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## THE MODERN PECULIARITIES OF MEDICAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT: A CASE OF CHINA

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**Abstract.** This paper examines the modern peculiarities of medical tourism development in China. It explores the factors driving its growth, the challenges faced, and the future prospects. China’s rapid economic development, advancements in healthcare infrastructure, and cultural heritage have contributed to its emergence as a leading medical tourism destination. While the industry faces challenges such as language barriers and cultural differences, the future looks promising with continued investments in healthcare and efforts to enhance the patient experience.

**Keywords.** Economic development, healthcare infrastructure, medical tourism destination, high-tech medical facilities, patient safety concerns, language barriers, medicine treatments, medical tourism market.

### **I. Introduction**

Medical tourism, a global phenomenon that involves individuals traveling to foreign countries for healthcare services, has witnessed significant growth in recent decades. China, with its vast population, economic development, and burgeoning healthcare infrastructure, has emerged as a prominent destination for medical tourists worldwide. This paper delves into the modern peculiarities of medical tourism development in China, examining the key factors driving its growth, the challenges faced, and the future prospects.

“China is facing new challenges as more of the country’s population begins to suffer from so-called “lifestyle” diseases, such as cancer, heart disease, diabetes and other chronic illnesses. According to the latest cancer report by the World Health Organization (WHO), China accounted for 3.07 million newly diagnosed cancer cases, 21.8 per cent of the global total [1]”. The pressing need to manage the increasing number

of cases in the country has significantly boosted the growth of China's medical tourism market. This has attracted medical tourists from developed nations to consider China as a viable option for healthcare services, enhancing the country's share in the medical tourism sector. Additionally, favorable currency exchange rates for visitors from developed countries have made various treatments more affordable, creating numerous opportunities for key players in China's medical tourism industry.

#### *1.1 Research Questions:*

- 1. Which Type Of Treatment Is Most Popular In China?*
- 2. What Limits China Medical Tourism Market?*
- 3. What Factor is Further Boosting the Medical Tourism Market in China?*

#### *1.2. Research Objectives:*

- 1. To explain the essence of medical tourism to the development of economic growth in China*
- 2. To describe what range of medical procedures and heals have been developed for medical tourists in China*
- 3. To describe available barriers for thriving medical tourism in China*
- 4. To display what factors are affecting China Medical Tourism Market to boost.*

## **II. Materials and methods**

The researcher has used a thorough methodology to perform the systematic literature evaluation with the help of recent-year-guideline articles written by Medical Tourism Magazine. The stages below delineate the technique that the writer has employed (or intend to employ) in carrying out this paper:

- 1.1 Formulating Research Questions:** It is started by developing specific research questions to help determine the breadth of overall review. These questions helped to discover relevant studies and concentrate study. As study's main purpose is to analyze and understand the impact of Chinese medical tourism industry in global landes.
- 1.2 Search Strategy Development:** It was created a search strategy based to achieve a through and targeted search, appropriate databases had to be chosen, search keywords defined like healthcare infrastructure, medical tourism destination, high-tech medical facilities, patient safety concerns. The researcher used databases of open access, Google Scholar and web-pages of international medical tourism organizations.
- 1.3 Data Extraction:** It was used a prepared data extraction form to retrieve pertinent information from the selected research. This featured data on study characteristics, methodology, sample size, and main conclusions. The extraction procedure ensured uniformity and enabled the systematic structuring of data for further analysis.

### III. Results and discussion

#### *2.1 Historical Context and Current Trends*

China, the most populous nation and the world's second-largest economy, has made significant strides in the global healthcare industry. In recent decades, the country has heavily invested in its medical infrastructure and technology, positioning itself as an emerging leader in medical tourism. Combining traditional Chinese medicine with advanced medical technology, China attracts patients globally for a wide range of treatments. From cutting-edge cancer therapies to holistic wellness programs, China offers a variety of healthcare services at competitive rates. Historically, China has been a pioneer in medicine, with traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) practices like acupuncture, herbal remedies, and Qi Gong being highly regarded for centuries. The ancient medical text, *Huangdi Neijing*, written over two millennia ago, continues to influence medical practices today. This rich cultural heritage complements China's modern healthcare offerings, providing an integrated approach that appeals to those seeking both conventional and alternative treatments.

