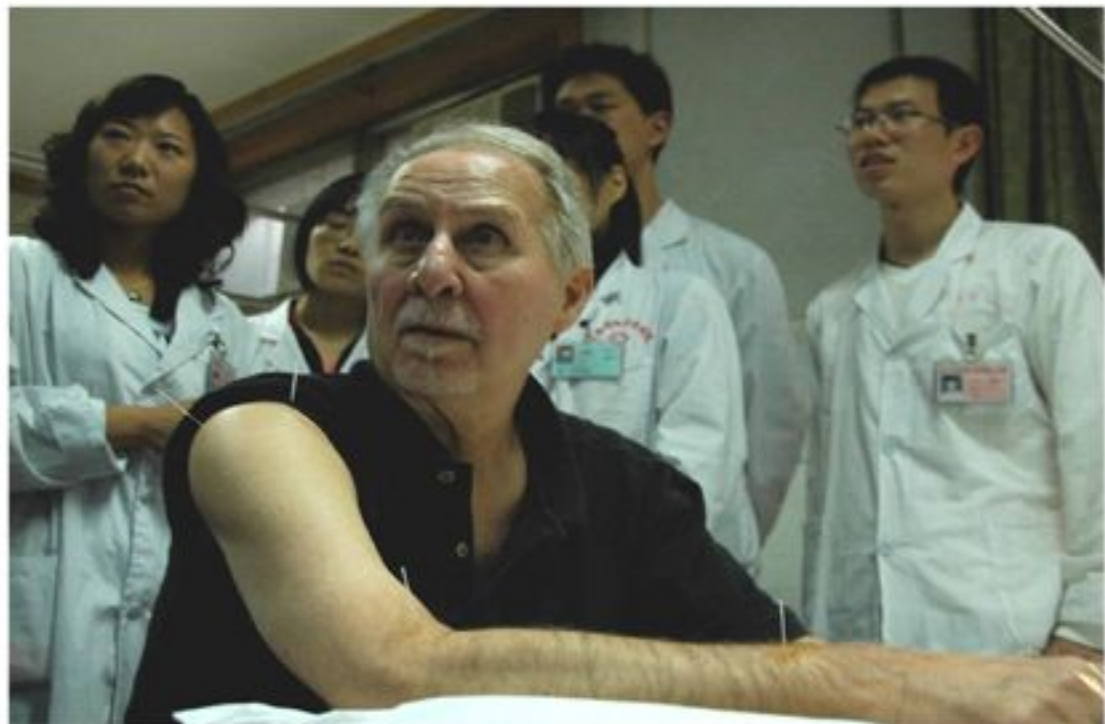


Beijing Medical

By DOMINICK A. MERLE

BEIJING Most tourists come here to climb the Great Wall, others head for Tiananmen Square and the Forbidden City. I'm due for my periodic head-to-toe checkup and repairs—eyes, shoulder, back and feet. Something like a 100,000-kilometer, bumper-to-bumper car inspection.



EYES Beginning with the top, it's off to the Hongqiao Market and the Sunny optical shop for an eye exam and prescription glasses. There are literally hundreds of eyeglass shops in Beijing, including one sprawling complex called Eyeglass City, but I bought at Sunny two years ago and have been extremely satisfied with the quality and the price.

"I'd like to see some glasses," I said upon entering, whereupon, simultaneously and frantically, one woman took the ones I had on to be checked, a second

measured my forehead and the space between my eyes and a third began showing me some fancy designer frames.

Being a veteran, I halted the triple-attack until I had selected my frames and negotiated the price. Once done, I was given an extensive 30-minute examination with very modern machinery, including some I had never seen before, after which it was determined that the prescription glasses I was using needed a little fine tuning.





My progressive, transitional prescription glasses with the designer frames would be ready in three hours.

Total cost, about \$100, roughly one-seventh the price I would pay back home.

I had lunch, came back for a fitting and minor adjustment, and the new glasses were in fact a big improvement over the ones I had been wearing. (I didn't feel as smug when I later learned I could easily have negotiated down to \$75).

SHOULDER Working down my checklist, the next two items---shoulder and back---would be handled at a clinic near my hotel that specialized in traditional Chinese medicine. It was decided that a standard acupuncture treatment would be applied to my aching right shoulder.

"How many needles can you take?" the white-coated lady specialist asked. I shrugged and she settled on six. Except for a mild sting with one needle, there was no pain.

The needles remained in my arm and shoulder for 30 minutes. After that, a heated suction cup was placed on my upper arm and the skin popped out the size of a baseball for an instant before falling back into place.

There was no immediate relief, but none was expected. The lady said it would take at least nine more treatments to have a pain-free shoulder.

Cost for the acupuncture:
About \$15.

