

Aging and quality of life in Taiwan

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is two-fold: to explore older people's attitudes towards aging as a subjective aspect of quality of life (QOL), and to further examine whether leisure pursuits in later years are associated with QOL in a Chinese society (Taiwan). We will review recent evidence to show that in general Taiwanese older people possessed positive attitudes towards aging. This reveals that aging in Taiwan can be experienced favorably and meaningfully. We will then review emerging evidence to show that leisure pursuits in older age are related to emotional well-being (depressive symptoms), even after controlling for effects of demographics, physical health/disability, and social support. Also, for Taiwanese older people, positive (life satisfaction) and negative (depression) aspects of QOL are mutually linked over and beyond known factors of health, financial security, and social embeddedness. We purport that health care, financial planning, social integration and active participation in life are all integral aspects to ensure a high quality of life in later years.

Keywords: Adulthood, aging, quality of life

Introduction

Aging is a pressing problem for many countries in this century, especially for a developing country such as Taiwan. In Taiwan, advances in medical science and technology, successful promotion of health care, material prosperity, coupled with the gradual demise of Chinese family values and lifestyle (e.g., large extended family living together), have sent the birth rate in a steady decline, but the life expectancy in a steady increase. Consequently, as early as in September 1993, Taiwan was officially an aging society as the proportion of those aged over 65 had exceeded 7% of the country's population (1). However, systematic research on aging topics in Taiwan is still in its infancy, and relies heavily upon Western theories and findings. Furthermore, most research efforts have been devoted to medical

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gerontology and other aging-related medical care topics, while psychosocial issues of normative aging are generally overlooked. Although there has been some research pointing out the beneficial effects of social support for the Chinese older people in Taiwan (2,3), other psychosocial correlates of quality of life (QOL) in later years, such as leisure, have been largely overlooked. Furthermore, older people's self-definition and perception of aging have been ignored. The purpose of this paper, therefore, was twofold: first, to explore a basic issue in social gerontology from the older people's point of view: Can aging be a positive experience for older people living in a collectivist but socially and economically fast changing society? If yes, are positive attitudes towards aging beneficial for personal well-being, over and beyond effects of known protectors such as social support and social embeddedness? Second, in addition to the above known protectors of QOL in older age, does leisure have a role to play in ensuring a successful aging?

Is it possible to experience aging as a positive process?

Quality of life defined in ethical, theological, political, economic, and psychological terms has been studied in a large number of disciplines over many centuries, and has generated increasing interest among researchers and practitioners involved in caring for older people (4). QOL is the result of one's comprehensive appraisal of life against individual and social goals, and four sectors comprising "the good life" have been purported: behavioral competence, psychological well-being, perceived quality of life, and objective environment (5). This demarcation of sectors is in broad agreement with the objective/subjective distinction in the tradition of QOL research (4,6-8). Objective indicators of QOL are those that exist outside the body of the person, such as economic resources, health functioning, and social contact (6), while subjective indicators of QOL are those that are perceived, experienced, and evaluated by the human mind, such as life satisfaction, happiness, morale, and positive outlook (4). Mirroring the trend in earlier generic well-being research, far more efforts have been expanded on

looking for "objective" external rather than subjective psychological indicators of QOL for older people, as the former is relatively easy to define and assess (6). Another characteristic of the QOL research is its focus on sick and frail older people rather than normal and healthy community older adults (5). As noted by Bowling and Gabriel, people of different age, health status, and residence arrangement may have different priorities when judging their QOL (7). Fry further suggested that personal mastery, autonomy, self-sufficiency, life style choices and privacy are the most important indicators of QOL for community-residing older people (9). All of these are subjective indicators. A recent Taiwanese study corroborates the above Western view, validating that a healthy body, a sense of self-worth, companionship, residential environment and leisure facilities, social contacts with friends and relatives, and joy are all important aspects of QOL for older people in Taiwan (10). The fact that even for disabled older people involved in this study subjective QOL is as relevant as objective indicators, serves to underline the necessity of emphasizing more on psychological aspects of QOL in gerontological research. So far, positive outlook of older age is a largely neglected topic in the QOL research.

