?  
Have you met any strangers, interested or funny cyclists?
10. Have you acquired something from the journey?  
How do you summarize the journey?  
Have you resolve some troubles in your life through the journey?  
Do you think the journey help to improve yourself and will help your life in the future?  
What is the meaning of the road and your journey?  
What are your opinions about the commodification during the road?
11. Do you feel excited and have expectations about arriving in Lhasa?  
What is your plan after arriving at Lhasa? Do you want to do it again or have a trip on G318 by other ways? Have you want to cycle other long-distance routes?
12. What your idea toward trekkers? Do you have interactions with tourists by drive?  
Have you met pilgrims what your opinions toward them? Do you think we also need such religion or belief? Do you have belief?
13. Do you think the sceneries is very beautiful or does not reach your expectations?
14. Do you live in cities? What your feelings are during live in cities?  
Do you feel alienation between people? And do you feel anxiety and uncertainty about future and present? Do you feel optimistic about future? What is your life goal?  
Do you feel boring about your daily life?  
Do you think you live in the concrete forest like a cage to limit your freedom? Are you happy? How to define happy?
15. Do you like stay in nature? Do you like outdoor activity?  
Do you satisfy the country, the government?  
Do you feel be institutionalized? Or do you want to a stable job in the state or state-owned organizations?
16. Do you feel that you are different with others?

### **Specific questions**

1. To the people quit their job to perform the journey, ask why?  
To those people who give up before departure and during the journey, ask why?
2. To my teammates, what are their opinions toward leader and other teammates? What are ideas about the whole team? And ask their special moments and reactions to them during the journey?

### *Male cyclists*

1. To Young male  
Do you think you undertake too much pressure and burden as a young man?

What is your attitude toward female cycling travelers and middle age and old cycling travelers?

Do you think you your partner should take equal responsibility after you married?

What is your feeling being overtook by other cycling travelers?

2. To middle age and old male cycling travelers, what are your opinions about young female and male cycling travelers and female middle-age and old cycling travelers? Do you have competition through the journey? Do you feel still young and health after finishing the journey?

#### *Female cyclists*

1. No matter the age groups, what is your feelings as a female cycling traveler? How do your male teammates take care of you? What are differences of your relations between male and female teammates? Do you feel discrimination toward female cycling travelers? What is your feeling being overtook by other cycling travelers? How to cope with your menstruation?
2. To the cycling service owners, why and how they start their business? What your plan of your business, especially the continue declination of cycling travelers?

To the Tibetan cycling hostel owners, how cycling travelers help them start their business? What their plan: staying here in the village or move to the town?

#### *To Students*

How do you have the budget to do this?

To high school student, I ask how to get the permit from their family? I will not ask too much about the pressure, anxiety, and related question to specific to the grown-up group?

To college student, I pay attention on their cycling association, since they usually came by their universities cycling association?

To those who have experience of cycling on G318 before

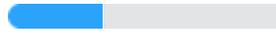
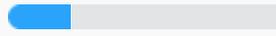
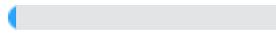
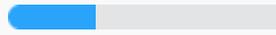
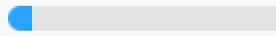
What are the changes of the road, accommodation, and the quality of cycling travelers? And what their attitude toward these changes?

To those who cycled on G318 more than one time, why they still want to do that, consider most of cycling travelers never to do it again? Are there any different experiences?

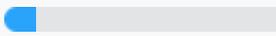
**Note:** the above is the semi-structural questions varied among different cyclists and situations. The in-depth interview's questions are similar to semi-structural questions, and I pay more attention on their life-histories and current life situation.

## Appendix B- Questionnaire

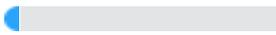
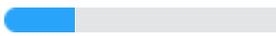
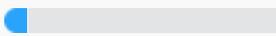
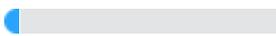
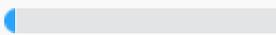
### 1. How do you define the cycling on G318 (from Chengdu-Lhasa)? \*

options	amount	ratio
Cycling	166	 32.49%
travel	108	 21.14%
Pilgrimage	18	 3.52%
All above	160	 31.31%
I do not know	13	 2.54%
Cycling-tourism	46	 9%
Valid samples	511	

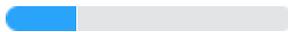
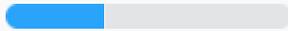
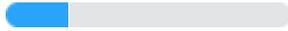
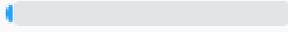
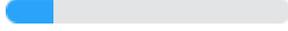
### 2. gender \*

options	amount	ratio
M	451	 88.26%
F	60	 11.74%
Valid samples	511	

### 3. age groups \*

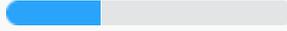
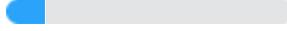
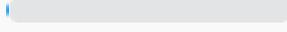
options	amount	ratio
Under 18	24	 4.7%
18~25	261	 51.08%
26~30	129	 25.24%
31~40	43	 8.41%
41~50	27	 5.28%
51~60	19	 3.72%
Above 60	8	 1.57%
Valid samples	511	

**4. Identity \***

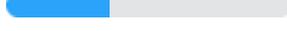
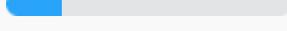
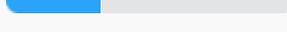
options	amount	ratio
student	125	 24.46%
Have a job	177	 34.64%
Resigned and unemployed	113	 22.11%
Retired	9	 1.76%
Freelance workers	87	 17.03%
Valid samples	511	

