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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2017.01.005>

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# **Diaspora Tourism and Well-being: A Eudaimonic View**

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For citation use: Li, T., & Chan, T. (2017). Diaspora tourism and well-being: a eudaimonic view. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 63, 205-206.

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In recent years, subjective well-being (SWB) has attracted growing interest from researchers of travel and tourism, who have investigated the effects of leisure and tourism activities on the individually perceived and experienced well-being of both tourists and host communities (Uysal et al., 2016). Various terms have been used, sometimes interchangeably, to capture the meaning of SWB, including “happiness”, “life satisfaction”, “quality of life”, etc. (Simpson et al., 2016). This literature implies two essential views, namely hedonic and eudaimonic views to examine SWB. Hedonic views of SWB are rife in this literature, with pleasure and satisfaction being seen as the ultimate goal and consequence of various experiences and activities (Diener, 2009). In this view, the “utilities” of people are emphasised and their rewards are maximised in terms of happiness and the satisfaction of preferences (Ryan & Deci, 2001). However, well-being is more than simple preference satisfaction, and the pleasure-producing outcomes of many behaviours do not necessarily promote well-being.

Based on the philosophy of Aristotle, eudaimonic views of SWB emphasise the realisation of one’s true potential as the highest goal and route toward well-being (Aristotle, 1980; Ryff & Singer, 2008). Ryff (1989) developed a theoretical model which identifies six substantive dimensions of well-being: self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth. Following Ryff’s work, Ryan and Deci (2011) in their self-determination theory emphasised autonomy, competence, and relatedness as three basic psychological needs, the satisfaction of which leads to the realisation of eudaimonia. These dimensions have thus been considered as key components of well-being, posing an empirical challenge to operationalise these theory-guided dimensions to examine people’s psychological functioning.

Among recent tourism studies, few have included the aspects of eudaimonia when examining SWB. For example, McCabe & Johnson (2013) included the themes of social relationships and self-esteem; and Richards (1999) considered personal development and the pursuit of personal and social interests. This research note seeks to explore the links between diaspora tourism and SWB from a eudaimonic view through an investigation of how home return travel influences SWB of Chinese diaspora tourists. Diaspora tourism has become a globally significant phenomenon whereby migrants and families travel to their ancestral place of origin to engage in genealogical endeavours of connecting to one’s ancestors and ancestral roots (Li & McKercher, 2016). Based on the explorative nature of this investigation, a qualitative research

method was used with in-depth interviews involving 46 Chinese migrants in North America. Qualitative content analysis was conducted to obtain underlying themes and factors along with the respondents' perceptions about the subject. Six themes emerged as significant in terms of the way in which these tourists perceive their home return travel as the route towards eudaimonic well-being.

*Personal Growth.* The interviewees reported having experienced personal growth in the form of feeling more mature and thoughtful after their home return travel. As Ryff (1989) argued, optimal psychological functioning requires individuals to develop one's potential, to grow and expand as a person. By developing different feelings about China and self, the interviewees continued to clarify and develop their personal identification as Chinese-Americans/Canadians, growing and expanding as diasporic members. They obtained a deeper understanding of their ancestors' conditions and choices, as well as the geographical and personal origins of their families. Their openness to the experience prepared them to confront new challenges in the future as Chinese diaspora members, rather than achieving merely a fixed state of self.

*Self/ancestry acceptance.* "Holding positive attitudes toward oneself" is also considered as a central characteristic of SWB (Ryff, 1989). The return trip helped the interviewees to relinquish negative thoughts about their Chineseness and to accept their Chinese ancestry as a major part of themselves. Some individuals engendered a positive attitude toward oneself – a sense of pride as Chinese-Americans/Canadians – by witnessing the great changes China has undergone and realising that China can continue to change and move forwards like the rest of the world. The comparison between life in China and that in North America led them to appreciate their own lives while treasuring both cultures.

*Interested in further exploration.* In Diener et al.'s (2010) Flourishing Scale, "interest in daily activities" is considered as an important theme in increasing individuals' SWB. Our interviewees reported having become more interested in exploring China, family and themselves after their return trip, which emerged as a similar theme to that in Diener et al.'s (2010) study. Most interviewees considered the trip to be a starting point – "one of the steps" – from which to learn about their paternal and maternal ancestors.

*Feel related and connected.* "Relatedness" and "relationships" are discussed by Ryff and Singer (2008) and Ryan & Deci (2011) as being two substantive dimensions in obtaining a higher sense of SWB. In the diaspora context, diasporic individuals obtain a varying sense of connection depending on the extent to which they feel physically and/or spiritually connected

to their ancestral homeland during/after the trip. This theme was also elaborated on in Li and McKercher's (2016) research on home return travel and place attachment. By engaging in a series of activities in the ancestral homeland, some tourists achieved a greater sense of belonging, and others felt emotionally or spiritually connected after a Chinese traditional ceremony in their ancestral house or tombs.

*Capability to return.* A fully functioning person is also described as an individual who does not look to others for approval but evaluates him/herself by personal standards (Ryff, 1989). The theme "capability to return" was raised by the interviewees and concerned the qualities of autonomy, freedom, self-determination and control over one's life. These were expressed through feeling good about having sufficient money and time to return "whenever they want to". Although several had failed to identify the exact location of their family roots, their capability of making their own decisions to return gave them a stronger sense of control as they felt they could govern their own lives.

*Meaning in life.* Engagement in home return travel helped diaspora tourists to create meaning and purpose in life. The definition of maturity emphasises a clear comprehension of life meanings, a sense of directedness, and intentionality (Ryff, 1989). The interviewees interpreted their home return as an important family event and endowed it with significant meanings. They considered "tracing family history all the way back" to be one of the most meaningful things to do. Their sense of well-being functioned positively by achieving emotional integration and fulfilling this intention and goal, contributing to the feeling that life is meaningful.

To conclude, this study explored the links between diaspora tourism and SWB through the lens of eudaimonia and identified six themes through which this highly nuanced travel behavior strengthens tourists' SWB. In line with the work of Ryff (1989), the research note argued that these themes emerged to be as important as other hedonic views to understand the long-term effects of tourism. Within the diaspora tourism context, the linkages between SWB and tourism can be rich and insightful considering important themes of personal growth, self/ancestral acceptance, interested in further exploration, feel related and connected, capability to return, and meaning in life. This research note recommends further in-depth studies on SWB and tourism by combining both hedonic and eudaimonic views.

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