As stated earlier, for many years, gerontological research was concerned nearly exclusively with problems of aging and older age, and has contributed to the problematization of older age and the negative image of the aging process. However, work in social gerontology has endeavored to deconstruct prevailing negative aging stereotypes, i.e., ageism in the society (11), to further promote educational interventions aiming at fostering positive attitudes towards older people (12) and the aging process (13).

Among older people, researchers have also recently found that the experience of aging is neither uniform nor necessarily negative. As part of the Berlin Aging Study, Freund and Smith collected spontaneous self-definition in a heterogeneous sample of 516 participants (aged 70-103 years) (14). The content of the self-definition revealed that these older adults still view themselves as active and present-oriented, and overall, there were more positive than negative self-evaluations. More importantly perhaps, positive emotional well-being was associated with naming more and richer self-defining domains. Another study found that when defining "old", older

people focused less on appearance or body image, more on health status and psychological factors such as loss of autonomy (15).

In Taiwan, social gerontological research on self-perception of older people or normative aging experiences is very rare. Two notable exceptions are a large scale survey of young, middle-aged and older adults (16), and a study of older adults with medical conditions (17). Lee's study (16) focused on the general impression of life in middle to late adulthood, and found that Taiwanese people tended to perceive old age rather negatively, including losses in health, status, relationships, and work. Furthermore, more negative and undesirable traits and behaviors were attributed to older people than to middle aged people. These findings largely corroborate other studies in Taiwan showing that people of different age groups all possessed generally negative attitudes towards older people (18,19). Apparently, ageism is still prevalent in the Taiwanese society.

Although the above mentioned empirical results seem to depict a general negative image of the old age and older people held by a wide range of Taiwanese people, a finer grained analysis did reveal that some positive aspects of aging were acknowledged both by the older people themselves (19), and by members of other age groups (16,20). Specifically, positive attitudes and traits pertaining to psychological and cognitive aspects of aging, such as rich experiences, wisdom, and authoritative status, were attributed to older persons in aforementioned studies.

What about older people's own experience of aging then? Lu and Chang (17) argued that aging is not an inevitably negative experience, even for those with compromised health. They found that older age, male, living alone, and being financially-dependent were risk factors of worsened health, while female, living alone, and being financially-dependent were risk factors of lowered life satisfaction in a sample of community older adults (aged 65-90 years). Although participants in that study all had at least one chronic medical condition, authors observed that they nonetheless maintained good functioning in daily activities, perceived little interference of illnesses with their normal life, reported fairly good psychological health and optimistic outlooks in life. Such more encouraging positive experiences with aging corroborate Lu and Kao's most recent finding

that older people indeed possessed more positive attitudes regarding cognitive and psychological aspects of aging than non-old adults in Taiwan (19). It needs to be noted though that the sample of older persons included in the study was rather small (N = 30), as the researchers were aiming at a wide spectrum of the general population.

One recently published study fortunately targeted community older people and assessed their perception of aging, using the same attitudinal measurement as that reported in the above study (21). Face-to-face interviews were conducted to collect data from a random sample of community older people in all regions of Taiwan (N = 316). The authors found that older people possessed positive attitudes towards aging in general, but there were some group attitudinal differences. Specifically, males were not different from females, the "young old" (aged 60-74 years) were not different from the "old old" (aged 75 years and above), and those living with family were not different from those living alone in their overall aging attitudes. However, education and urban residence had advantages of projecting a more positive outlook for the old age: those who were educated above elementary school level and living in urban areas avowed more overall positive attitudes towards aging.

