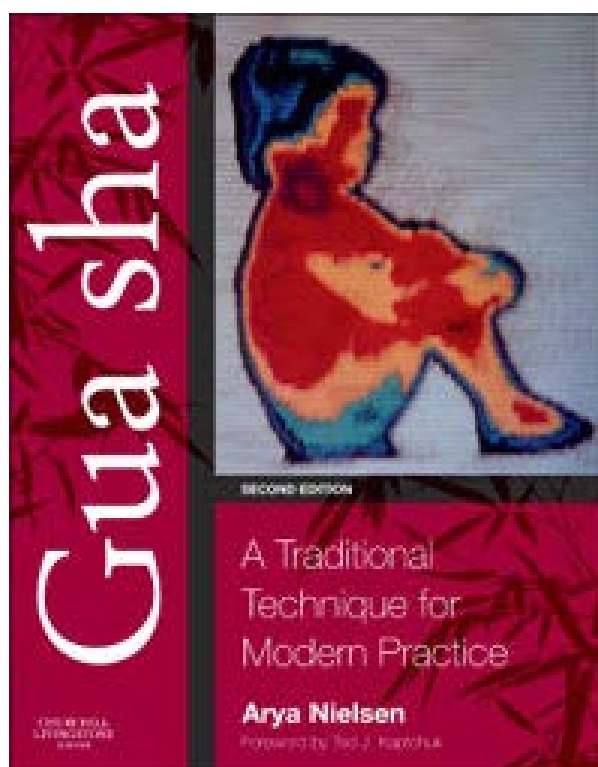




# Nielsen-A. Gua Sha

## A traditional technique for modern practice



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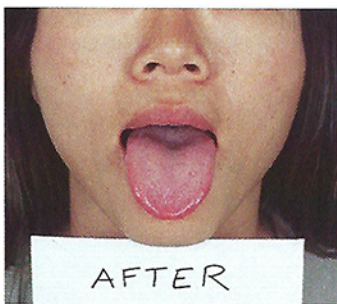
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*The plates will be found between pages xiv and 1*



**Plate 19** • Subject 1 was experiencing fatigue and early onset upper respiratory symptoms. The 'before Tongue' shows redness concentrated at the front and sides of the Tongue



**Plate 20** • Immediately after Gua sha the Tongue is less red with residual Heat at the front end corresponding to sinus inflammation. Tongue coat is slightly increased. Notice after Gua sha the face is also paler with some appearance of Heat still at nasi anni. With Gua sha clearing Heat, the underlying Blood deficiency is more apparent.



**Plate 21** • Note the sha is bright red and similar to the color of the redness of the 'before Tongue' (Plate 19). This Gua sha was performed in a student seminar: even with a beginner's technique where some areas were missed, Gua sha had a significant effect on the Tongue

# Application of Gua sha

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## When to check for sha

Always. In every situation: check for sha. The body's surface connective tissue is a membrane, the *Cou Li* in ancient terms discussed in Chapters 3 and 4 as one of the largest and most extensive body organs, where electrical, cellular and tissue remodeling signals are thought to be responsive to mechanical forces. This 'body-wide mechanosensitive signaling network' researched by scientists today was understood by traditional East Asian medicine (TEAM) for over 2000 years in a medical paradigm based on ordinary human sensory awareness and interaction with the body, environment, health and illness. For example, when outside Cold conditions are greater than a body's warming ability, cold penetrates the membrane, stagnating Qi, Blood and Fluid (see thermogram image on book cover). This stagnation can communicate a deeper stagnation. Therefore any condition warrants checking for surface stagnation, whether that stagnation is considered a causative or coexisting factor.

Suspect sha when there is pain anywhere. Gua sha may fully or partially resolve a presenting problem; it will almost always help. In addition, the response to Gua sha adds important diagnostic and prognostic information.

## How to check for sha: pressing palpation

Dr So discovered a way to palpate for the presence of sha surface stagnation. When examining a patient and palpating for Ah Shi or trigger points, make an impression in the flesh with several fingers of the hand (see Figure 6.1, Plate 1). Then quickly pull your hand away. If you can see the places where your fingers pressed and those areas are slow to fade to normal flesh color there is sha (Figure 6.2, Plate 2). The pressure from your fingers blanches the flesh, that is, displaces Blood. If there is a smooth flow of Qi and Blood in the flesh, blanching will disappear right away. If the blanching disappears gradually, it means the Blood is slow to return. This indicates the Blood is obstructed or congealed, which is evidence of sha. Simply put, pressing palpation causing blanching that is slow to fade confirms the presence of sha.

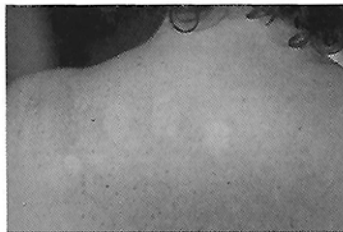
If a patient presents with pain that is helped by massage but the pain returns immediately after, it is a good indication of sha. If a patient has a sudden stiff neck, wakes with a body kink or reports pain that comes and goes, think sha. Chronic pain problems almost always involve sha.