China entered the medical tourism sector later than some other nations, but its rapid economic development and advancements in healthcare technology have quickly positioned it as a major player in the global market. In 2022, wellness services in China's medical tourism sector accounted for 34.8% of the market share. Known for its rich tradition and spiritual heritage, China has gained global recognition for its herbal treatments and medicines as popular complementary healthcare options. Acupuncture, a key aspect of Chinese medicine, is also highly favored by international patients seeking medical care in China. The growing influx of medical tourists has increased demand for wellness services, authentic alternative therapies, and has opened new opportunities for the expansion of China's medical tourism market.

China is one of 46 global destinations ranked within the 2020-2021 Medical Tourism Index, it is ranked 33 out of 46 Global medical destinations, 32 out of 46 Environment destinations, 35 out of 46 Medical Tourism Industry destinations, 29 out of 46 destinations based on quality of facilities and services.

In 2022, the cosmetic treatment segment captured over 45% of the market share in China. The growing influence of Korean pop culture and other factors have slightly raised beauty expectations among Chinese individuals. This, combined with the younger generation's increasing interest in enhancing their appearance, has driven the demand for cosmetic treatments across the country. The cosmetic treatment industry has evolved into a well-established and specialized sector, gaining popularity both domestically and internationally. As a result, it has become the most in-demand service in China's medical tourism industry.

**Table 1. The most popular medical providers in Chinese medical tourism industry.**

<b>№</b>	<b>The key players in Chinese medical tourism market</b>
1.	Beijing Saint Lucia Consulting Ltd.
2.	Dr. Prem Community
3.	Asia Pacific Medical Group
4.	China Medical Tourism Inc.
5.	Clifford Hospital
6.	Continuum Healthcare Co. Ltd
7.	Ctrip.com International
8.	Dennis Consulting Yunnan Ltd.
9.	Formera
10.	Inner Mongolia Tourism Administration
11.	Inter Partner Assistance Group
12.	Elizabeth Hospital
13.	BoaoYiling Life Care Center
14.	Beijing Tong Shantang Hospital of TCM
15.	Easy Tour China Travel Co. Ltd.

Key players in China's medical tourism market are working to expand their global reach, aiming to raise awareness of their affordable and accessible healthcare services. One prominent player, Beijing Saint Lucia Consulting Ltd, founded in 2011 and backed by Sequoia Capital, specializes in consulting for advanced medical treatments across China. Another major player, Asia Pacific Medical Company, China's largest private medical firm, successfully completed a financing round worth hundreds of millions of RMB. This investment, co-led by IDG Capital and PICC Equity Investment, with GL Capital joining in 2022, marks Asia Pacific Medical Group's first external funding round. The funds will primarily be used to complete the construction of Shanghai Xiehua Hospital and to acquire several new facilities.

**Table 2. Segmentation of Chinese Medical Tourism Market [2].**

<b>№</b>	<b>By Treatment Type:</b>	<b>By Services:</b>	<b>By Tour Type:</b>	<b>By Consumer Orientation</b>	<b>By Age Group:</b>	<b>By Booking Channel:</b>
1.	Dental Treatment	Wellness Services	Independent Traveler	Men	15-25 Years	Phone Booking
2.	Cosmetic Treatment	Therapeutic Services	Tour Group	Women	26-35 Years	Online Booking
3.	Cardiovascular Treatment		Package Traveler	Children	36-45 Years	In-Person Booking

4.	Orthopedic Treatment				46-55 Years	
5.	Neurological Treatment				66-75 Years	
6.	Cancer Treatment					
7.	Fertility Treatment					

China has earned a strong reputation for offering a diverse range of medical procedures that draw in international tourists seeking high-quality healthcare. Its medical tourism sector is distinguished by an extensive array of treatments, from advanced surgical interventions and cutting-edge cancer therapies to more holistic approaches like Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), which includes acupuncture, herbal remedies, and wellness programs. The combination of modern medical technology and ancient healing practices creates a unique appeal for patients from around the world. Additionally, China's competitive pricing for these treatments, coupled with state-of-the-art medical facilities and highly trained professionals, makes the country an increasingly popular destination for medical tourists. This wide variety of healthcare options, spanning both conventional and alternative treatments, has solidified China's status as a global hub for medical tourism, catering to patients looking for both affordable and specialized care.

