



Traditional Chinese Medical (TCM) Tourism in the Context of "One Belt and One Road"

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Abstract

With the development of modern economy, people all over the world have experienced a change of their needs from food and shelter to spiritual needs. The increasing number of tourists has brought infinite possibilities to the tourism industry. At the same time, the importance attached to health for all people goes higher than ever before. This is why "tourism + health" (or travel for health) has become an important model of growth in the industries as well as a popular topic for discussion and research. The aging of the international population has also become a factor for the development of health tourism. Destination countries are developing their own unique products to cater to tourists traveling for health and wellness, such as spa in Thailand, yoga in India, physical examination in Singapore and Japan, beautification in Brazil, cancer treatment in the United States, dentistry in Hungary, hot spring in Turkey, plastic surgery in South Korea, and stem cells in Switzerland. In China, traditional Chinese medicine has been usefully combined with tourism in its new development. This paper presents a review of traditional Chinese medical (TCM) tourism, and highlights its potential for further development in the context of the country's “one-belt-one-road” strategy. The article also suggests directions for future research on this emerging tourist market.

Keywords

Health, TCM tourism, Outbound medical tourism, “One-Belt-One-Road”

Introduction

Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) is a system of medicine of at least 23 centuries old that aims to prevent or heal disease by maintaining or restoring *yin-yang* balance. China has one of the world’s oldest medical systems. Acupuncture and Chinese herbal remedies date back at least 2,200 years, although the earliest known written record of Chinese medicine is the *Huangdi Neijing* (The Yellow Emperor’s Inner Classic) from the 3rd century BC. This classic has provided theoretical concepts for TCM that has remained the basis of its practice today. In essence, traditional Chinese healers seek to restore a dynamic balance between two complementary forces, *yin* (passive) and *yang* (active), which pervade human body as they do the universe as a whole. According to TCM, a person is healthy when harmony exists between these two forces; illness, on the other hand, results from a breakdown in the equilibrium of *yin* and *yang* (Baidu encyclopedia).

Since the launch of medical tourism products around 2000, the number of medical tourists around the world has been increasing year by year, so the total revenue of tourism industry has increased from less than 10 billion dollars per year to 20 billion dollars in just five years, becoming the fastest growing industry segment of global tourism. By 2013, it was worth 438.6 billion dollars (Baidu encyclopedia).

The largest part of the revenue comes from health tourism which spreads out around the United States, Germany, France, Japan and Austria. In Asia, Thailand leads the way. In China, the official development and promotion of medical tourism products in Shanghai started from 2009. In 2013, Hainan Province officially announced the establishment of an international medical tourism zone. As early as 2003, Sanya hospital of traditional Chinese

medicine provided TCM recuperation services to more than 30,000 tourists from Russia, Sweden and other countries (Sina Finance). However, neighboring Russia, Mongolia and Kazakhstan are the only foreign tourists coming to China for medical treatment. There are still a lot of opportunities for the TCM tourism, and it can even be established as an important strategy for tourism development. In 2017, China published the list of the first batch of national demonstration bases for TCM health tourism, which has not been widely publicized and promoted, so there is still a large gap. In Zaozhuang of Shandong Province, there is a first-of-its-kind pharmacopoeia museum. Every year, international tourists from more than a dozen countries visit *dong-e-e-jiao* museum and factory in Shandong Province. In Guizhou, although there is a TCM health tourism demonstration zone in the southeast of Guizhou that has been listed as one of the first demonstration bases, there is little information about it, even in the Internet. Therefore, it can be forecasted that there is considerable product for the development of TCM tourism in China. It could be well planned before tourists could be attracted for visit. A series of industrial chains will be alive.

The state administration of traditional Chinese medicine has noted that TCM has become globally popular and could also be considered one of the most representative elements of the Chinese culture. Hence the state attaches great importance to and supports the development of traditional Chinese medicine. International recognition of traditional Chinese medicine is also on the rise, with more and more Chinese medicine clinics operating in different countries.

Notably, TCM tourism fits very well within the framework of the “One-Belt-One-Road” strategy launched by the Chinese government in 2013. The outline of the Healthy China (2019-2030), issued by the state council, explicitly calls for the development of the health industry. As an important development objective, TCM tourism not only embodies the traditional Chinese medical culture, but also empowers the products of "tourism plus". By

2019, China had built 30 overseas centers of high-quality TCM along the one-belt-one-road countries, indicating that TCM tourism is becoming more and more popular, and has received increasing attention and participation.

Literature review

As early as the Tang and Song dynasties, the proportion of foreign trade in traditional Chinese medicine was expanding, books, works and technologies which related to traditional Chinese medicine were spread along the routes of the ancient Silk Road. TCM has been listed in the China and US's strategic economic orientation, as well as the China and UK's economic and financial orientation. It has become an important part of China's diplomatic contents (Ling, 2018). As a means of communication between countries, TCM culture has received more and more recognition.

At present, medical tourism around the world is divided into medicine and therapy, and TCM tourism is more focused on therapy. Under the characteristics of TCM recuperation, tourism routes have formed a series of tour groups, that is to say, the products are not *ad hoc* ones, but long-term repeat business from the same tourists of the same origins. Thus, its economic returns are also considerable.

Outbound medical tourism has started to attract research attention, nonetheless, little is known about inbound medical tourism, especially in TCM tourism, which is a complete knowledge gap. From my part, the reasons are as follows: First of all, the domestic facilities and equipment are not fully well in work, secondly, the human resources are not enough, and the chronic difficulties in getting medical treatment in China will also be obstacles to the establishment of TCM tourism products. Thirdly, the international awareness is not enough, which means that China has a large space for the development and promotion of TCM. Under this situation, in addition to inbound TCM tourism, there could be a big health

tourism chain with various countries' related production. For example, a traveler can have an experience in the chain production of big health tourism in various countries (not necessarily for diseases, but for therapy). China pays more attention to developing the TCM products at a culturally strategic level. Traditional Chinese medicine emphasizes on recuperating, so it can create a unique experience for tourists. This paper only presents a preliminary analysis, and more work could be done in the future.

Future research

In light of this emerging market, future research needs to be conducted in the following aspects. First, what are the current states of and future directions for health tourism in China, especially in terms of TCM? Second, from a destination marketing and management perspective, what have China and other countries done in planning and developing TCM tourism? In an associated manner, what are the strength and for weaknesses, and what could have been done better? Third, from a collaborative standpoint, what could be achieved globally or regionally in fostering this sector of tourism development? What role could the “one-belt-one-road” strategy play in developing a product or production chain for TCM tourism? Moreover, in addition to implications for industries, what could TCM tourism bring to health and wellbeing of its participants or consumers. Last but not least, are there any implications for education and training of tomorrow’s professionals to sustain the growth of this sector of tourism business?

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