

# Policy evolution and enlightenment of Japan's forest healthcare industry

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**Abstract.** Japan's forest healthcare industry has developed rather early in the world, and has gone through three stages: formation of conditions, active exploration stage and vigorous development stage. The writer, as from a country which started forest healthcare industry only ten years ago, and faces many problems, especially in the government's policies, tries to explore Japan's policies in different stages through interviews with the experts and reading the documents, and tries to find the Enlightenment of Japan's forest healthcare industry to China. The author finds, Japanese government has adopted a series of policies and regulations to support the development of the forest healthcare industry, such as forest laws and forest park system, promotion of the concept of forest bathing, construction of forest therapy bases and the professionalization of talents, and forest tourism. The Japanese government's policies has several inspirations for China: firstly, strengthening research on forest efficacy, establishing and popularizing the concept of forest healthcare, and promoting the professional talent training and qualification certificate system, promoting the standardization of China's forest healthcare industry development, and assisting in the implementation of the national strategy of healthy China and ecological civilization construction.

## 1 Introduction

Over the past 40 years of reform and opening up, the rapid development of the economy and society, as well as urbanization, have brought more psychological pressures. The number of people with sub health and urban diseases has increased, and the demand for health preservation and healthcare in the society with fewer children and older age is also increasing. Therefore, the Chinese government has elevated the construction of healthy China and ecological civilization as a national strategy and included it in the 13th Five Year Plan in 2016.

Forest health refers to the use of forest and other forestry resources for beneficial physical and mental health activities, including forest tourism, forest food therapy, forest sports, forest education, forest leisure, forest health and forest elderly care, etc.

China's forest health started relatively late, with only a few years. However, Japan's forest health development has a history of over 40 years and is the first country in Asia to

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develop forest healthcare. It leads the world in the certification system of forest bases and the development of forest medicine. According to statistics, Japan has an average of 800 million person-time participating in forest health services annually, which is similar to the health culture and physique of Asian countries. The Japanese government, in the development of the health industry, the role it played in promoting the development of the health and wellness industry through relevant policies has positive reference and value for the development of China's healthcare industry.

## **2 Development stages and the policy evolution of Japan's forest healthcare industry**

### **2.1 Formation stage of forest healthcare conditions**

After World War II, Japan's imperial forest system collapsed. In order to promote economic development and revitalize rural economy through forestry, Japan introduced the third Forest Law in 1951, which utilized state-owned forests to promote post-war economic recovery and laid the framework for Japan's modern forestry policy system. Subsequently, the establishment of forest road systems, skiing systems, and camping systems created conditions for forest tourism. In the 1960s and 1970s, the Japanese government began to control the use of forest resources and protect their public recreational purposes. In 1973, in response to the public's demand for forest entertainment, the Forestry Department introduced the establishment of a forest park system to support large-scale forest development projects, providing experience for the development of forest tourism.

### **2.2 Active exploration stage of forest healthcare**

In 1982, the Rino Department proposed to the Japanese public the promotion of the concept of forest bathing, incorporating forests into healthy lifestyles, and guiding the public to participate in experiencing forest bathing activities, recognizing the health value of forest bathing. In 1989, special measures were introduced to promote the health function of forests, in order to improve the comprehensive utilization of forest resources, revitalize the forestry economy, and enhance national welfare. Later, the concept of forests for the people was further implemented, and avant-garde pilot research on forest therapy was promoted. At an important stage of the dissemination and development of forest health concepts in Japan, the government actively guided the public and stakeholders through a series of policy measures.

### **2.3 Vigorous development stage of the forest health industry**

#### **2.3.1 Construction of forest therapy bases**

The Japanese government has taken the construction of forest therapy bases as an important means of developing forest healthcare. In order to promote the orderly development of forest health science, the government has guided the establishment of forest therapy associations such as NPC and forest medicine research associations, which has become the main driving force for forest therapy. In 2005, the forest therapy comprehensive project was launched, with the goal of conducting certification, publicity, and research on forest healthcare bases and roads, as well as building a human resource system. In 2007, the Physiological Medicine Association, affiliated with the Japanese Health Association, was

established to promote research in forest medicine. The Department of Commerce proposed to establish 100 forest therapy bases. Since 2006, 62 forest therapy bases have been built, and average of 3-5 candidate bases have been added annually. So far, Japan has a forest coverage rate of 68%, with approximately 800 million people taking forest baths in the forest every year to enjoy the physical and mental pleasure brought by the forest. 1055 recreational forests have been built, with approximately 110 million visitors visiting each year.

