

The discoveries of Sylvotherapy

HEALTH. *The Japanese biologist Qing Li points out the benefits of forest walks, which in Japan is the subject of a public health mission.*

BY MARIE-CHRISTINE MOROSI

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Professor Qing Li, Japanese biologist and associate professor at Nippon Medical School in Tokyo, founded the Japanese Society of Forest Medicine in 2007. © Nicolas Datiche / SIPA

A method considered scientific since 1927 and particularly efficient against tuberculosis and asthma, sylvotherapy joined balneotherapy in healthcare programs. But was gradually dethroned by thalassotherapy or by artificial techniques such as light therapy, the use of foggers and other type of aerosols. It has been thirteen years since Professor Qing Li, a medical doctor, Japanese biologist and associate professor at Nippon Medical School in Tokyo and founder of the Japanese Society of Forest Medicine in 2007, has undertaken the task to demonstrate the beneficial impact of trees on our metabolism, both psychologically and physiologically. His research has made him an internationally known and recognized unique leader in silviculture. After having conquered Asia and the United States, it sparked a wave of interest that is now reaching Europe.

READ also by [Prof. Qing Li "Forest bathing slow down cardiac rhythm."](#)

It all started in 1982, when Japan launched a very ambitious research program on the benefits of forest walks that has been an ancient ritual practiced throughout the Japanese archipelago. Between 2004 and 2012, the government invested no less than \$ 4 million in this national public health mission devoted to what is then called shinrin-yoku ("forest bathing"), a term that Prof. Li translates by "forest bathing".

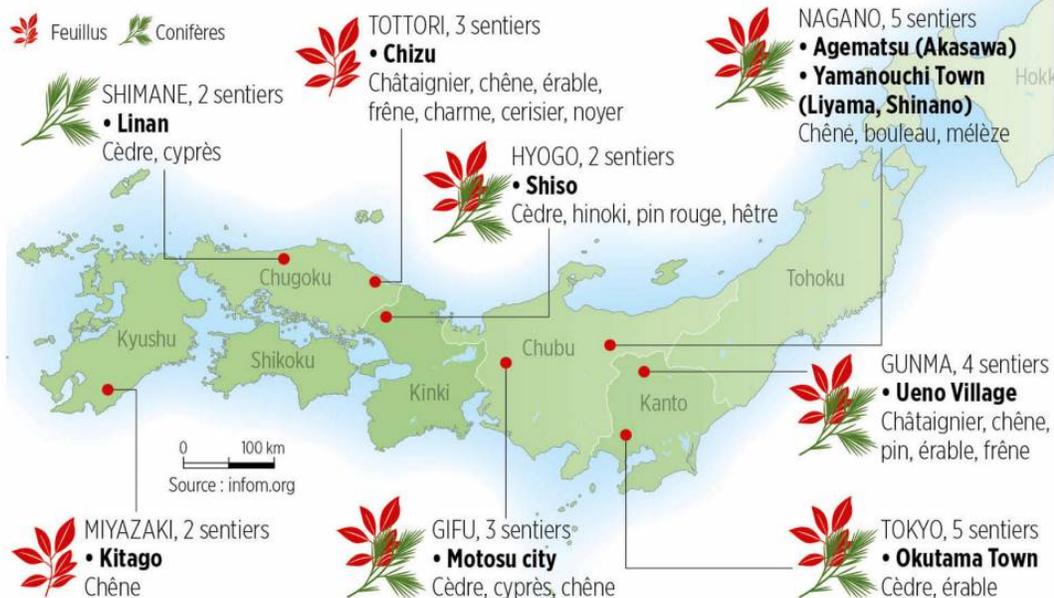


The king tree. According to Professor Li, the most beneficial in essential oils is the hinoki, a Japanese cypress. © HorizonFeatures / Leemage

Taking several groups of urban volunteers to walk in more or less wooded areas, the scientist methodically studied in his laboratory the effects of these walks on his volunteers analyzing, before and after, their blood and urine. His conclusions, depicted in diagrams and charts, brought astounding conclusions. In brief, decreased indicators of stress, depression syndromes, anxiety and anger, boosted immune system, increased natural killer cells against diseases such as cancer - the precious NKs. Also observed, was a noted positive regulation of the heart rhythm, hypertension, as effective as with the use of adapted medicine and in diabetics, a reduction of the amount of glucose in the blood and in the prevention of obesity. Forest immersion is excellent against respiratory diseases, osteoarthritis, hyperactivity and insomnia. It has also been shown to be effective in reducing adrenaline production and lowering the level of cortisol, the stress hormone secreted by our body. So much!! Moreover, if the positive effects are observed during the first half hour of forest immersion, the maximum beneficial effects are reached on the second day and remain at the same level for the next thirty days. In other words, a simple monthly immersion helps to maintain these rates. But beware, for an equal length of time, a walk in the city or in a sparse park does not have the same effect. It is imperative that the forested area is sufficiently dense.

