



Shiatsu in France

A silent revolution

By Bernard Bouheret



Bernard Bouheret has been practising martial arts since he was 12 and he began his Shiatsu training with Okuyama Shizan. He

Some say that the world today is in distress and that dark forces are invading the planet and dominating our spirit. In France, as is well known, every Saturday war is declared and each person is persuaded he holds the truth. The French love revolution and acts of protest!



I would like to temper this vision and say here that I foresee the dawning of a new world. Another, silent, revolution is already on the way even if the colossus of the old world is still standing.

History

Is a physiotherapist and went to Japan in 1981 to study the practice of Shiatsu and martial arts in the school of Okuyama sensei (School of the 8th Light). When he returned to France he continued his training with several courses in Chinese Medicine. He is the Director-Founder of the École de Shiatsu Thérapeutique de Paris and the President of the UFPST (Union Francophone des Professionnels de Shiatsu Thérapeutique).

I began to practise Shiatsu in 1977 and at that time it was little known. No one knew about this discipline except in certain well-informed circles, but, there was already a waft of perfumed air from the 'Orient' with all its related disciplines: yoga, meditation, martial arts, Ayurvedic and Chinese medicine. The wind continued to blow, so that today something has truly changed and it seems to have won over the heart of our society.

It appears that the attraction of 'The Way' has passed from the east to the west. In their time, the Tibetan masters were astonished by the fervour and thirst for knowledge of the young westerners who wanted to follow the teachings of Buddha, and it is the same with the 'Way of Shiatsu' that Europeans wish to follow now. In Japan the discipline has become a medical one and has forgotten its roots and its beautiful founding texts. In the west the appetite for these texts, and the spirituality which emanates from them, is great.

Who trains in Shiatsu?

I was very surprised at the extent of this at the beginning, but not now. In our school of Shiatsu (Ecole de Shiatsu Thérapeutique), when the group presents itself during the first class of the year, we are struck by the diversity of the people to be found. It is with great joy that we note the presence of all ages and professions: computer technicians, nurses, martial arts experts, Human Resources directors, airplane pilots, taxi drivers, head cooks, university and secondary school students, retired people, dancers, actors, musicians, and social workers. Some people decide to change jobs and thus lose material security. Young people of 17 or 18 years (sometimes even younger) come with their parents to test the waters, to sit in on the classes, and the following year they enroll. Their youth and enthusiasm are such a pleasure to behold. They are all there, and there are many of them! United by the same inspiration, to learn Shiatsu, they can get a sense to life. They are conscious

that they will have to kneel on the ground and attune their hands to a rhythm and melody which will nourish life - revitalise, re-centre, re-enchant.

If you want to awaken humanity in its totality then wake yourself up completely. If you want to banish suffering from the world, then eliminate all which is dark and negative in you. In truth the biggest gift you can give to the world is your own transformation.

Hua Hu ching



Students practising Shiatsu in Paris

Many aspects of the training have changed since those famous 70s: requirements and standards are stricter, as is the desire to 'do the job'. It became necessary to create structures, and in France (and throughout Europe) federations, syndicates and unions were formed, with all their qualities and defects which, given human nature could not be otherwise. Many schools were been established, each with their own style, offering a wealth of diversity, but only those which have been able to maintain a high degree of rigour have been able to survive

the intense competition surrounding body work today. Why choose Shiatsu when there are so many other manual and bodywork disciplines available? The reason is that Japan is there in the seated position of 'seiza', China is present with the Taoist school of thought, and the breath (Qi-Ki) is present in the entire being. To practise a discipline whose texts go back 3,000 years is rather special.

Influences and additions to the basic curriculum

We have delved into Chinese medicine and raised the level of our

studies, invited noted acupuncturists, and worked on our bodies through the practise of martial arts, Qigong and Yoga. We have now opened up to other eastern and western influences which have come to further nourish and enrich our knowledge: Qi Nei Zang, Seiki and Seitai, for example. Because sitting in morning peace is necessary for the interior stability of a practitioner, different meditation styles such as Zen, Chan and Tibetan have been introduced. Other modalities like EMDR (eye movement desensitization and reprocessing) and psycho-genealogy





are at our service to nourish and stabilise the psyche. Certain British schools have made the link with body work techniques such as BMC (Body Mind Centering) and Feldenkrais, and we will very soon be inviting the founder of Movement Shiatsu, Bill Palmer, to join the UFPST (Union Francophone des Professionnels de Shiatsu Thérapeutique: Union of French-speaking therapeutic Shiatsu Practitioners).

Where do we work?

As for our group of Shiatsu (Sei Shiatsu Dō) in France, we have been working in hospitals for the past 15 years in partnership with the medical profession, and it has been a great success. A practitioner who trained in our school has been hired on a monthly salary to practise Shiatsu in the hospital of Verdun in the east of France, and here in Paris we are present in eight of the most well-known ones including La Pitié, Cochin, and Necker. There is movement in the provinces too, with opportunities opening up in Montpellier in the south, and in many other French cities. More than 6,000 Shiatsu sessions are given each year and although we practitioners are numerous and enthusiastic, we are now obliged to refuse new opportunities, given the number of demands we receive. Each time the result is the same: guaranteed contentment, re-found humanity, shared joy.

Certain students have been able to base their end-of-training dissertations on their work in hospital settings (palliative care units), addiction treatment centres and even in geriatric cancer centres. At the Hôpital La Pitié in Paris, adolescents in the department led by Dr. Cohen receive Shiatsu sessions every week and this has been shown on French television. Three other hospitals are on the waiting list for September, and a new project is being prepared for the cancer department of Hospital St Louis in the 10th arrondissement in Paris. The medical world is asking for help and Shiatsu is welcomed with open arms, with eloquent and moving

testimonies. What joy to take care of the care takers!

We have been invited to a special high school for troubled adolescents and, armed with the experience gained in hospitals, we have been able to intervene with very convincing results. The bodies touched by Shiatsu become calm, relaxed, and traumas assuaged. It is amazing how much a benevolent hand can do to relieve someone who is suffering!

Indeed there is a growing Shiatsu presence in hospitals around Europe: Kawada sensei is in an oncology department in Brussels; in Italy hospital workers are also numerous and the numbers increasing. In Berlin one of our new graduates has joined a medical team to work on cases of fibromyalgia. The head doctor said, "It's funny - here is a Frenchwoman bringing Chinese and Japanese medicine to Germany!"

The time of Shiatsu has come because this discipline is remarkably well adapted to the deleterious

consequences of modern life: stress, burnout, lack of sleep, inactivity, and fast food.

It is clear that the largest clientele (or 'patientele') can be found in the business world. In France contracts have been signed with certain health insurance companies, La Poste (the Post Office), and certain retirement homes. Very recently our school signed a contract with the Prefecture of Police in Paris for Qigong classes, and it is a great success.

In France at least twelve health insurance companies now reimburse a part of the cost of Shiatsu sessions, and in Switzerland and Germany the procedure is even more efficient since the state pays for the sessions directly. We are active in Peru, India, Benin, Senegal, and Madagascar. In Spain a Franciscan brotherhood in Grenada has asked us to teach the medical personnel who work within its community. What could be more simple than Shiatsu - a mat on the floor, a cushion under our knees, and off we go!

We wanted to communicate all of this in the DVD and associated book whose title could only be, 'The Way of Shiatsu'. Why not help each other to translate it since it testifies to the universality of the discipline, including all the different styles?

'Nothing is stronger than an idea whose time has come.'

Victor Hugo



Members of 'Atelier Shiatsu' focusing on the body