

"Sturdy Junks and Scurvy Soldiers: An East Asian Perspective on a Deficiency Disease and the Chinese James Lind"

In bygone centuries the vitamin C deficiency disease scurvy received quite some attention in a variety of primary writings as well as in socio-historical, anthropological and epidemiological studies in the areas of Western medical, military and maritime history. Remarkably, the research did not particularly take into account the relevance of this topic for the East Asian cultural area until very recent times. This lecture will show that there were very good and rather unexpected reasons to take a closer look at the history of this particular ailment in China and beyond. It will focus on the connections between epidemiology, logistics, food supply and food preservation technologies on land and at sea in a premodern and early modern context and it will review the results of an interdisciplinary research project during the early years of this century.