## Where to check for sha

This is as simple as it is important. If the presenting disorder resides in or affects the upper body or upper extremities, check for sha at the upper back, neck and shoulders. If the problem is in the Internal Organs, check the back for areas of tension, Ah Shi points and sha. Treat the upper back for the Upper Jiao problems, the middle back for Middle Jiao problems, and the lower back for lower abdomen problems. It is



**Figure 6.1 • Pressing palpation** • Checking for sha, the practitioner presses her fingers onto the flesh and immediately withdraws them (see also Plate 1). See Figure 6.2.



**Figure 6.2 • Blanching that is slow to fade** • Pressing palpation (Figure 6.1) that results in blanching that is slow to fade indicates sluggish surface perfusion, or sha 'Blood stasis' in surface tissue (see Plates 1, 2 and 3).

by way of the Path of Qi that a Jiao's Internal Organs are affected by treatment of the back (see Figure 3.1).

For problems of the lower extremities, hips and pelvis, check for trigger points and sha at the lower back, sacrum and buttocks (see Figures 6.3 and 6.4).

For problems along the back itself, check the entire back for sha, as above can affect below, and below can affect above. For example, if the presenting pain is at the upper back, treat the site but also check the mid-back and the low back, even the back of the legs. If the problem is in the mid-back, treat the site but also check the upper and lower back. If the problem is at the lower back, needle and Gua sha at the low back but first check and treat accordingly the mid-back, upper back and even legs for trigger points and sha.

For musculoskeletal problems a general rule of thumb, or palpating finger, is to check along the channel or meridian that

**Figure 6.3 • Horizontal Path of Qi • The Upper, Middle, and Lower Jiao with the Back Shu points and their associated organs.**

#### Upper Jiao

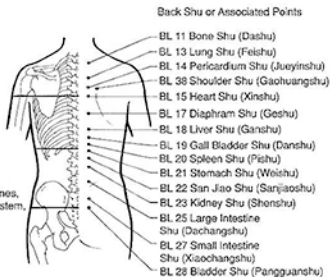
Disorders affecting the head, neck, chest, Heart, Lungs and upper extremities.

#### Middle Jiao

Disorders affecting the Stomach, Spleen, Liver, Gall Bladder and trunk.

#### Lower Jiao

Disorders affecting the Kidneys, Bladder, Intestines, genitals, reproductive system, pelvic region and lower extremities.



**Figure 6.4 • Horizontal Path of Qi • The Upper, Middle and Lower Jiao with the Front Mu points and their associated organs. The Yuan Qi can be accessed at CV 17 at the Upper Jiao, CV 12 at the Middle Jiao and CV 6 or CV 4 at the Lower Jiao.**

#### Upper Jiao

Disorders affecting the head, neck, chest, Heart, Lungs and upper extremities.

#### Middle Jiao

Disorders affecting the Stomach, Spleen, Liver, Gall Bladder and trunk.

#### Lower Jiao

Disorders affecting the Kidneys, Bladder, Intestines, genitals, reproductive system, pelvic region and lower extremities.



passes through an area of pain or stagnation, as well as directly at or near the site itself. Figures 6.5 and 6.6 illustrate this.

Consider areas where there is known referred pain or a known effect from Organ disharmony. For example, with eye problems one would check the upper back and neck because constriction of Qi or Blood in the upper back and neck can affect the head and eyes. It might also be wise to check the area of Liver and Kidney Shu points at the back, since the eyes open to the Liver and sight is influenced by the Kidneys. For ear problems check the Kidney area of the back as well as the Gall Bladder and Triple Burner (San Jiao) meridian paths for Ah Shi points and sha. For nose problems, treat the upper back and neck, the entire Lung area at the back (the nostrils open to the Lungs) as well as the BL 20 area of the back (the Spleen owns the nose). And so on.

Keep in mind that the connective tissue is concentrated at the body channels/meridians. Local treatment for a problem is propagated internally via the Path of Qi; distal treatment is

propagated as well by the channels associated with concentrations of connective tissue planes.

## Risk in ignoring sha

Unresolved sha leaves a patient vulnerable to tightness, tissue strain, pain, and illness, and/or their recovery from illness is protracted and incomplete. Blood and Fluids stagnating at the surface membrane mitigate circulation of warmth and Wei Qi. Hence the Exterior is porous to penetration by Cold or Wind. There is potential for chronic weakness or fatigue. Pain resulting from stagnation will persist until the stagnation is resolved. Chronic pain leads to decreased activity and compromised range of motion. Moreover, other forms of manual intervention may feel good in the moment but result in more pain and deter a patient from seeking further care.



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