

Andreas Cleyer's *Examples of Chinese medicine*

EX LIBRIS RCPE

Specimen medicinae sinicae
Frankfurt am Main, 1682

In 1682, the year the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh's Library was founded, European physicians were introduced to a completely new world of medicine with the publication of a work by the German 'physician' and botanist Andreas Cleyer, *Specimen medicinae sinicae* or *Examples of Chinese medicine*.

Cleyer has been described as 'a physician of dubious character', and even the title 'physician' seems to have been dubious. Born in 1634 at Kassel in Germany, Cleyer does appear to have been a man of good education, but there are no records of him ever having taken a degree. Not much is known of his early adult life, but by 1664 he was in the service of the Dutch East India Company at its eastern trading and administrative headquarters in Batavia (now Jakarta) on Java. There he rose from the rank of 'gentleman soldier' to become *Opperhoofden* or chief commissioner of the colony.

Within the first few years of his arrival, Cleyer was running two pharmacies, had established an extensive garden to stock them and was increasingly being referred to as 'Doctor Cleyer'. He took a keen interest in the native medicinal plants, and sent sketches, reports and botanical specimens back to scholars in Europe. Medical supplies were an extremely lucrative business, and would be even more so for Cleyer if he could substitute expensive European imports with local alternatives grown in his own physic garden. In 1667 he was appointed 'physician to the castle of Batavia' and 'head of surgery', positions that gave him overall supervision of the Company's medical services throughout the

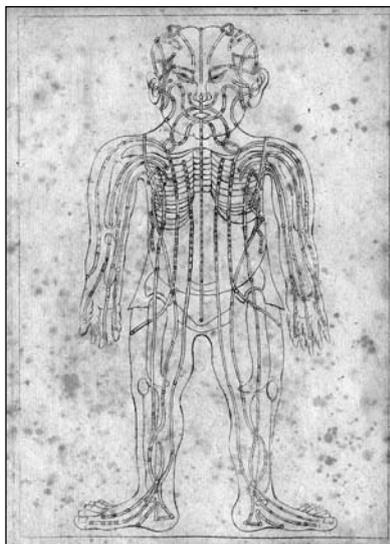


FIGURE 1 One of the acupuncture charts in Andreas Cleyer's *Specimen medicinae sinicae*, the first ones to be published in Western Europe.

East Indies. Between 1682 and 1683, and again in 1685, he was also appointed chief commissioner of the Dutch trading post at Dejima in Japan. This position ended in 1686 when he was banished for life from Japan, ostensibly for failing to control the smuggling trade. Considering that his Japanese accomplices were all executed, however, it seems more likely that he was actually controlling it very well, but to his own advantage.

Cleyer's interest in Chinese medicine can be traced to at least 1669, when he wrote to Philippe Couplet, a Jesuit missionary in China, seeking out manuscripts on the subject. Jesuit missionaries had been active in China since the 16th century. The Church, recognising that they were attempting to convert an ancient and learned culture, sent missionaries who were not just trained in theology but were also men of languages and science.

Michael Boym was one such priest. Ordained in 1631, he spent ten years in intensive study before setting out on his missionary travels through East Asia. After spending several years at the Chinese court

he returned to Italy in 1651. The son of a Polish physician, Boym's main interest was in medicine. He had studied the materia medica of China, and collected and translated a number of traditional Chinese medical works into Latin. In 1656, when he again left Rome for China, Boym was accompanied by Couplet, who shared his enthusiasm for Chinese medicine. Boym requested his fellow Jesuit's help in getting his writings and translations published in the West, and Couplet sent his manuscripts to Jesuits in Batavia.

Whether *Specimen medicinae sinicae* included some of Boym's translations, or was indeed based on Boym's work, is still a matter of controversy among sinologists, and Cleyer has often been accused of plagiarism. It has been said in his defence that although he did not credit Boym on the title page, neither did he claim authorship. Rather he listed himself as the editor of a collection of *Examples of Chinese medicine*.

Like Boym, the distinguished Dutch physician and botanist Willem Ten Rhijne also went unacknowledged in Cleyer's work. Ten Rhijne first arrived in Batavia in 1674, spent some time in Japan and Sumatra but returned to Java in 1681. He helped Cleyer with the medical botany in *Specimen medicinae sinicae*, as well as its sections on the pulse, acupuncture and moxibustion. He is also thought to have made general improvements to the Latin translation.

