



The idea of smoldering mugwort moxa very close to your skin isn't everyone's cup of TCM. Direct burning or moxibustion on the skin takes moxie to endure but there are other less dramatic ways to clear your energy channels. **C2**

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Christmas cheer for Chop-o-lin

Christmas Day marks the 30th anniversary of Charlie Chaplin's death. Despite the years, the Little Tramp with a bowler hat and cane and a waddling walk remains fresh and endearing, writes Bivash Mukherjee

Thirty years since his death on Christmas Day in 1977, the Little Tramp lives, still remembered as Chop-o-lin in China. The mime who epitomized silent screen laughter and tears still thrills and delights millions of men, women and children today.

Today Charlie Chaplin influences a new generation of artists and film makers: one of them is an American woman with a new gender-bending take on the tramp who wears (unseen) women's underwear. The cross-dressing Chaplin act came to the streets of Shanghai in October.

Chaplin himself visited Shanghai during his 1936 world tour and may have stopped over in 1931, though official records are lacking.

Chaplin was not only a name to reckon with in the magical world of motion pictures but also arguably one of cinema's best creative brains — actor, writer, director, musician — years before Jean-Luc Godard, Akira Kurosawa and Steven Spielberg were to become widely known.

Chaplin's influence was so widespread and global, cutting across strife-hit continents, different religions and other manmade obstacles, that the Chaplin phenomenon eclipses even some of today's megabucks multimedia blitzes.

Born in destitution on April 15, 1889, in London Chaplin attended just two years of school. He spent considerable time in foster homes and watched his mother go in and out of mental institutions. In an era of technological revolution, he earned his "education" on the streets as the social evils of industrialization split England into what Disraeli termed "Two Nations — rich and poor."

It's apparent that many of Chaplin's films were largely autobiographical and drew enormously from his personal experiences. He exposed the mechanization of human life, among other ills, in the hard-hitting silent film "Modern Times."

In one particular scene, the Little Tramp struggles with a feeding device which, besides being an utter laugh riot, argued in favor of the man over the machine — a product of the Industrial Revolution.

While he pantomimed the affable tramp on stage in his early days, it was not until in 1915, that Chaplin brought the personality to life in a silent short film "The Tramp."



In his book "My Autobiography," Chaplin writes of the tramp: "I was to play the role of a press reporter. It was to be comedy. I had no idea what makeup to put on. However

on the way to the wardrobe I thought I would dress up in baggy pants, big shoes, a cane and a derby hat.

"I wanted everything a contradiction: the pants baggy, the coat tight, the hat small, and the shoes large. I had no idea of the character. But the moment I was dressed, the

clothes and the makeup made me feel the person 'he' was. I began to know 'him' and by the time I was fully dressed 'he' was born."

Chaplin stressed that he did not have to read books to realize that the theme of life was conflict and pain. Instinctively, all his clowning was based on this. His means of contriving a comedy plot was simple. It was the process of getting people in and out of trouble.

While his early shorts like "The Immigrant," "Easy Street" and "Pay

Day" won him a huge following, it was not until he made feature-length movies that he won critical acclaim. "Gold Rush," "The Kid," and "City Lights" were light social commentaries that reaffirmed his working class ideals.

Even though the talkies had arrived, Chaplin played on in pantomime.

"Talkies are spoiling the oldest art in the world — the art of pantomime. They are ruining the great beauty of silence. They are

defeating the meaning of the screen," he insisted.

It was only in "The Great Dictator," a satire on Mussolini and Hitler, that he finally broke his silence. He had obviously waited for the right time — and for something important to say.

At the end of the film Chaplin the barber steps outside of the character to deliver a speech. "You, the people, have the power to make this life a wonderful adventure."

With McCarthyism at its peak, Chaplin was hounded out of the United States, where he had lived for 42 long years, for "obvious leftist leanings." Britain delayed knighting him for nearly 20 years because of his romantic "escapades" and his apparent politics.

In the end he made Switzerland his final home; he died there in his sleep on Christmas Day in 1977.

For someone who never celebrated the "Season of Goodwill," it was an ironic end to a long and distinguished journey.

"It really depressed him," Chaplin's son Michael told London's Daily Express. "My mother would always put a big tree in the house and we'd surround it with beautifully wrapped gifts, while my father would grow morose and complain about the commercialization of Christmas.

"It reminded him of his hard childhood when he had no presents and no tree. He'd complain: 'If I got an orange at Christmas as a child, I was lucky.' It's ironic that he died on Christmas Day. That gave him even more reason to hate the holiday."

The world's greatest comedian didn't give up on his humor even as he faced death. When the priest, who was attending him on his deathbed, said: "May the Lord have mercy on your soul," Chaplin is believed to have shot back:

"Why not? After all, it belongs to him."

For a child who once laid his head on a bare mattress on an attic floor, with only a bowl of soup to keep him alive, it had certainly been an amazing lifetime.

He was the greatest film comedian since movies began and made more people laugh than anybody ever did. Honestly, we owe to him a greater appreciation of the invaluable twin gifts — laughter and tears.