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Meet Dr. Qing Li – The Man Who Wants You To Walk More In The Forests For Your Own Benefits



by Deepannita Das

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To feel familiar to its surroundings, humans have always tried to establish a relationship with nature. The connection with nature is so intense and yet so subtle- it helps you to experience calmness and contentment. It also creates a positive impact on the human mind in the best possible way. But, unfortunately, today we have failed to establish a connection, due to a great shift from nature to technology.

LifeBeyondNumbers got in touch with Dr. Qing Li, the author of the book **Forest Bathing**, to know why he wants to make forest bathing a public movement and help him in his quest to make people understand about the positivity of nature by spreading awareness about the practice.

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Qing Li, the author of Forest Bathing

The 52-year-old Physician is the president of Japanese Society of Forest Medicine, the vice-president of International Society of Nature and Forest Medicine and one of the directors of Forest Therapy Society in Japan.

"I grew up in a small village in Datong, Shanxi Province of China. The Poplar forests were green in spring and summer, and the leaves turned yellow in autumn."

Qing Li came to Japan in 1988 to study Japanese advanced medicine. During that time, he spent a week camping with his friends in Yakushima, a small, round island with the mysterious, glowing, green forest.

realized how essential forest bathing is for human health. Later, this added a whole direction of my life and a new approach to my future research.”

“My major is environmental medicine and I got my Ph.D. degree from Kagoshima University in 1992 and then moved to Tokyo. I have studied the effects of environmental chemicals, stress, and lifestyle on immune function since 1988 in Kagoshima University and Nippon Medical School. I am interested in the effect of all environmental factors on human health. I am also interested in the effect of forest environments on human health.”

Because of his background, when the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries of Japan organized the project team in 2004, he was invited as a main member of the project team.



The birthplace of forest bathing (Qing Li)

“I want to know why we feel so much better when we are in forests. What is this secret power of trees that makes us so much healthier and happier? Why is it that we feel less stressed and have more energy just by walking in the forest? I study forest medicine to find out all the ways in which walking in the forest can improve our well-being. I had the following hypothesis before the study of forest bathing:

It is well known that immune system including natural killer (NK) cells plays an important role in defense against bacteria, viruses, and tumors. It is also well known that stress inhibits immune function. Empirically, forest bathing/shinrin-yoku may reduce stress. Thus, I speculate that forest bathing/shinrin-yoku may have the beneficial effect on immune function by reducing stress.”



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Since 2004, he has conducted serial studies to investigate the effect of forest environments (shinrin-yoku) on human health and published many scientific articles in English in the topic of Forest Medicine (forest bathing/shinrin-yoku).

The terms ‘forest bathing’ and ‘Shinrin-yoku’ in English were first used and defined in Qing Li’s research in 2007 and later he published many scientific papers on them.



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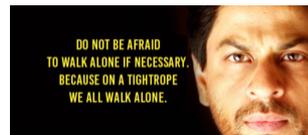
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Commemorating The Charms Of My Childhood That No Longer Exist

In his research, Qing Li has found that forest bathing has many benefits to human health-

- Reduced blood pressure
- Reduced stress
- Improved mood
- Increased ability to focus, even in children with ADHD
- Accelerated recovery from surgery or illness
- Increased energy level
- Improved sleep
- Boosted immune system functioning, with an increase in the count of the body's Natural Killer (NK) cells.

It is projected that by 2050, 75% of the world's population will live in cities. It is proven that city-people are more likely to suffer from heart attacks, strokes, and cancer. Urban city life is also associated with higher anxiety and depression rates.

Shinrin-yoku can reduce the risk of many people developing these illnesses, and it is free! It is also wonderful to be able to reconnect with the natural world, to enjoy the forest atmosphere by your five senses. He hopes his book will inspire more people to notice the natural world around them and be aware of the health **benefits of practicing shinrin-yoku.**

Connecting with trees have a healing effect on the mind as well as the body. It increases the intuitive power in humans. People can enjoy forest environments(forest bathing/Shinrin-yoku) through all five senses:

- **The sense of sight:** forest landscape- green color, yellow color and red color and other colors
- **The sense of smell:** special good smell, the fragrance from trees
- **The sense of hearing:** forest sounds, birdsong
- **The sense of touch:** Touching trees can put your whole body in the forest atmosphere
- **The sense of taste:** Eating foods and fruits from forests, taste the fresh air in forests

It is a total effect of all five senses- the quiet atmosphere, beautiful scenery, mild climate, special good smell, and fresh, clean air in forests contribute to the effects. However, the aromas from the trees (sense of smell) have the main effect.

