

# Dilemmas and Solutions on Healthcare Tourism: A Case of Ya'an City in China

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**Abstract:** With sharply increasing of the tendency seeking health, healthcare tourism has ushered in unprecedented opportunities all over the world. Motivated by this phenomenon, under the strategy of rural revitalization of China, this paper aims at resolving dilemmas for developing healthcare tourism of Ya'an city in China. Ya'an city, locates in western China, is rich in healthcare resources and has been devoted itself in developing healthcare tourism, but the development is still in infancy. Through investigating current situation of healthcare tourism, three problems were found, such as insufficient planning, lacking of infrastructure and professional people on healthcare tourism. Based on these, three measures should be proposed, such as to make a comprehensive planning, to improve supporting facilities, and to cultivate some talents on healthcare tourism.

## 1. Introduction

The issue of "agriculture, rural areas and farmers" has always been the top concern to China. In the Nineteenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China, President Xi put forward the strategy of rural revitalization, prioritizing the development of agriculture and rural areas to build rural areas with thriving businesses, pleasant living environments, social etiquette and civility, effective governance, and prosperity [1], which provided theoretical guidance. Meanwhile, modern society has witnessed a sharply increasing of tendency seeking health. Higher incomes, mounting interests in healthy lifestyles and the willingness to spend on health, have accelerated the progress of healthcare tourism [2, 3]. The "Thirteenth Five-Year Plan for Tourism Development" proposes to promote the integration of tourism and healthcare, and build a number of healthcare tourism demonstration bases. Based on the local healthcare resources, upgrading healthcare tourism is a feasible measure for rural revitalization and poverty alleviation through tourism.

Ya'an city locates in the western edge of the Sichuan Basin, southwest of China, adjacent to Chengdu, whose location conditions are superior. At present, the government of Ya'an City is actively promoting the healthcare tourism. However, there continue to be many problems. So, this study will clarify the connotation of healthcare tourism and its relationship with rural revitalization strategy, difficulties encountered in the development of healthcare tourism in Ya'an city, and propose our advice for future development.

## 2. Literature review

In China, "Healthcare" is defined as "Kangyang", which means health, old-aged care and health preserving [4]. In a narrow sense, the core connotation of it is health, old-aged care and healthcare. In a broad sense, healthcare tourism is a niche tourism industry that could satisfy people's pursuit of a healthy and happy life through medical surgery or some leisure activities, so that people's body and mind are in a healthy and good state [5]. At present, most people in China are in sub-health state. For elder people, it is due to age; for young white-collar, it's working pressure. Even young children are suffering from adolescent obesity and myopia caused by unhealthy living habits. As above,

healthcare tourism, which helps to meet the people's needs for a better life, is receiving more and more attention. Healthcare tourism gets an opportunity.

A series of explorations on healthcare tourism have been done by countries around the world. As far as the policy is concerned, the United States incorporated health management into the national healthcare plan in 1969 [6], Japan promulgated the Health Promotion Act in 2002, and China opinions on accelerating the development of the old-age service industry, opinions on promoting the development of the health service industry, etc. As for the focus of healthcare tourism, European and American countries mostly focus on pension and health; while instead of paying attention to pension and healthcare, China pays more on tourism development. For developing model, European and American countries have formed the old-age community in Sun City of the United States, developed hot spring tourism in Kangal, Turkey, and different types of forest health models in Germany. Even though China has formed the health tourism model with regional characteristics, such as migratory bird health model of Hainan province, sunshine tour health model of Panzhihua city in Sichuan province, however, when compared with mature healthcare tourism destinations in Europe, Canada and Australia, it is still in infancy [7]. Traveling for health and improving health become a fashionable idea for modern people [8, 9]. Even though, Ya'an city has devoted itself to the development of recreational tourism over the past years, almost no great progress has been made. In this new era, an effective way for healthcare tourism development is of enormous significance.

### 3. Relationship between strategy of rural revitalization and healthcare tourism

The strategy of rural revitalization aims at revitalizing the countryside, and healthcare tourism can be an effective way to realize it. Rural revitalization and the progress of healthcare tourism can promote each other.

#### 3.1 Rural revitalization promoting the development of healthcare tourism

Thriving businesses promotes healthcare tourism. In the strategy of rural revitalization, it is clearly putted forward that it should be given priority to develop agriculture and countryside, which aims at ensuring the supply of agricultural products and national food security. But if only primary industry, less economic benefits could be obtained. Therefore, besides ensuring agricultural development, the integration of the primary, secondary and tertiary industry must be realized (Huang, 2018), which will promote the extension of rural industrial chain and realize the prosperity. Therefore, multifunction of agriculture must be explored, as being shown in Table 1. Specifically, importance should be attached to the functions of leisure, cultural education to provides resources for tourism activities.

