

The China Hot Springs. Introduction and remarks

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As early as the records “the flowing hot spring, washes away the filth, drives away evil spirits, and returns to the right way” of Ode of Hot Spring by Zhang Heng in the Eastern Han Dynasty to the Commentary on the Waterways Classic by Li Daoyuan in the Northern Wei Dynasty, there have been 31 records of hot spring in China, among which Lushan Mountain Hot Spring and Taiyi Mountain (Zhongnan Mountain) Hot Spring have detailed description of curative effect. Because of the its health benefits, hot spring bathing went into the residence of the upper ruling class. Many hot spring areas became temporary residence of the royal family, while the public use of hot spring was rarely recorded in the official history. For example, the Tang Dynasty poet Bai Juyi wrote Everlasting Regret, saying that “granted shower in Huaqing Pool in cold spring, with slippery hot spring water washing her silky skin.” Although the beauty effect of the hot spring was clear, what impressed the world was the political marriage of Imperial Concubine Yang. In the 14th century, the Mongols established a vast empire across Eurasia, and the Chinese and Western civilizations had an unprecedented intersection. Western balneotherapy has entered China for the first time. According to archaeological discovery, the remaining Yude Hall in The Palace Museum in Beijing was built in the Yuan Dynasty, built by Byzantine craftsmen at that time. Its architectural form was influenced by the Roman spa, which became the historical witness of the introduction of balneotherapy from the West into China. However, the sinicization of this only combination of Chinese and western balneotherapy was only used by the imperial palace of the Yuan Dynasty and it was not popularized in Chinese society after all. When the empire that unites Eurasia is gone, Yude Hall is forgotten gradually in the humble corner of Palace Museum.

Influenced by the revival of western balneotherapy in the 19th century, Chinese warlords and senior officials built a number of hot spring accommodations throughout the country during the Republican period, such as Tangshan in Nanjing, Tanggangzi in Liaoning and Conghua hot spring. Unlike in the west, balneotherapy in China attaches great importance to the theory of natural health and neglects the development of water quality, medical facilities and complementary therapies. For

example, the Pearl River Nursing Home built in the Conghua hot spring in the Republican period was named as the place of heavenly medicine, with an inscription of “a disease cannot be cured by medicine, but only by heaven”, which means to restore health through the efficacy of the natural environment.

From 1950s to 1970s, China began the construction trend of nursing homes. More than 1,500 nursing homes of all kinds were set up in the 1960s, many of which are hot spring sanatoriums. At this stage, Chinese hot spring sanatorium introduced relatively completed balneotherapy from the Soviet union and became an important part of the national medical system. However, as the institutional reform in the 1990s was gradually pushed forward, the state's financial support for nursing homes gradually decreased, and a large number of nursing homes closed down due to the lack of patients. The development of balneotherapy in China fell into a low ebb again.

Reform and opening-up in 1980s drove the redevelopment of hot spring tourist destinations in China. According to the China Hot Spring Association, there were 2,538 hot spring enterprises in China (excluding Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan) as of 2017. In 2017, the total number of hot spring tourists reached 770 million, and the total revenue of national hot spring enterprises reached 242.83 billion yuan. China's hot spring tourism has experienced rapid growth in the past 30 years. Many new hot spring projects include the hot spring pool, water park, restaurant and high-end hotel, and balneotherapy has been preserved in many hot spring projects. However, what do China's vast tourist population think of balneotherapy, and what do they do with their consumption in modern hot springs, all of which are worthy of attention.