

A Review of the Opportunities and Challenges for the Highland Tibetan Medicine Health and Wellness Industry under the "Healthy China" Perspective

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Abstract: In recent years, the issue of population aging has become increasingly prominent, and societal demand for diversified and specialized healthcare services has continued to grow. Against this backdrop, the Tibetan medicine industry has developed steadily, while the plateau health and wellness industry has also shown a positive growth trend. Owing to its unique natural environment, plateau health and wellness bases demonstrate significant potential in promoting human health. This paper first reviews the environmental characteristics of the Qinghai–Tibet Plateau and analyzes the current status of plateau health and wellness base development in China, as well as the development of the Tibetan medicine industry. On this basis, the paper further explores the practice of Tibetan medicinal bathing in plateau Tibetan medicine-oriented health and wellness tourism, its integration pathways with modern industries, and the existing limitations. The study aims to enhance public awareness and understanding of plateau health and wellness and Tibetan medicine, provide scientific support for the in-depth exploration of Tibetan medicinal resources and the sustainable advancement of the plateau health and wellness industry, and thereby better safeguard the physical and mental health of local residents and visitors while promoting the high-quality development of the plateau Tibetan medicine industry.

Keywords: Highland; Tibetan Medicine; Health and Wellness Industry; Research Progress.

1. Introduction

In recent years, the plateau has become a sacred place for spiritual relaxation for many people. Meanwhile, the rapid development of the health and wellness industry has led to the formation of relatively complete industrial models across the country. Considering the characteristics of the plateau, further integrating the plateau with the health and wellness industry has become our new goal. In particular, the Tibetan medicine industry provides targeted services with ethnic characteristics for tourists traveling inland, offering new ideas for people's relaxation and the sustainable development of the ethnic medicine economy.

2. Environmental Characteristics of the Qinghai–Tibet Plateau

The Qinghai–Tibet Plateau, covering 28% of China's land area, is known as the "Asian Water Tower." It is also a natural habitat for rare wildlife, a gene bank of plateau species, one of the "World's Four Major Pollution-Free Super Clean Zones," and a crucial ecological security barrier for China and even Asia [1]. As the source of the Yangtze River, Yellow River, and Lancang River, it contributes 25% of the Yangtze's total water volume, 49% of the Yellow River's, and 15% of the Lancang River's, hence its name "Asian Water Tower" [2]. Also hailed as the "Third Pole of the Earth," it is a vital national ecological security barrier, influencing global climate stability and biodiversity prosperity. Therefore, scientific planning is of great significance for preserving its lucid waters and lush mountains [2].

3. Current Status of Plateau Health and Wellness Bases

Health and wellness tourism started relatively late in China

and has a short history. However, with government attention and societal interest, research enthusiasm for health and wellness tourism has been increasing. The plateau not only has the aspect of hypoxic damage, which can cause altitude sickness, but also benefits human health. The remarkable achievements of high-altitude training, the location of the world's three major longevity areas on plateaus, and the benefits of using the plateau environment to treat certain diseases are indisputable facts [3]. Nowadays, "plateau health and wellness" has received significant attention and strong support from leaders of the Qinghai Provincial Party Committee and Government, who have issued important instructions for carrying out this work well. I am greatly encouraged and will actively promote, mobilize, and organize efforts within the plateau medicine community to implement this work thoroughly, meticulously, and effectively [3]. The "Qinghai Standard," as a representative work of Chinese plateau medical research, has made outstanding contributions to the development of world plateau medicine and has earned a "passport" for Chinese plateau medicine to go global [4].

4. Current Development Status of Tibetan Medicine

The Tibetan medicine industry is a crucial component of China's traditional Chinese medicine sector and one of China's valuable traditional medical cultures [5]. The emergence of "new quality productive forces" presents opportunities for the prosperity of the Tibetan medicine industry. New quality productive forces aim for high technology, high efficiency, and high quality, implementing the new development philosophy throughout the process, enhancing overall development quality and ensuring sustainability through innovation, green development, coordination, openness, and sharing [6]. An analysis of all journal literature on Tibetan medicine from CNKI (China

National Knowledge Infrastructure) covering 2010 to August 2024 reveals distinct disciplinary characteristics. Relevant data shows that the field of Chinese materia medica contributes 120 articles, accounting for 75.47% of the total, fully demonstrating its core position and leading role in Tibetan medicine research[7]. From the inclusion of "Lum medicinal bathing of Sowa Rigpa" in the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity on November 28, 2018, to the active involvement of Tibetan medicine in COVID-19 prevention and control at the end of 2019, the "Tibetan medicine solution" embodying Chinese wisdom serves as an excellent vehicle for disseminating Tibetan medical culture. Research on the dissemination of Tibetan medical culture is thus timely and significant [8].

5. Plateau Tibetan Medicine Health and Wellness Tourism

5.1. Tibetan Medicinal Bathing: A Living Heritage of Healing Art

As a traditional therapeutic method, Tibetan medicinal bathing has a solid mass foundation in Tibetan areas. Since its successful UNESCO inscription, it has garnered worldwide attention, affirming its medical and cultural value. The tourism application prospects for Tibetan medicinal bathing are considerable [9]. Tibetan medicinal bathing refers to an external therapy that extracts active ingredients from certain Chinese herbal medicines through various methods to create medicinal liquids, which are then applied via fumigation, steaming, compresses, or bathing to treat ailments[10]. It is particularly effective for certain diseases, simple to administer, and free from toxic side effects [11]. The principal formula "Five Nectar Medicinal Herbs" (Wuwei Ganlu) for Tibetan medicinal bathing is recorded in the Four Medical Tantras, composed of five Tibetan medicines: Ephedra intermedia, Juniperus formosana leaves, Artemisia sieversiana, Myricaria germanica, and Rhododendron anthopogon. These act on the body through external application [12]. Tibetan medicinal bathing can drive the development of Tibetan culture in brand marketing, attracting more collaborators and clients [13].