It is worth mentioning that the "older people scale" (OPS) (19) used in both of the above mentioned studies, is the first standardized scale developed specifically for the Chinese people, assessing attitudes towards older people in general. When responding to the same items, young and older adults may base their opinions on different information. Specifically, older respondents are more likely to draw information from their own aging experiences, thus scale scores may thus reflect their attitudes towards aging itself. Using OPS as a measure of attitudes towards older people (when young people responding) and attitudes towards aging (when older people responding), empirical evidence can be compared across different demographic groups from different studies. Lu and Kao (19,22) have provided evidence of reliability, structural validity of a four-factor model, convergent validity with an existing Western scale (Aging Semantic Differential) (11), criterion validity in predicting intentions of interacting with older people in daily life, as well as

college students' career choices of working in older people-related jobs. The OPS uses a stem "In general, older people are..." to assess four aspects of attitudes: Appearance and physical characteristics, Psychological and cognitive characteristics, Interpersonal relations and social participation, and Work and economic safety. Each item was rated on a 7-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). A higher score indicated more positive attitudes towards older people/aging. Older people reported high item means for the aggregated score on OPS (4.74) and those of its four subscales (4.61, 4.81, 4.72, 4.89). All five mean scores were not only in the positive ranges of the scale, but also statistically significant from the mid-point of 4 on the 1-7 scale. Furthermore, older people's own perception of aging was significantly more positive than the projections of them by a broad section of population in Taiwan (19), college students (22), company managers (23) and workers (24). These results are encouraging when interpreted as one indicator of QOL in old age: Taiwanese older people not only view aging more positively than their younger counterparts, they remain optimistic in all aspects of the aging process, physical, psychological, social, and financial.

Adopting a different research paradigm, a rare qualitative research reported 22 in-depth interviews with community older adults in Taiwan (25). Researchers noted that many of their interviewees held positive attitudes towards their family roles in later life. Such positive self-perceptions for the old age was rooted in the rich life experiences, in the belief that they can teach, guide and help their children and grandchildren, and in the prevailing societal value of respecting the old and ascribing authority to the old in family. From these rich personal accounts of aging in the family, researchers concluded that given adequate health and financial assurance, Taiwanese older people generally held positive attitudes towards the impending aging and were able to adapt to the family role transition with optimism.

Synthesizing these strands of research, we argue that aging can be experienced positively in a Chinese culture. At the society level, the prevailing social value of filial piety and social norm of respecting the old in a Chinese society help to strengthen status and prestige of older people both in and beyond the family

domain (25). At the individual level, the possibility of maintaining a positive outlook for the old age and experiencing aging positively is supported by a theoretical perspective emphasizing life course development (26). As one negotiates with specific developmental tasks through the course of life, the process of aging should not necessarily be detrimental to well-being; instead there even exists possibilities for positive change and personal growth. This is exactly what has been revealed in a recent Taiwanese study: for community older people, less positive attitudes towards aging were related to more depressive symptoms while more positive attitudes were related to higher happiness (21). Furthermore, the associations of aging attitudes with well-being persisted even after controlling for the effects of social support and community participation.

Leisure: The incremental value beyond other social resources for successful aging

As stated earlier, most research efforts have been devoted to medical gerontology and other aging-related medical care topics both in the West and in Taiwan, some psychosocial factors has been proven beneficial for normative aging as well as maintaining certain quality of life among the frail. These protective factors are social support (2,3), family role participation (25), and positive attitudes towards aging (21). However, other domains of active participation in life such as leisure, especially subjective experiences of leisure have largely been ignored so far.

Research on leisure with Chinese people in general and with older people in particular is in the rarity, partly because hardworking has always been a highly regarded Confucius virtue. However, with economic development, material abundance, and the shortening of statutory working hour (now 40 per week), Taiwanese people are learning to "improve life with leisure" (27). Thus, against this transition of cultural mandate on a "good way of life", understanding the subjective experiences of leisure of older Chinese people will not only shed light on some interesting issues in leisure research, but also contribute to better leisure policies and management to promote successful ageing. Below we will theorize

possible mechanisms linking meaningful leisure experiences in older age to psychological well-being, and present empirical evidence supporting the beneficial effects of leisure over and beyond those of known protectors such as physical health, financial security, and social embeddedness.