Un archipel sillonné de sentiers thérapeutiques

Les recherches menées depuis 2004 au Japon ont abouti à l'aménagement de centres et de sentiers thérapeutiques forestiers choisis pour leur beauté et leurs bienfaits. Voici quelques sites remarquables



An archipelago filled with therapeutic trails. © DR

Researches since 2004 in Japan rendered the creation of therapeutic centers and trails selected for their beauty and benefits. Here are some of the most beautiful sites.

Taken very seriously, based on the concept of forest medicine established by Professor Li, the works led to the creation in Japan of about sixty therapeutic centers in selected areas for the quality of their forest and the beauty of

the landscapes (valleys, streams, mountains, waterfalls). You can walk in these sites accompanied by specially trained guides either for short getaways or for treatments of a few days depending on the pathologies. According to naturopath Laurence Monce trained at the University of Turin in forestry therapy, there are two types of cures in Japan. Passive cures, with slow paced walks, and active cures on more challenging, fast and sporting courses.

The good news, Prof. Li started writing a compilation of his results. So expected that he was one of the three hot-books with hard-fought rights at the recent Frankfurt Book Fair in competition with four other publishers to win the French rights. First editions have raised the stakes. Editorial editor at this publisher, Marie-Anne Jost - who has recently successfully discovered Marie Kondo, the storage hero, and Hal Elrod, the inventor of the "Miracle Morning", could not pass such a publication. "Qing Li's research echoes all of our concerns of stressed city dwellers in need of nature," she says. The publication in France is announced for spring 2018.



Les conifères. Ils produisent des oléorésines appelées terpènes, à l'action bactéricide et fongicide et à l'effet particulièrement dynamisant.



Les feuillus. Dans leurs forêts, l'effet des phytoncides est tonisédatif, c'est-à-dire à la fois relaxant et apaisant.

A "Natural medicine" © DR

An abundance of phytoncides

In the woods, these volatile molecules from essential oils secreted by trees act as much as the purity of the air and play an antibiotic role. To breath them has an extremely invigorating effect.

Precious negative ions

These electrically charged fine particles, act as anti-pollution filters. One can get his fill near trees, waterfalls and after a storm. They bring vitality and relaxation.

A bath of leaves

Laurence Monce, naturopath, advises to spread a blanket in the sun. Cover it with leaves, lie down and fold the blanket over, like a foil. One will sweat, which will have a detoxifying effect. Then rest in the shade.

The "Forest bathing slow down cardiac rhythm."

INTERVIEW :

Prof. Qing Li: "Forest bathing slow down the heart rate".

They reduce stress and anxiety, increases natural killer cells, cancer prevention ... The Japanese doctor details his findings.

COMMENTS COLLECTED BY MARIE-CHRISTINE MOROSI

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Professor Qing Li, a Japanese biologist and associate professor at Nippon Medical School in Tokyo, founded the Japanese Society of Forest Medicine in 2007.

Point: When did your research begin?

Prof. Qing Li: In 1982, the Forest Agency of Japan launched a new activity called "shinrin-yoku", "forest bathing". Today, this activity is recognized for its effectiveness, especially for relaxation and stress management. But there was not enough scientific evidence to prove the positive effects of these immersions. It was to obtain them by means of serious scientific analysis that the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries launched in 2004 a vast research program.

Point: How were you involved?

Prof. Qing Li: I am a doctor of medicine at the Nippon Medical School in Tokyo, where I live, and my specialty is environmental medicine, especially environmental immunology. I have been studying the effects of chemicals, stress and lifestyles on the immune system since 1988 and I am interested in the influence of all environmental

factors on health. As part of the project team by the ministry since 2004, I devote myself on the impact of the forest on human beings.

Point: What are the scientifically proven effects of "shinrin-yoku"?

Prof. Qing Li: They can increase the number of natural killer (NK) cells, NK activity, as well as intracellular anticancer proteins such as perforin, granulysin and granzymes A / B. Therefore, forest bathing has a possible preventive effect on cancers. They reduce blood pressure and stress hormones such as adrenaline, noradrenaline and cortisol. They finally slow down the heart rate. Their preventive effect on anxiety and depression is obvious.

Point: Which are the more beneficial forests in Japan?

Prof. Qing Li: Forests where cypresses and cedars grow in Japan. The Akasawa Forest Park (a forest therapy base) and the Iiyama Forest Park (a forest therapy base) in Nagano, as well as the Okutama Forest (a forest therapy base) in Tokyo, are the therapeutic trails that I recommend as a priority in the archipelago.

Point: Which advice would you give to a city dweller that wants to enjoy forest bathing?

Prof. Qing Li : I recommend a three-day stay and two nights on forest sites. The calm atmosphere, the beautiful landscapes, the mild climates, the particular scents, the freshness and the pure air, all contribute to the effects. All the senses benefit from it.

Point: You are writing a book at the moment...

Prof. Qing Li: Many of the studies I have done have actually been published in the United States in 2012 under the title *Forest Medicine*, which has been translated into Chinese and Korean. But I am preparing a new book, which will be released in 2018.