BACK---I was led into another section of the clinic to treat my lower back, which had been diagnosed as a slipped disc. A type of massage called "tuina" was chosen, a 2,000-year-old technique that massages muscles and tendons.

There is nothing gentle or sensual about tuina.. For the most part, it carries a mild degree of pain and discomfort. But at the end of a 45-minute session, I felt relaxed and the hitch in my lower back had disappeared.





A man on a nearby massage table mentioned that he was having problems sleeping as well. The remedy, the masseur said, was to walk backwards for 20 minutes each day, all the while clapping your hands in front and rear.

He demonstrated the exercise and said it could be done in a circular path in an enclosed area like home or office. But lost in translation was how this would help him get some sleep.

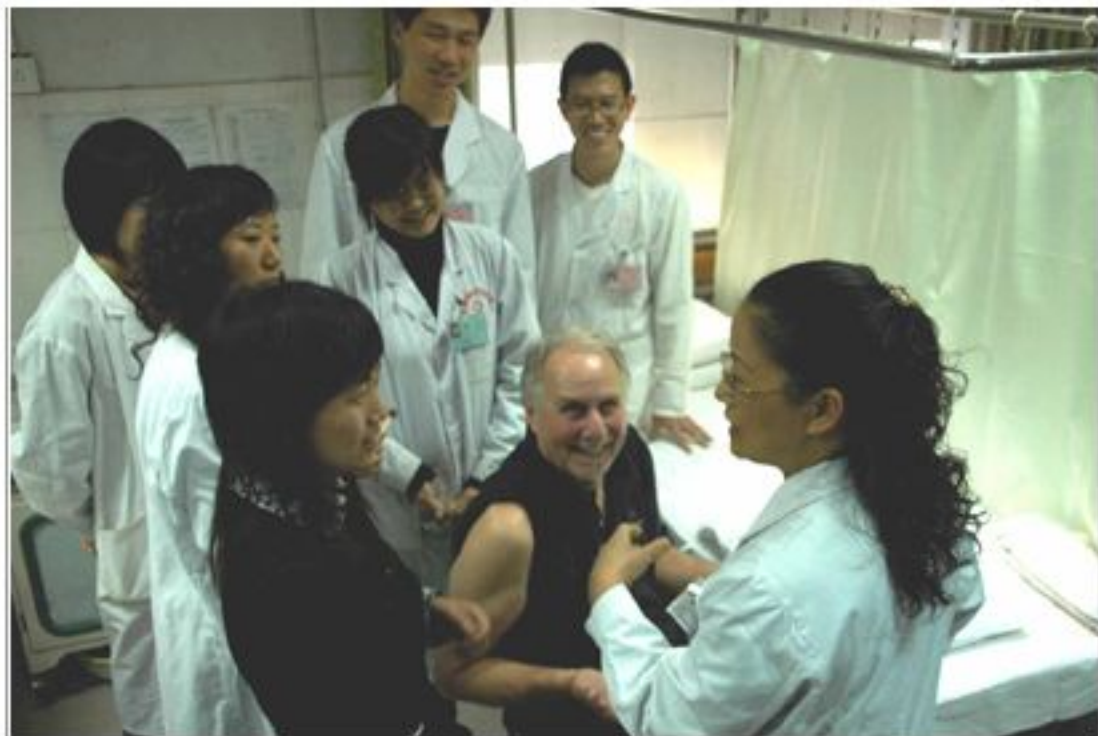
Total cost of the tuina massage: About \$15.

FEET---My final checkup was at a traditional foot massage parlor a short distance from my hotel. Wearing my new eyeglasses , I walked there briskly with a pain-free back.

There was really nothing wrong with my feet, but in China going for a foot massage is similar to taking your auto to a diagnostic center to pinpoint the problems.

Chinese believe there are 72 pressure points on your feet and toes that correlate to other parts of your body. When a sensitive area is probed, one that causes pain, it indicates a problem in another part of your body---perhaps your digestive tract, or heart or kidneys.

The trained masseurs do not sugarcoat the symptoms, but tell it like it is. I tend to be a believer, because the last time I had a Chinese foot massage it indicated problems which I've since had corrected. This time those problems were not



mentioned, but my shoulder, back and a couple of other things that need repairs, were cited.

Total cost for the diagnostic foot massage: Again, about \$15.

Mission accomplished--a head-to-toe checkup including a new pair of eyeglasses for a total cost of \$145. I hope to be back here in a couple of years for another go-around, including a much tougher negotiating session at the Sunny optical shop.

IF YOU GO:

Dress is informal throughout China, even in the finest restaurants.

Drink only bottled water and avoid uncovered food stalls.

Push your way, boldly yet gently, along with others in crowded venues. It is a way of life for 1.3-billion people.

Visas are required. Check with your nearest Chinese Embassy, Consulate or travel agent.