In a recent study, Bowling interviewed 337 British home-living older adults, and found that 43% regarded having/maintaining physical health and 34% regarded participating in leisure and social activities as elements of active ageing (28). It is rather encouraging to note that a third rated themselves as ageing “very actively” and almost half as “fairly actively”. This research provides empirical basis for the notion of successful ageing as “engagement with life”, including role participation with work, family, friends, community, and leisure (29).

In Taiwan, 65 is the statutory retirement age, and a recent nationwide survey noted only 5.9% of those aged 65 and above still held paid jobs (including part-time work) (24). This finding corroborates the popular image and commonly held expectation of older age in Chinese societies being a time of leisure and retreat into family life with grandchildren (25). Instead, active role participation with family, friends, and community has been repeatedly found pivotal to older people’s well-being in Taiwanese studies (2,3,25). However, leisure in older age seems to be largely overlooked in existing Taiwanese studies. Time being one of the most available assets in older age, leisure can serve a key role in the successful ageing process, and can be a constructive way of engagement with life. One recent study found that Australian older people spent 4.5 h/day on solitary leisure and 2.7 h/day on social leisure (30). Although there is no data on time use of Taiwanese older adults, Chen did find that participation in various leisure activities was positively related to increased life satisfaction for older people (31).

More striking evidence came from a 10-year follow-up study with a nationally representative sample of Swedish older people (32). Researchers found that those increasing their leisure activity participation across domains tended to perceive an improvement in their life conditions. Another study found that for Japanese older men, less interaction with neighbors, society, and friends was highly associated with depressed mood, while for women

engaging in various types of activities relating to society, leisure and children/grandchildren was associated with less depressed mood (33).

Various leisure theories have provided us with frameworks to understand the benefits of leisure. For instance, Beard and Ragheb purported that leisure could gratify basic human needs and generate satisfaction pertaining to six aspects: psychological (e.g., interesting activities), social (e.g., getting to know people), physical (e.g., getting exercise, keeping fit), educational (e.g., learning new things), relaxation (e.g., relaxed, unwind), and aesthetic (e.g., beautiful surrounding) (34). Existing leisure research has confirmed that various leisure activities could indeed generate short-term benefits including positive mood, physical fitness and immediate satisfaction, as well as long-term effects of happiness, mental health, physical health, and social integration (35,36). One in-depth interview study with Taiwanese college students further revealed that leisure also served an important function of structuring time (25), which should be more important for older adults with ample time to spend. It may be for this reason, previous Western research has found that leisure is especially important for older people (35).

A recent study (37) has shown that among a large sample of American adults (N = 1,399, 19-89 years), leisure participation in aggregate was associated with lower blood pressure, total cortisol, waist circumference, body mass index, and perceptions of better physical function. These associations withstood controlling for demographic measures. Leisure participation also correlated with higher levels of positive psychosocial states and lower levels of depression and negative affect. It seems that leisure activities are associated with both psychological and physical outcomes. A large-scale Taiwanese study with a national representative sample (N = 2,147, 20-96 years) found that leisure participation in aggregate across 13 common activities was associated with high leisure satisfaction (19). There is thus empirical evidence that Taiwanese people generally feel happy about their leisure and may indeed gain benefits from this particular aspect of life.

However, it is not clear whether some social aspects of leisure confound with social support, which is a known protector against distress and illness. This is particularly so for Taiwanese people. The above

mentioned national survey in Taiwan revealed six most popular leisure activities: watching TV/DVDs/videos, listening to music, taking part in physical activities, spending time on the internet/PC, reading books, and getting together with friends, in that order (38). All these activities involve different degrees of socialization, especially for older people living in community with their families, except perhaps listening to music and reading books. As social embeddedness along with support received in social networks has been well-established as a protector of well-being in Taiwanese studies with older people (2,3,39,40), we need more solid evidence to tease out the incremental value of leisure participation over and beyond such known correlates of QOL.

