



CHAPTER

9

*Thai Traditional Medicine
& Types of Thai Massage*

*“Pali: Natthi Panya Samalapha
Wisdom is greater than light.”⁵⁸*

— Lord Buddha

Chapter 9

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Thai Traditional Medicine and Thai Massage in the Modern Era

The Return of Natural Healing Based on National Regulations

In 1977, the World Health Organization (WHO) sponsored an international conference on indigenous medicine. The following year, WHO urged its member nations to utilize the benefits from native medicinal plants in their primary health care systems. Since then, the Thai government has supported Thai traditional medicine as part of national policy. This alternative healing choice, along with Thai massage, would later gain much more credibility in the eyes of the Thai public.

However, the modernization of the health care system created a demise and stagnation in the field of Thai traditional medicine. Laws and regulations setting standards of care and safety for the public were necessary to control health care services being provided in non-formal settings such as temples and local communities. To help Thai traditional medicine, particularly Thai massage, gain greater acceptance in modern society, improved standards and safety practices were implemented along with an increase in training and education required for practitioners in formal settings.

Since July 2004, the Thai law requires licen-

ses to practice Thai massage for health. The Thai Public Health Department has undertaken a major revamping of regulations in order to certify Thai massage curriculum for government-approved Thai massage schools to conduct training for massage therapists to acquire licenses. The law now requires all practitioners of Thai massage to obtain proper training from approved schools; or attend intensive training and pass a written and practical examination on Thai massage techniques.⁵⁵ (See more details of law and license requirements in “Thai Massage Revival Project: The Law and Standards for Thai Massage”, chapter 8.)

Nevertheless, several techniques of Thai massage are currently being practiced. The variations in techniques may be attributed to the differences and vagueness which occurred during knowledge transfer by oral tradition from one person to another. The teachings may vary according to the unique methods, preferences, and interpretation of a particular teacher. However, the basic tenet of the flow of life force or *Prana* is common to all schools. (See chapters 1 to 5.)



National Institute of Thai Traditional Medicine

National Health Care Plan

The future of Thai traditional medicine looks much more promising with the sanction of government policy placing Thai traditional medicine on the national budgetary plan. Thailand has established a national agency to provide holistic healing (Thai traditional medicine and Thai massage) under the responsibility of the National Institute of Thai Traditional Medicine and the Department of Medical Services, Ministry of Public Health respectively.

The Department's main objectives are to develop and strengthen the health care system of the nation and to enhance self-sufficiency in health.

*The agency has set up a five year plan as follows:*⁵⁹

1. Establish and manage the national education system for health care practitioners in the field of folk doctors, Thai medicine doctors, and holistic medicine doctors.
2. Develop a health care system utilizing health care practitioners in the fields of folk doctors, Thai medicine doctors, and holistic medicine doctors.
3. Develop man power in the fields of folk doctors, Thai medicine doctors, and holistic medicine doctors.
4. Develop Thai medicine and herbal medications.
5. Preserve Thai traditional health care knowledge to ensure its purity and to protect the rights on remedies and products in the field and to approach the international community for acceptance.

During the establishment of the pilot plan, the government had allocated a budget of 2,364 Billion Baht for the 2007-2011, a five year plan, to achieve its objectives. In addition, government agencies in related fields are also active in formulating laws to protect Thai citizens, licensing practitioners, create curricula for learning and funding for research.⁵⁹

The Thai government continues to recognize Thai traditional medicine including Thai massage as an important alternative healing modality to the health benefits of the Thai citizens. The government has allocated annual national budgetary to promote education and to provide service for the safety and good health of the people.

Thai Traditional Medicine— The Ancient Art of Healing

Thai traditional medicine is an ancient art used by Thais for healing purposes. Its practice still continues to the present day. Thai traditional medicine consists of four branches, namely the Thai traditional medicine doctors, Thai midwifery, Thai orthopedic medicine, and therapeutic Thai massage.

The Thai traditional medicine doctor uses indigenous plants and some animal parts to treat the patient. Treatment begins with analyzing the symptoms together with the patient's unique make up of the life elements: *earth, water, wind, and fire* as well as other information about the patient's life such as behavior, habits, time and date of birth. Patients suffering from the same illness may not receive the same medicine or advice due to differences in their life elements and personal information. (See more on elements of life in chapter 5.)