Japan has introduced a forest therapy base access system, promoting certification of forest therapy bases and routes which requires more than two trails easy to walk ,with a width of 1.5-2 meters and a slope of less than 5 degrees.

### *2.3.2 Ensuring the professionalization of forest health service talents*

Implementing the forest therapy guide, namely the forest therapy therapist qualification certificate system and the forest medicine certified physician qualification system. In 2008, the Forestry Department guided the establishment of the Forest Therapy Association to promote project management and implementation of forest therapy. The association introduced a forest therapy certification examination system, which has provided professional guidance to enhance the effectiveness of forest bathing. Japan has a system for forest therapy guides and qualification exams for therapists. Therapy guides are mainly recruited among local residents and have provided employment opportunities to the local area. After training and exams, they can practice. The main purpose is to guide and lead visiting tourists to take walks and exercise on site, and forest therapy therapists need to master the theory of forest therapy, to be steeped in forestry, pharmacy, psychology, and health knowledge, have good communication skills, and can provide high-quality health care projects for forest therapy participants. Treatment therapists need to obtain the qualification of therapy guides and pass the study, training, and examination before being awarded the qualification certificate. The exam is divided into written and interview exams, which have been implemented since 2009. In 2015, electronic training exams have been implemented to obtain qualification certificates. The forest greening base also attracts relevant professional talents and doctors to join. However, in 2014, the forest medicine certified physician qualification system was introduced, and only through certification can one obtain the corresponding physician qualification to establish a system of professional forest medicine physicians in Japan.

### *2.3.3 National financial support for the construction of recreational forests and the development of forest tourism*

Recreational forests refer to forests with beautiful natural landscapes, suitable for forest bathing, natural observation, and outdoor activities. In the late 1960s, Japan's economy developed rapidly. In order to meet the needs of the people for physical and mental rest in nature, the "natural rest forest system" was proposed, which designated some state-owned forests as natural rest forests. Natural protection was implemented in the forest areas, allowing the orderly development and utilization of the forest areas and development of forest tourism and rest.

In 2016, Japan proposed the "Future Japan Tourism Dream Plan", established the policy of "building a country through tourism", accelerated the construction of recreational forests, and used 100 state-owned recreational forests as demonstration recreational forests as tourism resources to attract foreign tourists to mountainous areas. In the 2017, a budget of 300 million yen was allocated, including the effective utilization of recreational forests and

added a project budget application of 250 million yen for the construction of walkways in selected recreational forests, logging of timber for landscaping, production of multilingual promotional display boards and brochures, and creation of websites. In addition, the Japan Rural Revitalization Bureau will apply for 15 billion yen to work with rural homestays and other projects to promote the construction of wooden huts and forest guide training in the forest.

### **3 Policy characteristics on different stages of forest healthcare development**

#### **3.1 In the stage of condition formation, policies shift from passive to active ones**

After World War II, in order to revive the economy, forestry was used to revitalize the rural economy, logging timber, and building roads, as a side effect of revitalizing the economy and an indirect effect of the development of the timber industry. The policy indirectly promoted the development of forest tourism. During this process, the Japanese government realized the demand for national forest recreation and the health role of forests, actively established a forest park system, built forest recreation infrastructure, issued forest tourism policies, stimulated the public's demand for forest recreation, promoted the formation of forest tourism concepts, and provided important demand conditions for the later development of forest tourism.

#### **3.2 Active exploration stage of forest health, with guiding policies**

The government has issued a series of policies and regulations to relevant industry academic groups and the public, promoting and guiding the concept of "forest bathing" and "forest for the people". The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries guide the research team of forest owners and the public to pay attention to forest health functions by conducting a comparison of 100 forests suitable for forest bathing among the public. At the end of the 20th century, the Department of Forestry and Wildlife issued policies to strengthen the connection between the public and the forest, guiding the public to get close to the forest and pay attention to it. Therefore, during the active exploration stage of forest health, policies have guiding significance.

