

# HANDS ON

## STEPHEN LEWIS takes a crash course in the art of Chinese massage and reflexology

**P**AUL the photographer is not the kind of guy to take being pummelled by a martial arts expert lying down. He's solid and well-muscled, as even Errol Lynch, a Chinese health consultant and proponent of the Chinese martial art of Wushu, admits. After a few rounds on Errol's treatment couch, however, Paul is not fit for anything but lying down. His arms flop down the side of the couch and when Errol inquires if he's OK he gives a dreamy, muffled 'umph'.

Errol is the newest 'alternative' healer in town, offering a range of Chinese treatments and therapies.

Watching him at work is an experience. Paul is lying face down on a treatment couch in a room at the Healing Clinic in York's Fulford Cross. He's fully clothed, with a towel draped over him, while Errol gives him a vigorous Tui Na massage. Tui Na in Chinese means 'pushing and grasping' – and that's essentially what Errol is doing.

**“I don't want to work the superficial muscles, so then it becomes slightly uncomfortable. But as soon as I take hands off, there's no discomfort.”**

He stands over Paul, using the knuckles of his right fist in a rolling movement to deep massage the muscles of the photographer's back. Occasionally, he switches technique: using an elbow to apply deep pressure, and then switching to a circular rubbing method.

It looks pretty fierce. Every movement is precise and expert – but he's not playing around. It is, he admits, a vigorous, if not aggressive, form of massage. “This may be slightly uncomfortable,” he warns Paul at one point, as he digs into the muscles down either side of the photographer's spine. “He's quite a big, heavy guy,” Errol explains to me. “When someone is strong, you have to use a stronger technique. I don't want to work the superficial muscles, so then it becomes slightly uncomfortable. But as soon as I take hands off, there's no discomfort.”

It's hard to tell whether Paul agrees or not, but he certainly looks content enough. Tui Na claims to be the oldest-known system of massage in the world. It originated in China 2,000 years ago and uses the traditional Chinese medical theory of the flow of Qi or 'energy' through meridians in the body. The Tui Na therapist uses massage, acupressure and manipulation to help Qi flow more freely, allowing the body naturally to heal itself. The rolling fist technique, which Errol calls Gun Fa, is used for deep soft tissue massage, muscle sprains and joint injuries, while other techniques such as a one finger pushing method (An Fa) use acupressure to treat internal diseases.

The claimed benefits include improvement of circulation, improved muscular flexibility, pain relief, boosting the immune system,

improving sleep and relief of stress, anxiety and depression.

Errol admits there is a 'kind of arrogance' about the technique from the point of view of anyone watching. He uses a single hand only, which can appear lazy. But there is, he says, a reason for that: it increases his awareness of any problems in the patient's body. “If one hand is working, it is more sensitive.”

As if to illustrate that, he pauses in his massage of Paul. “Do you get some back pain?”

“Uh-huh.”

“This side?”

He can tell Paul has been getting back pain, he says, because he can feel the muscles down the left side of his back are in 'spasm'. “You can look at the feet as well,” he says. “One foot is splayed out more.”

One of the great benefits of Tui Na, he adds, is that used regularly it can help prevent muscle pain developing. It relaxes muscle strands so they don't reach the point where they go into spasm and stop working properly.

Massage over, Paul gets up from the couch. He's wearing a slightly dazed expression, but looks hugely relaxed. There were moments when it was a little uncomfortable, he admits: but overall it was “quite invigorating” and he can see there could be real benefits.

Tui Na massage is not the only therapy Errol offers. He's also trained in Chinese herbalism and Chinese reflexology.

Herbalism uses traditional plant recipes, some of which have been used in China for more than 2,000 years, to restore the body's natural balance and harmony, thus enabling it to heal itself.

Reflexology, an ancient healing art first practised by the early Indian, Chinese and Egyptians, involves the application of pressure to reflex points in the hands and feet, again with the purpose of freeing up blocked energy pathways and helping the body restore its balance.

