

Centre for the Humanities and Medicine
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Convergence and Collisions: Disease, Religion, and Healing in Asia

**New Methods of Diagnosis in China and a Catalyst for New Methods in
Europe**

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Throughout the long textual history of Chinese traditional medicine we have descriptions of diagnosis. In the earliest texts (Han Dynasty, 206BCE – 220CE) we find eloquent depictions of diagnosis according to the Pulse and the patient's colour.

Not until the 14th century do we find the first textual reference to the emergence of a new and comprehensive diagnostic technique in Chinese traditional medicine. A manuscript by Du Qingbi takes the prescriptive information in the Shanghan Lun, a famous Han text dealing with cold induced illness, and inserts illustrations of 36 different tongue presentations, linking them to the use of specific herbal formulae. Observable attributes such as the colour of the tongue body, the colours of the coatings on the tongue, the placement of small fissures, the size of the tongue among others are correlated to disorders of specific organs and specific illnesses. By the 17th century, this relatively new system of diagnosis has become quite widely used and documented in the writings of some prominent traditional physicians.

Also in the 17th century one Andreas Cleyer, a physician working with the Dutch East India Company, produced a Latin translation of a Chinese text entitled "Concerning the Signs of Disease According to the Colours and States of the Tongue" (*De Indiciis Morborum ex Linguae Coloribus and Affectionibus*). It was printed and circulated in Frankfurt, Germany. By the mid 19th century, medical texts used in the training of Physicians in Great Britain contained diagnostic tracts on the correspondence between tongue presentation and certain illnesses. In the story of the migrations and transformations of medical knowledge and practice, the inspection of the tongue holds a fascinating position.