One possible mechanism of leisure participation on enhancing successful ageing may indeed be through social support and social engagement, as many activities are conducted with family and friends (33,38). Joining in activities with others reflects the social organization of leisure, strengthens interpersonal relationships, and enhances a sense of belonging among the participants (41). Leisure-related social support has indeed been found to buffer the stress-illness relationship for the Americans (42).

Moreover, leisure has the potential to go beyond social engagement or social support. The aforementioned Swedish study (32) revealed that the beneficial effects of increased leisure participation was particularly strong among older adults who became widowed, developed functional impairments, and had relatively low contact with family. These results suggest that maximizing leisure activity participation is an adaptive strategy taken by older adults to compensate for social and physical deficits in later life.

Yet another possible mechanism of leisure participation on enhancing successful ageing may be through cognitive stimulation of the brain. Leisure activities may help brain function and protect against cognitive deterioration. The recent availability of longitudinal data on the possible association of different lifestyles with dementia and Alzheimer's disease (AD) allowed for exploration of the effects of social network, physical leisure, and non-physical activity on cognition and dementia. For all three lifestyle components (social, mental, and physical), a

beneficial effect on cognition and a protective effect against dementia are suggested (43). However, a distinction should be drawn between activities that are "cognitive" and those that are "passive", as evidence showed leisure activities that do not involve social engagement but are cognitively stimulating are protective against cognitive decline in older people (29). However, such a salutogenic effect does not apply to watching TV, which is in fact a risk factor for cognitive decline (29).

So far, it seems that participation in leisure activities may facilitate successful aging partly via its instrumental gains in enabling people to join and maintain social networks, to stimulate brain function, and partly via enjoyment of leisure per se (36). Research in Western societies has shown that leisure activities per se may enhance reported physical and subjective well-being among older adults, but the sociability aspect of such activities makes a more substantial difference (44-46). It thus would be interesting to see if leisure activities not connected with social engagement had the same relationship with depression as those connected with social engagement.

Finally, leisure participation of older people, whether in aggregate or in individual activity, has received research attention in the West, subjective experiences of leisure have been understated. A recent study (47) probed into the significance of experiential components in leisure and found that for Australian older people, relaxation and engrossment were commonly expressed experiences. Such subjective experiences were different from yet complimentary to those derived from social support, such as care and respect.

One pioneering Taiwanese study (48) explored older people's subjective leisure experiences, and further examined associations of such experiences with their depressive symptoms in a national representative sample of community older people (N = 1,308, aged 65+). Known correlates of depression such as demographics, physical health, and social support, were taken into account. Face-to-face interviews were conducted to collect high quality data. A checklist of 10 types of leisure activities was provided, including TV/radio, reading newspaper/magazine, playing chess/board games/cards, visiting relatives/friends/neighbors,

PC/internet, gardening/plants, interests/hobbies, attending concerts/plays, movies/shopping, and walking/exercising. Participants checked yes/no (1 = yes, 0 = no) for participation in each category of activities.

Results showed that being female, older, single, less educated, and had lower family income were demographic risk factors of depression. Worse physical health, lack of independent functioning in everyday life, and disability were found to relate to more depressive symptoms. Greater social support was once again confirmed to reduce depressive symptoms. Finally, having controlled for effects of demographics, physical health, and social support, positive leisure experiences, i.e. leisure meaningfulness tapping aspects of psychological, social, physical, educational, and relaxation experiences, were independently related to fewer depressive symptoms. However, neither aggregate leisure participation nor participation in each of the 10 activities could predict depressive symptoms in multivariate analysis. Thus, evidence from this large scale national survey seems to suggest that participation per se in leisure activities (whether individually or in aggregate) may not help reducing depressive symptoms, but positive experiences generated through leisure will. The benefits of meaningful leisure pursuits as a subjective human experience for successful ageing were thus clearly demonstrated over and beyond known QOL protectors for Taiwanese older people living in community.