While Ten Rhijne may have been the person Cleyer referred to as a 'learned European' who helped him assemble part three of his work, the Dutchman was far from happy about Cleyer's use of his work. He wrote to the Royal Society of London, accusing Cleyer of dishonesty in his dealings over the publication and of breaking agreements. In 1683 the society published, at its own expense, Ten Rhijne's *Dissertatio de arthritide: mantissa schematica: de*

acupuncture. It was Ten Rhijne's work that actually provided the West with the first detailed description of Chinese and Japanese acupuncture and moxibustion, and the first illustrations of the acu-points.

Cleyer's book contains sections on Chinese theories of medicine, the materia medica and diagnostic methods. There are 36 drawings showing the appearance of the tongue in certain pathological conditions. Special attention was given by Chinese physicians to the coating, shape and colour of a patient's tongue, with specific areas believed to reflect the health of corresponding organs. There

are also 30 plates that include several anatomical illustrations. What was most confusing to European eyes, however, were the first acupuncture charts to be published in the West. These were not explained by Cleyer, and many thought them also to be anatomical – a mistake that led to much criticism of Chinese medicine by Western readers.

One aspect of the work that did have a major influence on at least one European physician was the importance the Chinese put on monitoring the pulse in diagnosis. Sir John Floyer incorporated passages from Cleyer's text in his classic work

The physician's pulse-watch, published in 1707. Floyer entitled part three of his work 'The Chinese art of feeling the pulse is describ'd; and the imitation of their practice of physick, which is grounded on the observation of the pulse, is recommended'.

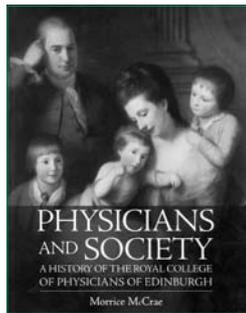
Despite its faults and controversies, Cleyer's *Specimen medicinae sinicae* was the first major contribution to the understanding of Chinese medicine, and the first illustrated book on the subject to be published in Europe.

John Dallas, Rare Books Librarian, RCPE; j.dallas@rcpe.ac.uk

BOOK REVIEW: Morrice McCrae, *Physicians and Society*

The prospect of reviewing Morrice McCrae's history of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh did not appeal for Morrice is an old friend, his book had the backing of the College Council and he was appointed Historian to the College during my Presidency. The consequences of not liking his book might be dire, and I began reading it with some trepidation. I need not have worried for *Physicians and Society* is a riveting read that can be enjoyed by anyone with an interest in the history of medicine, doctors, institutions and the societies of which they are a part. This book is about a Scottish College and Scottish physicians, and it should be required reading for the leaders of the RCPE, but it can be recommended strongly to the College membership and to anyone seriously interested in the history of medicine.

Many themes run through this book, including the importance of individuals, of persistence in pursuing worthwhile goals, of the necessity for unwelcome compromises and the need to expect opposition to even – perhaps particularly – the best of intentions. All of these were exemplified in the founding of the College itself, which took 60 years including three failed attempts before



the Royal Charter was granted by King Charles II in 1681. Individuals were important both in themselves and because of their broad education and network of contacts. Robert Sibbald, generally regarded as the 'father' of the College, studied in Leiden and Paris; his cousin Andrew Balfour was a pupil of William Harvey in London, where he was well known to the founders of the Royal Society; Archibald Pitcairn, a founding Fellow, was a mathematician and friend of Isaac Newton. In the 18th century, Fellows such as William Cullen and Joseph Black were friends of other major Enlightenment figures such as Adam Smith, David Hume and James Hutton.

Societies, however, contain competing groups and interests, and the College discovered this when its objectives clashed with opposing political, economic, religious and even medical interests. Indeed, internal divisions have at times brought the College almost to its knees.

So what has this book to say of the RCPE's achievements? More than enough to inspire its current worldwide membership to emulate the achievements of the past. These include the establishment of the Edinburgh

University Medical School and the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh teaching hospital, which emphasised bedside teaching; an insistence on proper medical education and assessment; the development of medical ethics as an essential part of a profession with societal obligations; an obligation to provide free medical care for the poor; and the development of public health. In the latter part of the 19th century, as Edinburgh medicine lost ground to continental Europe, the College set up the first medical research laboratory in the UK, which operated successfully for 60 years.

The Royal Colleges in the UK stand at a crossroads in respect of their relevance to UK medicine, and while the past does not provide a blueprint for the future, it has a lot to say about the way in which a profession contributes to society. Dr McCrae has produced an important book in this regard (hopefully the typos will be corrected in future editions). It traces the College history to the end of the 19th century, but it is to be hoped that he will bring this history up to the present in an era in which the state dominates but does not perform well.

Niall Finlayson, Editor, *The Journal*

To order copies of the book from the College, please contact reception on 0131 225 7324 or email reception@rcpe.ac.uk.