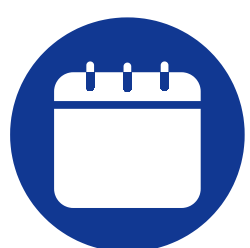


KNOWING HANDS: THINKING WITH THE MIND IN HAND IN CHINESE MEDICINE AND DIVINATION

The concept “Knowing hands” captures how pre-modern people used their hands to think through things, such as macro-microcosm relationships, and to think with, as in cognitive processing. It also captures hand-based interventions such as, in medical care, pulse taking, needling, massage, and ritual healing that also required one’s mind to be at one’s fingertips. The talk will cover two dimensions of what is meant by “knowing hands”; namely, 1) hand-memory techniques – how humans use hands to aid their cognitive processing – and 2) handy knowledge – what knowledge is grasped corporeally and conceptually with hands and so considered “handy” enough to be embodied. This lecture draws from the history of Chinese medicine and divination to cover the spectrum from “knowing hands” to “handy knowledge” that the “Knowing Hands” project sets out to examine within East Asia and compare with examples in other cultural contexts past to present. When Chinese healers, for example, used their hands to memorize concepts related to clinical practice, calculate with time variables, and carry out ritual gestures intended to reduce risk, improve fortune, and even cure, they placed their minds in their hands.



Marta Hanson earned her PhD in History and Sociology of Science from the University of Pennsylvania in 1997, focusing on epidemic discourse in China (17th–19th century), distinct from Western medicine. She taught late imperial Chinese history at UC San Diego (1997–2004) and later taught the history of medicine and public health in East Asia at Johns Hopkins University (2004–2021). Her 2011 monograph, *Speaking of Epidemics: Disease and the Geographic Imagination in Late Imperial China*, traced the history of “Warm diseases” (wenbing 溫病) from ancient China through the SARS epidemic, using the “biography of disease” method. Her current project explores the intersections of the healer’s body, divination, and the extended-mind hypothesis in Chinese medical history. She is revising her forthcoming book, *Grasping Heaven and Earth (Qian Kun zai wo 乾坤在握): The Mind in hand in Classical Chinese Medicine*, which shows how healers used their bodies to both think and treat. Beyond academia, Marta enjoys urban foraging and has contributed articles to the Baltimore Brew.



Date:
Tuesday - 27 May, 2025



Time:
6.15 - 7.45 PM

**Location: Big Seminar room,
Hartmannstr. 14, Building D1, Erlangen**

Link for virtual attendance: <https://fau.zoom-x.de/j/62556506187>



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