



## Traditional Medicine

**S**hanghai was not easy to get used to in February. The weather was cold and gnarly and the skies were dismal gray for weeks at a time. After a solid year of heat and smiles given unearned from the people in Thailand it was a shock to be here

智  
日

Wisdom

where smiles were not so freely given away. Traffic on the streets seemed treacherous and nonsensical, with the





amazing density of it why weren't man and machine colliding every second? I was sick for weeks with a variety of symptoms like watery eyes, insomnia and a bad cough, plus I was living in a hotel room for the first time which made me feel closed in. I went to the American clinic where the doctor took my pulse and such, asked me if I wanted antibiotics which he said certainly couldn't hurt and I said no, thanks. I left with some pain pills after paying my eighty five

bucks or so and decided that as long as I was in China why not try traditional Chinese medicine and acupuncture.

健

Vigor





Some of the modern Shanghainese thought I was crazy for wanting to get needles stuck in me, why would I want to experience pain, why not take antibiotics like they did? I like acupuncture, I've used it before in the Bay Area and have no trouble with the slight pinprick of the needles.

I found the clinic in an old medical building with the kind of green run down hallways you'd expect to see

from watching movies of China. There was a strong but not unpleasant odor from the moxybustion, the burning herbs. Doctor Qin Xiu Di was the middle aged woman who headed the department. She said my treatment would consist of acupuncture sessions every two days along with therapeutic massage and some herbs. The sessions were over an hour of constant attention and only cost about ten dollars, and I was probably paying a lot more than the locals. I found the acupuncture combined with massage very relaxing.

The clinic was always filled with what we would call poor people of all ages and there was constant noisy chatter, snacking and joking going on

神

Spirit

like one big family gathering. One five year old boy smiled up at me silently with many needles in his scalp. I asked what he was being treated for, he had cerebral palsy. I was a bit



*Chinese child-safety seat*

協力

Unity

of a curiosity to these folks but felt relaxed around them, most of them had their shoes off and there was a lot of laughter. The massage was great and it was a high point in my week to come here.

Sometimes while getting a massage I would hear screams of agony from the next table of someone being treated for serious bone degeneration or other painful problems. And the conversation and laughter just continued, no point in stopping, just an everyday occurrence. The masseuse's hands

were on my shoulders when I felt a second pair of hands on my feet or lower back as a doctor with nothing to do would just come and join in. Sometimes there were three sets of hands on me and they'd be cracking jokes with each other or lighting up a cigarette, hey, what kind of a hospital is this anyway? At the end of each session we'd hang out and talk for a while and munch on some fruit and nuts, some of which were new to me.



I walked  
back out  
to the  
busy  
street  
after the  
third  
session  
and I  
knew that  
something  
in me had

shifted, I felt slightly high. It was a moment of clarity, something like when Luke Skywalker discovered The Force – all the chaotic bicycles, carts, autos and pedestrians seemed in order and I saw my way through them without thinking. I was seeing something different in the people as well – they weren't as taciturn as I had imagined, they were living quite in the moment in their own way, and now when I looked at someone often I would get a nod or an easy smile in return. It was as if they had been waiting to see if I would extend myself, if I had achieved some humility.

From that day my symptoms began clearing up. I became good friends with Doctor Qin and was invited several times to have dinner in her ninth floor flat with her family. Sometimes we rode our bikes across Shanghai through rush hour to get there. Her mother cooked until her husband, a railroad dispatcher, came home and we gathered around the small kitchen table. Sometimes he hummed some folk melodies, one of which I recognized as "Midnight in Moscow." All the dishes were made

安

Tranquility



from fresh ingredients and I got used to some new tastes. Afterwards he offered me a Double Happiness cigarette, or on payday a premium brand Chungwah. Since he couldn't

speaking any English we taught each other our most useful and hilarious vocabulary words using a hand-held Chinese-English dictionary computer. They explained the stories of the modern Chinese drama shows coming from their huge new wide screen TV (there is very little graphic violence or car chase scenes in the programs) and then we watched the World News report on the Beijing English Language channel. It wasn't much different from the coverage on CNN or BBC – the same wars, earthquakes and stock reports. More entertaining, one evening I watched their eight year old son Ching Ching painting his favorite subject with traditional brushes and ink – monkeys reaching for grapes in a tree. He already speaks quite a bit of English. I couldn't help noticing the ceramic Buddhas and GuanYins they had collected and placed in glass cabinets, and the large Buddhist calendar in the hallway. Various little delicacies of fruits or nuts were constantly passed around until it was time for me to get on the number Forty One bus and head back to the hotel for work.



Patience



*"I had to do some convincing to get Sally to wear the Red Star Hat for this photo - I guess she felt the way you and I would if a Chinese traveler asked us to put on a Mickey Mouse Club hat with ears!"*

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