Table 1 Multifunction of agricultural products

	Functions	Effect
Economic level	Food production Economic Development	Stabilizing supply of agricultural products Forming agricultural income
Political level	National security	Ensuring food security, food safety and food sovereignty
Cultural level	Medical, leisure and Tourism Cultural education	Being a place for leisure tourism Cultivating natural sentiment, understanding agricultural civilization and experiencing traditional folk customs
Ecological level	Ecological protection Species diversity	Protecting residential environment and biological resources Maintaining harmonious coexistence between human society and nature

Pleasant living environments provide basic resources for healthcare tourism. The strategy of rural revitalization clearly states that the pleasant living environments of rural areas should be guaranteed, and the development of rural industries should not be at the expense of "lucid water and lush mountain", which means pleasant living environments. Healthcare tourism has strict requirements on the topographic elevation, climatic conditions, air and water quality. Once living environments being destroyed there is no possibility to strengthen healthcare tourism.

Civility improves tourist satisfaction. Civility requires inheritance and innovation of Chinese traditional culture, such as respect the elder and cherish the young, which in turn improve customer experience. And customer experience directly affects customer's revisit rate to a certain extent. Civility is a profound experience of tourists in the "global" range of destinations, which could effectively satisfy customers in the destination along eating, living, traveling, purchasing and entertainment [10].

### **3.2 Promoting the revitalization of rural areas by developing healthcare tourism**

Developing healthcare tourism promotes thriving businesses. Healthcare tourism involves manufacturing, agriculture, medical treatment, old-aged care, culture and other related industries, which can integrate related industries in the countryside to activate businesses. For example, the combination of healthcare tourism and manufacture industry forms healthcare tourism manufacturing industry, which provides tools and equipment for recreational and health activities, consequently effectively prolongs the industrial chain and value chain.

Developing healthcare tourism promotes pleasant living environments. Wang and Jiang based on economic knowledge, analyzed the relationship between "lucid waters and lush mountains" and economic income through theoretical modeling, and concluded that when the non-expendable use of lucid waters and lush mountains can obtain more profits than the expendable way, people will choose to protect the environments [11], in order to be more profitable. Healthcare tourism can bring enormous economic benefits through a nonexpendable way. For example, government of Panzihua city proposed developing healthcare tourism in 2012. In the past five years, the number of tourists of Panzihua city increased by about 172% and the total income of tourism increased by about 318%. It has also made gratifying achievements in environmental protection.

Healthcare tourism promotes prosperity, and produces huge economic benefits. Developing healthcare tourism could effectively exploit multifunction of agriculture, then prolong the industry chain and value chain creating more jobs, then effectively increase the income of rural residents achieving prosperity, narrowing the income gap between urban and rural residents, which as a consequence effectively enhance the sense of satisfaction of rural residents.

## **4. Advantages for developing healthcare tourism of Ya'an city**

Healthcare tourism has specific requirements for destination altitude, climate conditions. Hot spring and cultural resources are also required for the purpose of health.

### **4.1 Basement for developing healthcare tourism of Ya'an city**

Altitude has an extremely important impact on human health. From the point of view of health, the area with an altitude of 1,200-2,000 meters, which has abundant sunshine, fresh air and negative oxygen ions, is most suitable for people's health. It cannot only promote metabolism, improve immunity, but also have a good convalescent effect on the respiratory system, especially for asthma, bronchitis and other diseases. Specifically, when altitude is 1,200 meters, the heartbeat frequency of the person can rise. The thyroid and adrenal glands of men become more active. Ya'an city locates in the edge of the Sichuan Basin, showing a pattern of lower terrain in the east and higher in the other three sides. The highest elevation can reach 5,793 meters, while the lowest elevation is only 627 meters. Among them, the area with elevation of 1,000-3,500 meters accounts for 69% of the total area, which is suitable for human health.

Meanwhile, climate is an extremely critical factor affecting human health. Superior climatic conditions could improve the health of the human body and achieve longevity. The climate of Ya'an city is a subtropical monsoon humid climate with an average temperature of 14-17 °C. There is no heat in summer, no cold in winter, pleasant for living.

#### 4.2 Resources for developing healthcare tourism of Ya'an city

Hot spring activities contribute to health and fitness. Trace elements in hot springs cannot only be absorbed by human body through human skin, improving human liver, kidney and stomach functions, but also attach to human skin to play a protective and therapeutic role. The hot spring resources in Ya'an city are mainly distributed in Shimian county and Yucheng district. Among them, Shimian county owns the largest number, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Hot springs health resources of Ya'an city

Location	Hot spring name
Shimian county	Caoke Hot Spring
	Tianwan Hot Spring
	Nanya River Hot Spring in Guangyuanpu
Yucheng district	Zhougongshan Hot Spring Park
	Zhougongshan Hot Spring Town

*Collected from the Annual Ya'an Government Report*

Chinese herbal medicine is a treasure of the Chinese nation culture, which has a history of thousands of years. Different from Western medicine, traditional Chinese medicine focuses on the overall and systemic health, and can prevent diseases well, which is in line with the needs of contemporary people for health care. Ya'an city is a national medicine base, with more than 1,200 common medicinal plants, detailed in Table 3.