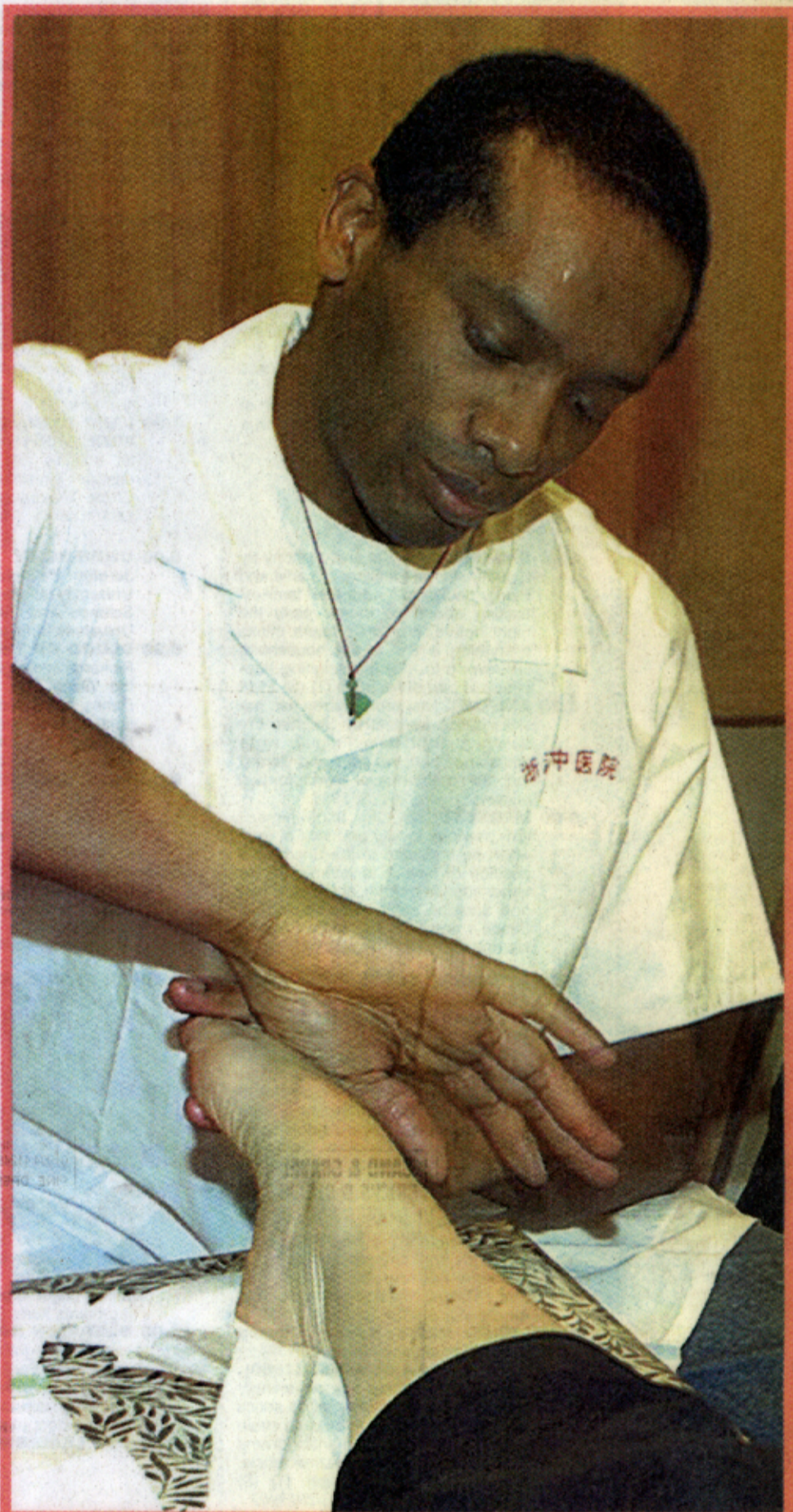
Come for a consultation with Errol and he will take you through your medical history and then ask you about any specific problems, before deciding which approach to adopt.

But how did this martial arts expert become interested in Chinese medicine in the first place?

All down to showboating, he concedes. He was giving a martial arts demonstration, beating up a punchbag, and was more interested in watching the women watching him than in taking care over what he was doing. The result: he injured his wrist so badly he couldn't even hold a pint of beer.

He went for a course of shiatsu – and was so impressed with the results he signed up to train as a shiatsu healer there and then. During the three-year course he began to learn about reflexology, too. “And I became greedy for knowledge. I still didn't have all the answers people were seeking.”

So he began to study acupuncture and Chinese herbalism, found a job as a Chinese pharmacist in London and, when the offer came, leaped at the chance of going to study Tui Na massage in China.



Errol Lynch at work on a patient

Picture: PAUL BAKER

That was in 1998. Since then he has been back to China at least once a year to hone his skills, and has begun teaching Tui Na in Britain. He takes his students with him to China to gain their practical experience in Chinese hospitals.

He still teaches and practices in London on Fridays and Saturdays, but now spends much of the week in York so he can be with his partner Grace and four-year-old son Dexter. So now he has begun practising, on Wednesdays only to begin with, at the Healing Clinic.

Watching him at work on a vigorous massage, it strikes me that it must be extremely

hard work. He is, after all, by his own admission, making up to 160 rolling hand movements every minute for as much as 45 minutes. Doesn't he get tired after a while?

Not at all. “This is my Tai Chi,” he says with a grin, referring to the Chinese martial art used for relaxation and contemplation. “I'm relaxed. When you're relaxed you don't get tired so easily.”

Errol Lynch can be contacted at the Healing Clinic in Fulford Cross on 01904 679868. He charges £20 for a 30-minute session, £35 for one hour.