This emerging evidence in Taiwan compliments Western findings of benefits of leisure on enhancing quality of life in older age (32), constructing the subjective experiences of active ageing (28), and reducing risks of dementia in older age (43). More importantly, while existing studies focused on benefits of leisure or life style per se on dementia, AD, physical and mental health, the above reported results were obtained after controlling for effects of social support, thus taking out any potential confound between leisure as a means of sociability (38) and social support as a function of social embeddedness (49). In other words, these results revealed a “cleaner” effect of leisure experiences on depressive symptomatology. Together, existing evidence from the West and Taiwan serves to underline the

importance of including leisure as a means of engagement with life, along with social participation in the promotion of successful aging and QOL in older age (50).

Although research in Taiwan fails to find direct evidence linking specific activities to reduced depressive symptoms in the regression analysis, an inspection of the rank order of leisure pursuits in a nationwide sample of older people may still help us to understand why positive leisure experiences in the form of overall leisure satisfaction and subjective experiences of meaningfulness could protect older adults against depressive symptoms. As reported in Lu (48), the most popular leisure engagement for Taiwanese older people was TV/radio (90%), a solitary leisure that tops the list of leisure pursuits for the general population in Taiwan in another recent national survey (38). Although watching TV has been found to be a low arousal and sometimes boring activity (51), and may even be harmful for brain functioning in older age (29), reading newspaper/magazines which ranked the third popular leisure (25.6%) in Lu’s study (48) and the 5th in Fu et al., is more cognitively engaging and challenging. Indeed this cognitive activity had the strongest correlation with depressive symptoms ($r = -.21$) in Lu’s study. Its role within the active life style and potential function as a brain stimulus against depression deserve further exploration.

The second popular leisure pursuit for older people in Lu’s study (48) was social in nature: visiting relatives/friends/neighbors (47.9%), which ranked the 6th in Fu et al (38). This is in agreement with the Australian finding that older people spent 2.7h/day on social leisure (30). In a close-knit Chinese society, older people tend to have relatives and friends living nearby. In Taiwanese rural areas, older people habitually get together in front of the village temple to chat and drink tea. Such casual social gatherings help to strengthen community bonds and satisfy social needs. Indeed this social activity correlated with lower levels of depressive symptoms ($r = -.16$).

Gardening (20.8%) was the fourth popular leisure pursuit for older people and the only one involving physical exertion in Lu’s study. Physical activities can protect against dementia and AD for older people (43). Gardening is also regarded as a hobby which can generate a strong sense of achievement (52) and

aesthetical enjoyment (35). Taken together, it is understandable that older adults who engaged in these popular leisure pursuits may harvest diverse benefits gratifying psychological, educational, social, physical, relaxation, and aesthetic needs. Such gratified needs thus are expressed in reported meaningfulness of and satisfaction with one's leisure life as-a-whole. To promote active engagement with life and successful ageing, these meaningful leisure pursuits may play an integral part.

Further evidence pertaining to psychosocial correlates of QOL in older age came from the latest national survey, Taiwan Social Change Survey (TSCS). TSCS is the largest nationwide social survey in Taiwan (also incorporated into the International Social Survey Program, ISSP, which involves 40 countries in the world). The TSCS series is operated by the Academia Sinica Taiwan, which has conducted 41 surveys as of 2008. With more than 80,000 interviews over the past 24 years, the TSCS has become the largest survey series among all of the general social surveys in the world in terms of the accumulated sample size (53). Highly reputed for its methodological rigor (e.g., nationwide three-stage stratified proportion-to-population size (PPS) sampling using household registration data, well-trained interviewers making home visits, strict supervision, post-interview verification and data checking), its high quality database is widely used for academic research and cross-cultural comparisons under the banner of the ISSP. The 2010 survey includes a full scale of depression symptoms (CES-D), and a comprehensive measure of QOL (global and domain satisfaction), as well as an index of social embeddedness, which is unprecedented in the TSCS/ISSP series. The following results were obtained using data from those aged above 60 years (60-93 years) in the survey sample.