- *Oncology Treatments:* Cutting-edge cancer treatments, including immunotherapy and targeted therapies.
- *Orthopedic Surgeries:* Knee and hip replacements, spinal surgeries, and more.
- *Cardiac Care:* From bypass surgery to angioplasty, China offers a wide range of cardiac procedures.
- *Traditional Chinese Medicine:* Acupuncture, herbal medicine, and other holistic therapies. China has made groundbreaking progress in stem cell therapy and regenerative medicine.

Additionally, the country has specialized centers for fertility treatments, such as in-vitro fertilization (IVF), that report high success rates.

**Table 3. Price reports in Chinese medical destinations [3].**

№	The types of procedures	Price
1.	Oncology Treatments	\$10,000 - \$50,000
2.	Orthopedic Surgeries	\$8,000 - \$20,000
3.	Cardiac Procedures	\$10,000 - \$35,000

On average, medical procedures in China are 30% to 70% cheaper than in the United States or Western Europe. For instance, while a knee replacement surgery in the U.S. may cost approximately \$40,000, the same procedure in China would be around \$15,000.

### *2.2 Key Drivers of Medical Tourism Development in China*

In recent years, China has made remarkable progress in biotechnology, genomics, and pharmaceuticals, positioning itself as a global leader in medical innovation. Breakthroughs in areas such as stem cell research, cancer treatment, and orthopedic care have elevated China's reputation in the field of medical excellence. Many of China's medical facilities are equipped with cutting-edge technology and collaborate with international healthcare organizations on research and clinical trials, allowing them to offer advanced treatments at significantly lower costs than in Western countries.

**Advancements in Healthcare Infrastructure:** China has invested heavily in modernizing its healthcare system, particularly in major urban centers. Today, many Chinese hospitals are equipped with state-of-the-art technology and staffed with highly skilled medical professionals, making the country an attractive option for medical tourists seeking high-quality care.

**International Accreditation and Partnerships:** Chinese hospitals have pursued international recognition through accreditations like Joint Commission International (JCI) certification, which underscores their commitment to maintaining high-quality standards. Partnerships with foreign healthcare providers have further strengthened China's credibility and appeal to international patients.

**Development of Medical Tourism Hubs:** Cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen have emerged as key medical tourism destinations in China. These cities boast world-class healthcare facilities alongside cultural attractions and convenient transport options, making them ideal locations for medical tourists.

**Increasing Awareness and Marketing Efforts:** Both the Chinese government and the private sector have actively promoted China as a medical tourism destination through widespread marketing campaigns, raising global awareness about the country's healthcare services.

**Leveraging Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM):** China's rich history of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) has become a major attraction for medical tourists seeking alternative or complementary treatments. The combination of modern and traditional healthcare offerings is a unique advantage for China in the global medical tourism market.

Several factors have contributed to China's growing success in medical tourism:

**Cost Advantage:** Healthcare in China is significantly more affordable than in many Western countries. This cost-effectiveness draws patients seeking various treatments, including surgeries, dental care, and TCM.

**Quality of Care:** Over time, perceptions of Chinese healthcare have improved, thanks to efforts to elevate standards and achieve international accreditation. Hospitals in major cities now offer world-class facilities and medical expertise.

**Cultural Heritage:** TCM's holistic approach to health has a long-standing tradition in China and is increasingly sought after by international patients interested in alternative healing methods.

**Government Support:** Recognizing the economic potential of medical tourism, the Chinese government has implemented policies to promote the industry, investing in healthcare infrastructure, simplifying visa procedures, and launching marketing initiatives to attract foreign patients.

The China medical tourism market was valued at US\$ 8.9 billion in 2022. It is expected to reach US\$ 45.98 billion by 2033, growing at a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 16.1%. The demand for medical tourism in China is expected to grow substantially during the forecasted period. China's rapid economic growth, positioning it as one of the world's leading economies, has enhanced its image as a country with advanced medical infrastructure. This development has directly contributed to the expansion of China's medical tourism sector. Additionally, government backing has played a key role in promoting the industry's growth. As a result, the outlook for China's medical tourism market is optimistic, with positive trends supporting its continued growth.

Key Growth Drivers:

- Lower treatment costs in developing countries;
- Access to cutting-edge medical technologies;
- Improved adherence to international and regional quality and service standards;
- Enhanced promotion and marketing of medical tourism services.