### **4 Enlightenment of Japan's policies to promote forest healthcare on China**

China's forest healthcare started relatively late. In 2013, the State Council issued the "Several Opinions on Promoting the Development of Health Service Industry", proposing the use of green ecological tourism resources to develop health tourism, which for the first time drew public attention to forest healthcare. In 2016, the National Forestry Administration issued a notice on vigorously promoting forest experience and forest healthcare development, as well as the 13th Five Year Plan for National Forestry Development, proposing to make forest tourism, leisure, and health care an important part of the forestry industry. The direction of forest healthcare development was clarified. In 2019, the Ministry of Civil Affairs of the National Forestry and Grass Administration, the Health Commission, and the Traditional Chinese Medicine Administration jointly issued the "Opinions on Promoting the Development of Forest Health Industry", proposing to

build a regional forest health service system with basic infrastructure and reasonable layout by 2022, but the implementation effect was not satisfactory.

With reference to Japan's more than 70 years of forest healthcare industry development policies, combined with China's national conditions, the following inspirations are provided for the development of China's forest healthcare industry.

#### **4.1 To strengthen research on the efficacy of forest healthcare, popularize the concept of forest healthcare**

The development of forest healthcare in Japan lasted for over 70 years until the 1950s after World War II. In the early stages of condition formation and active exploration, about 50 years later, the government realized the healthcare and recreational functions of forests, and began to establish a forest park system and infrastructure such as forest roads. Later, a research team for forest health projects was established to strengthen research on the efficacy of forest healthcare. From 2004 to 2007, the Japanese Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries, also known as the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Tourism, invested 270 million yen in research on forest healthcare, guiding the public and social capital to pay attention to and experience the efficacy of forest healthcare.

Since the official forest health document was issued in 2016 in China, apart from the government and scholars, few non professionals have participated in forest health activities. The public in China has less understanding and recognition of non sightseeing and non entertainment forest healthcare experience activities. The government should strengthen interdisciplinary research in forestry, forest medicine, kinematics, psychology, landscape architecture, and other fields, while also strengthening communication and collaboration with international peers. The government needs to formulate laws and regulations, promote and popularize the concept of forest healthcare, increase the public's experience of it, transform the public's understanding of it, increase the target audience for forest therapy, and create demand for the development of the forest healthcare industry.

#### **4.2 To promote the professional training of forest healthcare professionals, qualification certificate system and standardization of its development.**

At the beginning of the vigorous development stage of forest healthcare in the 21st century, the Japanese government guided the establishment of forest healthcare therapy associations, forest health medicine associations and other related associations, and actively carried out work, introducing access standards for forest therapy bases, forest healthcare guide and forest physiotherapist qualification examination systems, and forest medicine physician certification systems, and formulating talent training standards and industry access systems for the forest healthcare industry, Ensuring the professionalization and standardization of forest healthcare services. At present, China has established standards for forest healthcare bases and forest towns, but their normative rationality needs to be verified. To promote forest healthcare, talent cultivation standards need to be established, and the Forest Health Association needs to strengthen regulatory supervision. Based on the experience of Japan, the government should guide forest healthcare related associations to strengthen cooperation with them, and rely on the cooperation between government, academia, and industry. Under the government's leading mechanism, it should guide social forces such as universities, research institutes, enterprises, and civil society to participate in the formulation of standards, balance multiple demands, and build industry access standards that are in line with China's national conditions.

## Conclusion

Forest healthcare is a sunrise industry that meets the needs of aging and sub healthy society. As a new growth point of the national economy, the government takes the lead, fully and effectively utilizes China's forest resources. Through legislation, it strengthens interdisciplinary collaborative research, establishes forest health and wellness industry access standards that meet China's national conditions, promotes the integration of industries such as forestry, elderly care tourism, and healthy real estate, and promotes the healthy and rapid development of the forest healthcare industry to benefit the people and achieve the strategic goal of a healthy China.

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