

5000 YEARS OF MASSAGE IN CHINA

by Ronnie Allan

A country that is criticised for its human rights and yet in the last 20 years it has taken over 300 million people out of poverty, more than all the western countries and North America put together. A country that is criticised for its pollution and yet it is now the largest user of renewable energy in the world. A country which is now the most successful and strongest economy in the world and where in the last 20 to 30 years there have been the most dramatic social and economic changes and improvements on a scale that it is difficult to comprehend. It is time that we in the West changed our constant negative attitude and criticism of what is now one of the most successful and powerful countries in the world. Instead we should encourage the positive changes that are taking place and look, listen and learn from the many positive aspects of modern day China.

In the last three years I have travelled to China on eight occasions, met and married Luo Ping (Nancy) and grown to love the people I have met and the places I have seen. Contrary to the image that is often portrayed in the West, at no time have I ever been approached by police or military, prevented from travelling where I wished to go, or photographing any place or anyone. Everywhere I have gone in China I have always been made welcome and shown absolute kindness from all those that I have met and feel that life has more freedom in China than it does here in the UK.

China has to be one of the most interesting, diverse and vibrant countries in the world and I can no longer think of anywhere I would rather visit. It is a country of extreme contrasts from the ultra modern to the most primitive, from the grotesque to the most stunningly beautiful, from the most tranquil to the most dynamic. Where family values are still very strong and put many of us to shame in the west.

It is a country where massage has developed over 5000 years, where massage is a way of life, a family affair. Massage like acupuncture is part of their medical tradition and is performed by the local doctor and in hospitals. A doctor will happily resolve your soft tissue problems with some very effective massage rather than prescribing analgesics and anti-inflammatory tablets. One of the greatest aspects of their massage is that oils are not used and it can be performed anywhere and in any situation.

Traditional Chinese Massage looks extremely deceptive, in that the slightest person can with absolute ease perform deep tissue massage to the point of having to ask them, for the only time in my life, to reduce pressure. The greatest revelation was watching their excellent technique, posture and totally relaxed bodies creating such an effective and great depth of massage. Their positioning and techniques have been developed over thousands of years and yet there are some in the west today who claim these ancient techniques to be new, innovative and invented by them. It is now also well known that Henrick Ling who developed the most predominant example of traditional European massage, Swedish Massage in the 1830s spent time in China and no doubt learned and copied many of their techniques.

The first documented descriptions of massage date back 5000 years to about 3,000 BC and were discovered in China. Chinese Taoist priests practiced 'Qi Gong'- meditative movement revealing and cultivating the vital life force. Traditional Chinese medicine is based on the principle that every illness, ailment or discomfort in the body is due to an imbalance of 'Qi'. In traditional Chinese practice, massage is one of the fundamental treatment modalities, along with dietary regulation, herbal medicine, acupuncture/moxibustion and therapeutic exercise. Massage as a part of Chinese medical treatment goes back to 2000 BC. Written massage textbooks began to appear as early as the fourth century B.C., along with the earliest Chinese medical texts. Massage appears to have developed alongside both therapeutic exercise and acupuncture, as it depends on the same understanding of the meridians and the flow of Qi in the human body.

Traditional Chinese massage is not intended to be an experience of pampering or pure relaxation. It is a form of deep tissue therapy that conveys the following benefits:

- speeding the healing of injuries and clearing bruises
- stimulating blood circulation and regulating the nervous system
- removing scar tissue
- easing emotional distress
- curing some conditions affecting the internal organs
- increasing flexibility in the joints and improving posture
- relieving chronic pain
- maintaining wellness and functioning as a form of preventive care
- improving athletic performance
- strengthening the body's resistance to disease

It was an extremely pleasant surprise therefore when I discovered, on my second visit to China to be with Luo Ping, that she was a qualified therapist in traditional Chinese massage. She had worked in a hospital for a number of years alongside the eminent Dr Zhang Chun who had also been her tutor.

As well as massage via the medical profession there is also an astonishing number and variety of Spas. The major Spas are government run and open 24 hours a day. They are on a scale I have never seen anywhere else in the world. Always busy with whole families and individuals through the day and evenings and couples and individuals through the night. With family rooms and individual rooms, with juice bars, fruit bars, restaurants, movie rooms, TV rooms, swimming pools, steam rooms, saunas, beauty rooms, and a large variety of different types of treatment rooms.

You can have your feet done, watch a movie at the same time, while being served fresh mango and papaya and if you wish, spend the night there and forget about returning to your hotel. An hour foot massage followed by a body scrub, then a one and half hour full body massage, sauna, all the fruit you can eat, tea, coffee, watch a movie, stay as long as you wish all for £15 and that's a top end Spa.

All the Spa therapists I met were very well trained and their techniques from the use of hands forearms and elbows, to walking on you were expertly done and extremely powerful. Rather than just the normal relaxing spa massage, they will also deal with and resolve specific problems using massage, mobilisation and manipulation. As with all the ancient techniques that I have come across it is extremely powerful and performed with effortless graceful ease.

On one of my life changing visits to China I asked Luo Ping to give up everything and join me in the UK. On asking her if she was prepared to leave her family and friends and everything she had ever known and come to the UK she replied, "Life can either be an exciting adventure or it can be nothing. You can either embrace the unknown or stand still and do nothing as empty days pass by. I will never stand still". These words will always remain in the forefront of my mind and I now apply them to every aspect of life, especially to the work that we do. You can either stay with the same old routine or you can continue to enjoy study and learn from other cultures some of the many exciting techniques that are available.

For anyone interested in learning the basic techniques of Traditional Chinese massage, weekend workshops are now available with Luo Ping (Nancy) Please Contact Ronnie Allan at r.allan32@btinternet.com or go to our website www.ronnieallan.com

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