**5. If you have a job, what is your occupation\_\_\_ (about 170 valid answers)**

**6. Are you interested in cycling? \***

options	amount	ratio
love	270	 52.84%
Interesting	168	 32.88%
Average level	66	 12.92%
Not interested in	7	 1.37%
Valid samples	511	

**7. What is the most attraction part of cycling on G318? \* multiple choices**

Options	amount	ratio
Challenging themselves	351	 68.69%
Enhancing perseverance	302	 59.1%
Enjoying sceneries	356	 69.67%
Completing the dream of cyclists	293	 57.34%
Tibetan culture	189	 36.99%
Team intimacy	103	 20.16%
Finding self	227	 44.42%
Sense of achievement	168	 32.88%

Purification/clearing their minds	155	30.33%
Releasing stress	109	21.33%
Others (about 20 gives detailed information)	23	4.5%
Valid samples	511	

**8. How long before you want to cycle on G318? \***

options	amount	ratio
Many years ago	165	32.29%
Two to three years ago	120	23.48%
One years ago	97	18.98%
During the half year	60	11.74%
A trip without plan	69	13.5%
Valid samples	511	

**9. How many times of long-distance (>300km) cycling experiences? \***

options	amount	ratio
More than 5 times	161	31.51%
3-5 times	49	9.59%
1-2 times	99	19.37%
None	202	39.53%
Valid samples	511	

**10. How long have you prepared for cycling on G318? \***

options	amount	ratio
More than 2 years	71	13.89%
One to two years	104	20.35%
In half of year	201	39.33%
Just beginning	135	26.42%

Valid samples	511
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**11. Have you thought of giving up cycling on G318? \***

options	amount	ratio
yes	119	23.29%
no	392	76.71%
Valid samples	511	

**12. Have you told family members? \***

options	amount	ratio
No	129	25.24%
Yes	305	59.69%
Not told all of them	77	15.07%
Valid samples	511	

**13. If you told your family members, do they agree?**

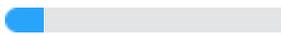
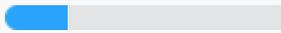
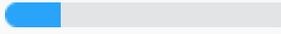
options	amount	ratio
support	147	38.48%
object	64	16.75%
Neither support nor object	166	43.46%
They do not do this question	5	1.31%
Valid samples	382	

**14. Have you want to cycle on G318 only one time? \***

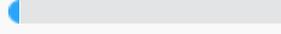
options	amount	ratio
Yes	171	33.46%
No	192	37.57%
Undecided	148	28.96%

Valid samples	511
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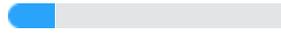
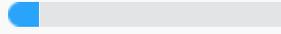
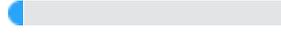
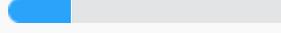
**15. How many days you plan to take, or have you take already on cycling on G318? \***

options	amount	ratio
Less than 21 days	67	 13.11%
21-23 days	115	 22.5%
24-28 days	228	 44.62%
More than 29 days	101	 19.77%
Valid samples	511	

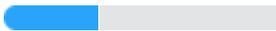
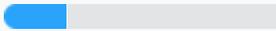
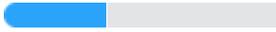
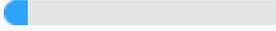
**16. Would you take the van? \***

options	amount	ratio
never	223	 43.64%
I will if I need to	227	 44.42%
Probably	42	 8.22%
I plan to or had took the van before	19	 3.72%
Valid samples	511	

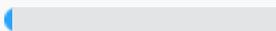
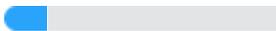
**17. Under which situations, you would take the van? Multiple choices**

options	amount	ratio
Bicycle broken	179	 62.15%
Feel uncomfortable	231	 80.21%
Too tired to cycle	48	 16.67%
Do not want to cycle	31	 10.76%
Accompanying with others to take the van	16	 5.56%
Dangerous road	64	 22.22%
Valid samples	288	

**18. If you had been Lhasa before by cycling, have you changed?**

Options	amount	ratio
Yes	170	 36.48%
No	115	 24.67%
I do not know	181	 38.84%
The do not do the question	45	 8.81%
Valid samples	466	

**19. Will you continue to do long-distance cycling after finish cycling on G318? \***

options	amount	ratio
Yes	416	 81.41%
No	17	 3.33%
I do not know	78	 15.26%
Valid samples	511	

**Note:** the option “cycling tourism” in the first questions was added in August. That is why the Valid Samples are 214 not 511. The reason I added this choice because many responses from interview use “cycling tourism” to describe this journey.

Appendix C- Table of stages, locations, and activities

Stage	Location	Informal interviews	Formal interviews	Focus groups (including into the 254 interviewees)
May 22-31	Chengdu Freedom cycling hostel	30	19	1
June 1-26	Cycling hostels on G318	5	7	0
June 27-July 2	Hostel called Jiuyechenmeng In Lhasa	9	10	0
July 3-15	Freedom cycling hostel in Lhasa	30	38	2
July 16-Aug 10	Four Cycling hostels on the road And freedom cycling hostel and Sunshine cycling hostel in Chengdu	31	75	3