On asking about deforestation, Qing Li says, *"We should stop the urbanization and plant more trees. Since 2003, we have conducted many scientific experiments to investigate the effects of forest environments on human health and have published lots of papers in scientific journals and books. We found many beneficial effects of forests on human health."*

Imagine a new medical science that could let you know how to be more active, more relaxed and healthier with reduced stress and reduced risk of lifestyle-related disease and cancer by visiting forests. This new medical science is called **forest medicine.**

Forest medicine encompasses the effects of forest environments on human health and is a new interdisciplinary science, belonging to the categories of alternative medicine, environmental medicine, and preventive medicine. This book presents up-to-date findings in forest medicine to show the beneficial effects of forest environments on human health.

The Experiments that bear proof to the therapeutic impact on humans due to forest bathing –

The Experiments

- In 2004, I conducted an experiment with the aromas (phytoncides) from trees in vitro to investigate the effect of phytoncides on natural killer activity.
- In 2005, I conducted an experiment by a three-day/two-night trip to investigate the effect of walking in forests on the human immune function in male subjects.
- In 2006, I conducted another experiment by a three-day/two-night trip to investigate how long the effect last in male subjects.
- In 2007, I conducted an experiment by a three-day/two-night trip to investigate the effect of walking in forests on the human immune function in female subjects.
- In 2008, I conducted an experiment with the aromas (phytoncides) from trees in vivo to investigate the effect of phytoncides on natural killer activity.
- In 2006-2008, I conducted another experiment to investigate the effect of walking in forests on the stress hormones and the psychological effects in male and female subjects.
- In 2007, I studied the relationship of forest coverage and standardized mortality ratios (SMR) of cancers. In this study, I found that people living in areas with higher forest coverage show significantly lower standardized mortality ratios (SMR) of cancers compared with people living in areas with lower forest coverage in Japan. The findings suggest that forests may partially contribute to decreased SMR of some cancers in Japan. This may be very important in health promotion and preventive medicine.
- In 2009, I conducted a day trip experiment to investigate the effect of walking in forests on the human immune function in male subjects.
- In 2010, I conducted another day trip experiment to investigate the effect of walking in forests on the blood pressure.
- In 2009-2015, I conducted many experiments on the topic of the Effect of walking in city parks in Tokyo on human health. I found that the walks in city green parks significantly increased the score for vigor and decreased the scores for anxiety, depression, anger, fatigue and confusion. On the other hand, walk at a shopping street without trees in Tokyo did not affect the mood states, indicating the relaxing effects walk in city green parks.
- In 2015, I conducted another day trip experiment to investigate the effect of walking in forests on the blood pressure and heart rate in the birthplace of forest bathing in Japan.

Qing Li believes that Shinrin-yoku makes one more active, relaxed, happier and healthier. This further helps one to reduce stress and lifestyle-related diseases and cancers. *"If you want to be more active, more relax, happier and healthier, you need to come close to nature."*

Qing Li's book **Shinrin-yoku** has been translated into 20 languages now. He wants to verify the preventive effects of forest bathing on lifestyle-related diseases among INFOM(*International*



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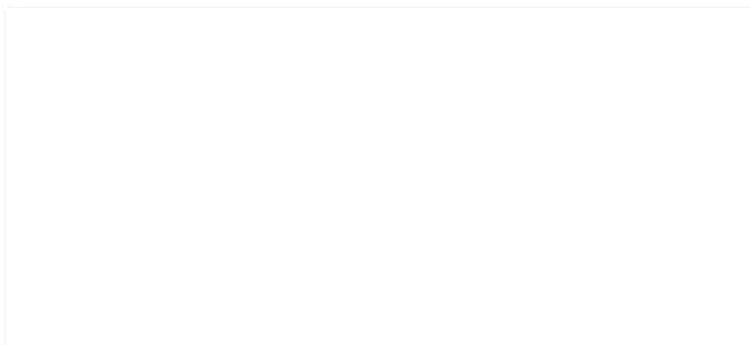
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