5.2. Integration Pathways of Tibetan Medicine with the Modern Health and Wellness Industry

The Four Medical Tantras, authored by the renowned Tibetan medical master Yuthog Yontan Gonpo and completed in the 8th century, is an authoritative academic compendium integrating Tibetan medical practice and theoretical essence, hailed as the encyclopedia of Tibetan medicine [14]. During the phased achievements in epidemic prevention and control, the unique advantages of Qinghai's Chinese and Tibetan medicine were undeniable, with adjuvant therapies showing significant clinical efficacy [15].

Internet-famous treatments like "acupoint catgut embedding for weight loss," the UNESCO-inscribed Tibetan medicinal bathing, as well as Tibetan Hor-mer therapy, Nengxiu therapy, Yuque therapy, and moxibustion—these distinctive Chinese/Tibetan medical diagnostic and therapeutic methods are gradually entering the public eye and attracting widespread attention [16]. Promoting the integrated development of "ethnic medicine + health and wellness," deeply tapping into the potential of the health industry, accelerating the integration of medicine and elderly care,

enhancing the quality of the health industry, using TCM rehabilitation techniques for follow-up diagnostic rehabilitation for disabled individuals, and providing door-to-door rehabilitation healthcare services can effectively improve the accessibility of TCM rehabilitation services [17]. Integrating Tibetan medical cultural elements into tourism significantly enhances tourist appeal and endows tourism products with unique cultural value. This represents an optimization of the tourism industry by the cultural industry within the context of integration [18]. Tasting health-preserving herbal teas, experiencing Chinese/Tibetan medical appropriate techniques, visiting Chinese/Tibetan medicine night markets on "Leopard Street"... Chinese/Tibetan medical culture is permeating the daily lives of ordinary people [19]. Leveraging the Tibetan Medical Culture Exhibition Center established by the Prefecture Tibetan Hospital, historical and cultural tourism centered on Tibetan medicine can be developed, along with wellness tourism bases featuring Tibetan medical cultural experiences, healthcare experiences, and product experiences [20]. Health products independently developed by the Ganzi Prefecture Tibetan Hospital, such as the "Sanwei Yuganzi Tea" and Tibetan medicinal health liquor, have been completed and launched. The "Yaoyu San" (Herbal Bath Powder) developed in collaboration with Guangdong enterprise Zangbangkang has also been released [21]. The Tibet Autonomous Region is placing increasing importance on the development of Tibetan medicine, achieving multi-stakeholder collaboration to jointly promote the advancement of Tibetan medical culture [22].

5.3. Practical Difficulties in the Development of the Tibetan Medicine Health and Wellness Industry

Currently, although Tibetan medicine remains the predominant traditional medical system in plateau regions, characteristics such as late industrialization start, weak development capacity, and insufficient supporting strength remain prominent [23]. Due to specific growth environments, naturally grown Tibetan medicinal resources are extremely limited [24]. There is a shortage of trained personnel in health and wellness tourism, and service quality urgently needs improvement; thus, establishing a proficient professional service team is imperative [25]. Dorje Rinchen, Professor at Tibet Tibetan Medical University and President of its Affiliated Hospital, notes that while the university has done solid work in inheriting Tibetan medicine, it lacks advanced high-level scientific research cooperation, necessitating continued deepening of educational model reforms [26].

5.4. Promising Industrial Prospects

The development of the Tibetan medicine industry is vital to the health of the Tibetan people and the economic growth of the snow-covered plateau. Advancing this ethnic medicine industry forward requires promoting its standardization and internationalization, further extending the industrial chain, and continuously strengthening technological innovation [27]. Utilizing Tibetan medicine cultural exhibition halls to create an immersive cultural atmosphere can guide urban and rural residents towards a social climate of knowing, trusting, using, and loving Chinese/Tibetan medicine [28]. Developing integrated information platforms and maker spaces for the Tibetan medicine cultural and creative industry based on Internet of Things technology can perfect the "industry, learning, and research" trinity industrial service system [29-

^{30]}In the new era, continued efforts should be made to strengthen the protection and research of Tibetan medical culture, promote its integrated development with modern medicine, and allow this precious cultural heritage to radiate new brilliance on the international stage [31].

6. Conclusion

The rise of plateau Tibetan medicine health and wellness signifies that the plateau health industry has entered a completely new development stage. The emergence of this new format not only achieves a deeper integration of the plateau's unique natural environment, profound ethnic medical wisdom, and humanistic care but also indicates that Tibetan medicine has transcended geographical limitations. It is no longer merely a cultural heritage of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau but a knowledge treasure cherished by the entire Chinese nation. Promoting the plateau Tibetan medicine health and wellness industry holds profound significance for advancing Tibetan medical culture globally, while also serving as a key initiative to attract people worldwide to "come in" for experience and understanding. As relevant theoretical and practical research continues to deepen, plateau Tibetan medicine health and wellness is poised to unleash greater potential in the global health field, demonstrating even more vigorous vitality.

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