Table 3 Main resources of traditional Chinese herbal medicine of Ya'an city

Classification	Names of major herbal
Woody medicinal materials	Cork tree
	Eucommia ulmoides
	Magnolia bark
Herbal medicine	Coptis chinensis
	Gastrodia elata Blume
Animal medicine	Musk
	Bear bile
Mineral medicinal materials	Gypsum
	Glauber

#### 5. Dilemmas for developing healthcare tourism of Ya'an city

The development on healthcare tourism of Ya'an city has begun to emerge, showing strong development momentum and development potential. However, there are some problems still, such as insufficient planning, lacking of infrastructure and of talents on healthcare tourism.

##### 5.1 Insufficient planning

In recent years, a series of policies and regulations has been promulgated to promote the development of healthcare tourism, yet, the comprehensive planning of healthcare tourism is still deficient, and the local government is even more chaotic in developing healthcare tourism, lacking

the practical guidance programs. Specifically, although in 2016 Ya'an city promulgated the "Thirteenth Five-Year" Service Industry Development Plan (2016-2020), it still has no necessary specific policy and guidance. Insufficient comprehensive planning will inevitably separate healthcare tourism and relative business, leading to difficulties in integrating tourism with healthcare, pension, medical and other industries.

## **5.2 Lacking of infrastructure**

Healthcare tourism has specific requirements for resources and supporting facilities. To some extent, the quality of supporting facilities will determine how well healthcare tourism will be. As far as medical facilities are concerned, according to the statistics issued by the State Health Planning Commission in 2012, there are 322 rehabilitation hospitals in China, including 206 in cities and 116 in rural areas. The number of rehabilitation hospitals at Ya'an city is too little, which is not conducive to the progress of healthcare tourism. As for the distribution, most distribute in urban area of Ya'an city, leading to inadequacy.

## **5.3 Lacking of talent**

Talents are the core competitiveness in contemporary society. As a compound industry, healthcare tourism needs person who master the knowledge of pension, health caring and tourism management. However, at present, there is still a serious shortage of planning personnel, business management personnel and high-quality practitioners in the healthcare tourism throughout the country. Yet there are have only two universities, named Sichuan Agricultural University and Ya'an Vocational and Technical College, have no relative major about healthcare tourism. How to cultivate health personnel, what is the training standard and what is the training mode are still the big problems which need to be further explored.

## **6. Solutions for developing healthcare tourism of Ya'an city**

Ya'an city has superior basis and abundant health resources. It is of great significance for Ya'an city to plan and develop healthcare tourism in an all-round way to realize the strategy of rural revitalization.

### **6.1 Making a comprehensive planning**

Definite policies and plans should be formulated by the government of Ya'an city with responsibility of rural revitalization. Especially the comprehensive plan should be made being based on regional differences. Then brand could be produced. Taking Shimian county as an example, the hot spring resources should be used to form hot spring healthcare tourism, which integrate the old-age medical care and hot spring entertainment.

### **6.2 Improving supporting facilities**

The following ways could be used to meet the needs of healthcare tourism for supporting facilities. Firstly, the existing supporting facilities should be well maintained. For existing public infrastructure involving transportation, network, rehabilitation medical care, nursing homes and other facilities. Meanwhile, government and healthcare enterprises should strengthen management and maintain them regularly. Secondly, improve the construction of health infrastructure. The government should increase the investment of facilities, especially in transportation, rehabilitation medical care, nursing homes and other facilities. Thirdly, relative resources must incline to rural areas. The focus of infrastructure construction of healthcare tourism should be shifted from city to rural area.

### **6.3 Cultivating some talents**

Without abundant talents, healthcare tourism could not go further. It is necessary to cultivate talents on healthcare tourism. Firstly, setting standards. Personnel training management system and

employment standards should be formulated by the government to improve practitioner's ability. Secondly, the government of Ya'an city can cooperate with relevant colleges and universities to form school-site cooperation, try to set up relevant specialties to try out counterpart employment, and train high-level compound person for the development on healthcare tourism of Ya'an city. Thirdly, encouraging enterprises to train staff. The government can give certain financial support to enterprises who carry out the activities of cultivating healthcare tourism personnel. Finally, introducing industrial elites. The government can introduce a number of elites with abundant experience on healthcare tourism through certain measures to promote the development of local healthcare tourism.

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