When predicting depression in older age, female sex, impairing sickness, and financial insecurity were all significant risk factors. Physical ill-health had the gravest effect on mental well-being. On the other hand, when predicting life satisfaction in older age, staying married, not having impairing sickness, financial security, social embeddedness, and lack of depressive symptoms were all significant booster factors. Mental ill-health (depression) had the gravest impact damping life satisfaction. Interestingly, the

three leisure activities included in the survey, namely visiting museums/galleries, physical exercises/sports, traveling, did not have any effects on either depression or life satisfaction. As TSCS is designed as a national survey for all age groups, the three listed leisure pursuits this time are not the most popular among older people (48). Thus, the lack of significant results involving leisure needs to be interpreted with caution.

Nonetheless, TSCS 2010 is ground-breaking in the sense that it is the first time a national survey includes both positive and negative indicators of QOL, namely, life satisfaction and depression. Furthermore, unlike large-scale social surveys, both indicators of QOL are measured with multiple items reflecting well upon their latent constructs: both CES-D and life satisfaction scales conformed to a one-factor structure, with all items highly loaded as they should be. The combined conceptual, psychometric, and methodological rigor renders us more confidence in claiming that health, finance, social integration and active participation in life are all integral aspects of a high quality of life in older age for Taiwanese adults.

Discussion

The purpose of this paper was two-fold: to explore older people's attitudes towards aging as a subjective aspect of QOL, and to further examine whether leisure pursuits in later years are associated with QOL in a Chinese society--Taiwan. On the first front, we have presented unequivocal evidence from a recent series of studies assessing Taiwanese people's general attitudes towards older people, and older people's own projection of aging. What is consistently found is that in general Taiwanese older people possessed positive attitudes towards aging, confirming that aging can be experienced favorably and meaningfully. The limited existing Taiwanese research also noted that the preponderance of positive attitudes towards aging is most prominent in psychological and cognitive aspects, both viewed by older people themselves (19) and by other age groups (16,20). In other words, old age along with its rich life experiences, wisdom, and social prestige is to a certain extent represented in a positive light. Even more encouraging is the finding that from older

people's perspective, positive attitudes are not restricted to any one aspect of the aging process—they remain optimistic for aging in physical, psychological, social, and financial aspects (21). These latest findings were consistent with Western studies showing overall positive self-evaluations among older people (14), and generally more favorable aging perceptions among older than younger people (54). In this respect, ample Western studies have demonstrated the beneficial effects of education programs on dismantling negative stereotypes and ageism (12,13), we in Taiwan need to be more rigorous in promoting and implementing such programs at school and in the community. Positive aging needs not remain an ideal; it is humanly possible and politically correct. More concerted research and practical efforts should be invested to ensure and enhance this subjective aspect of QOL for older adults in Taiwan.

On the second front, we have also presented unequivocal evidence from several large scale studies examining leisure as a psychosocial correlate of QOL for Taiwanese older people, along with other known factors. The most striking evidence presented is that leisure pursuits in older age are related to emotional well-being (depressive symptoms), even after controlling for effects of demographics, physical health/disability, and social support. Although leisure experiences were not the strongest predictors of depression, their contributions were greater than the often-studied social support and independent from those of physical health/disability and social support. Previous social gerontological research has firmly established the protective effects of social resources (49,55-57). We have extended the list of protectors to include leisure, which is so far largely overlooked in Chinese studies of older age. Last but not the least, for Taiwanese older people, positive (life satisfaction) and negative (depression) aspects of QOL are mutually linked over and beyond known factors of health, financial security, and social embeddedness. Looking ahead, in a fast changing developing society, health care, financial planning, social integration and active participation in life are all integral aspects of a high quality of life in later years. Individuals, family, organizations, and society at large need to join hands to ensure positive experiences in the above aspects of objective and subjective quality of living.

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