In December 2021, the Boao Lecheng government in China highlighted initiatives by the Hainan Boao Lecheng International Medical Tourism Pilot Zone. These efforts focus on advancing research in stem cells, gene therapy, immune cells, other innovative biomedical procedures. Such research and development activities are anticipated to drive market growth from 2023 to 2033.

**Table 1.**

Report Attribute	Details
Estimated Market Value (2023)	US\$ 10.33 billion
Projected Forecast Value (2033)	US\$ 45.98 billion

Anticipated Growth Rate (2023 to 2033)	16.1% CAGR
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Source: <https://www.futuremarketinsights.com/reports/china-medical-tourism-market>

The Chinese government plans to establish special zones dedicated to medical tourism across the country to further drive market growth. Recognizing the global rise of medical tourism, especially in neighboring countries like India, Thailand, and Singapore, which have successfully attracted consumers from developed nations, China has stepped in with supportive policies to foster the growth of its own medical tourism sector. Under pressure to keep pace with these competitors, the government has taken decisive action.

One of the most notable initiatives is the development of the Hainan Boao Lecheng International Medical Tourism Pilot Zone, located in the southern province of Hainan, an island known for its excellent medical facilities and favorable climate. The pilot zone is a bold government effort to boost China's medical tourism market. It features cutting-edge medical equipment and treatments sourced globally, many of which are exclusive to this zone and not available elsewhere in the country. This unique offering has significantly contributed to the expansion of China's medical tourism market size.

### *2.3 Challenges and Opportunities*

There is significant potential for growth and improvement in China's developing medical tourism market. Factors such as language barriers - stemming from many individuals preferring to communicate in their native languages and a general reluctance among consumers to trust China's healthcare system are limiting expansion of the market. Medical tourism in China is still a relatively new concept, and stringent laws and regulations imposed by the government contribute to this situation. However, if the government were to relax these restrictions and establish a global medical certification system, China could evolve into a major hub for medical tourism. Over time, these barriers are expected to diminish, especially with the country's increasing population of English speakers and its rising status as a leading global economy. Despite its rapid growth, China's medical tourism sector faces several challenges:

- **Language Barriers:** While many healthcare professionals in China have a good command of English, communication issues can still occur. Overcoming these language challenges is essential for ensuring a positive experience for patients.
- **Cultural Differences:** Variations in culture between patients and healthcare providers can lead to misunderstandings. It is crucial to address these differences to facilitate effective communication and care.
- **Quality Concerns:** Although there have been notable improvements, some concerns regarding the quality of healthcare services in China remain.



Consistently maintaining high-quality standards is vital for attracting and retaining international patients.


- **Competition from Other Destinations:** Countries such as Singapore, Thailand, and India are also competing for a share of the medical tourism market. China must find ways to distinguish itself in order to stay competitive.


Nevertheless, these challenges also offer opportunities for growth and innovation. By tackling language barriers, promoting cultural understanding, and continually enhancing the quality of healthcare services, China can further solidify its reputation as a preferred destination for medical tourism.


### Conclusion


The development of medical tourism in China has been impressive, positioning the country as a prominent destination for international patients by providing affordable healthcare, high-quality medical services, and a rich cultural experience. Although challenges persist, the outlook for medical tourism in China is optimistic. As the nation continues to invest in its healthcare infrastructure and promote its medical tourism sector, it is set to become an even more significant player in the global market.

The future of medical tourism in China appears bright, with several key trends to monitor:

 **Expansion of Medical Tourism Services:** The range of medical tourism services in China is expected to grow, encompassing areas such as cosmetic surgery, dental care, fertility treatments, and rehabilitation programs.

 **Increased Focus on Wellness and Preventive Care:** With a rising awareness of health and wellness, there will be an increasing demand for wellness and preventive care services, which China is well-equipped to provide.

 **Leveraging Technology:** Advancements in technology, such as telemedicine and online patient portals, can enhance the medical tourism experience and facilitate better communication between patients and healthcare providers.

 **Strengthening International Partnerships:** Collaborations with foreign healthcare institutions can enhance trust and credibility, further attracting international patients.

Overall, by capitalizing on these trends, China is poised to further solidify its status as a leading destination for medical tourism.

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