

Travelling to China

President Nixon, James Reston, George Soulie De Morant and Acupuncture

There have been many westerners who have travelled to China and had an influence on and been influenced by its culture and medicine extending back to Marco Polo and beyond.

Through intrepid adventurers, explorers and missionaries, knowledge of acupuncture has slowly been transmitted to the west throughout the last millennia.

However, in the last century this process has been increasing rapidly. There are significant events which have led to the enormous worldwide growth of acupuncture.

One such event was President Nixon travelling to China, another is George Soulie de Morant travelling from China back to France after almost 20 years of studying acupuncture in China.

It was in 1972 that President Richard Nixon visited China, which ended 25 years of isolation between the two countries leading to diplomatic relations being established in 1979.

A New York Times reporter named James Reston was visiting China in 1971 with the intention to announce the upcoming visit by Nixon in 1972.

Whilst he was still in China Reston suddenly became ill and had to have an appendectomy. He had significant postoperative pain so he was offered and accepted treatment with acupuncture.

From China, Reston informed the readers of the New York Times of the nature and success of his treatment as well as the progress he was making after receiving acupuncture for his post operative pain.

Reston's report and Nixon's visit were the catalyst which began close scientific scrutiny by western doctors and scientists who visited and were intrigued by the promise acupuncture had in the treatment of pain without drugs or side effects.

Science wanted to know how acupuncture worked and how did it achieve such startling results. For example using acupuncture as the only anaesthetic during open heart surgery whilst the patient was still awake!

Research into acupuncture is still being carried out to the present day in hospitals and universities, both in China and in the west. Many theories are put forward which try to explain the exact biological mechanism that enables acupuncture to work. Despite these efforts it is still not known to the satisfaction of scientific investigation.

Other westerners ventured to China after Nixon's visit. They travelled from USA, Europe and Australia to study in hospitals with Chinese doctors. These modern day pioneers, together with practitioners from Asia coming to live in western countries, have spread and developed the knowledge of acupuncture. Some of these practitioners have become authors, translators and teachers laying the

foundation for what has become an enormous health science in the west.

Millions of people worldwide now use acupuncture as their first choice of medicine despite the fact that in most cases they have to pay for it out of their own pocket.

So many people have contributed significantly (and in fact devoted their lives) to the development and transmission of acupuncture to the west. It would be impossible in this article to create a detailed list of them all but there are books available which go into greater depth for those interested.

Any account of the transmission of Chinese medicine to the west would have to include George Soulie de Morant.(1879-1955)

He was a French diplomat who lived in China and studied Chinese Medicine for almost 20 years, he studied with the most renowned practitioners of that time.

Soulie de Morant received the award the “Coral Globe” and was regarded as a doctor of Chinese medicine by the Chinese themselves an extremely rare accolade for a foreigner.

He left China and returned to France in 1917 to share his knowledge with the French medical profession and further investigate the effects of acupuncture scientifically.

In 1950 Soule de Morant was nominated for the Nobel Prize, he remains the only acupuncturist to have received that honour.

Soulie de Morant is known as the father of French acupuncture, it would be fair to say that his works, both in

books, journals as well as his constant research has also had a major influence on acupuncture all around the world.

The transmission of acupuncture to the west was not initially intended by any of the people mentioned in this article. It is however historical fact that the transmission of China's ancient medicine (more than 2000 years) to the west was significantly influenced by these events.