



**CAS-E**

Alternative Rationalities and  
Esoteric Practices from a Global Perspective

## CAS-E Newsletter 02/2025

The Center for Advanced Studies [CAS-E](#) brings together researchers from all over the world to investigate practices aimed at predicting, influencing, and orchestrating contingent life events.

### New Semester, New Fellows, New Research Projects

Dear Friends,

The summer semester has just begun and we are excited to bring to you a rich program of lectures, workshops and new research projects.

This term is particularly busy, as we are joined by the largest cohort of fellows that CAS-E has had thus far: find out about their research areas and CAS-E projects below.

In addition to our customary CAS-E Lecture Series, over the next months we present workshops by CAS-E fellows and alumni, where scholars will delve deeper into selected topics. We also have very special guests coming all the way from Taiwan in July: spirit mediums who will perform their "writing with the phoenix stylus" ritual in Erlangen and in Nürnberg. Don't miss this free and open to all event!

While the CAS-E programs are in full swing, a CAS-E core team composed by Prof. Giovanni Maltese, PD Dr. habil. Bernd-Christian Otto and Dr. Jessica Albrecht are finalizing the CAS-E extension proposal, with which we strive to secure funding for a second phase (2026–2030) of state-of-the-art research on esoteric(ized) practices across the globe.

Join us in person or virtually via Zoom and contribute to expanding the conversation on "esoteric practices and alternative rationalities".

Your CAS-E Team





## Events

The term kicked off with **Welcome Day** on April 29, where the new fellows and team get to know each other, followed by the first lecture of the **CAS-E Lecture Series**. As usual, lectures take place on **Tuesdays** at **6.15pm CET** and are free and open to the public: join us in person in the **Big Seminar Room, Building D1, Hartmannstr. 14, Erlangen**, or via [Zoom](#). Below you can also find out about our workshops and other events. To participate, please follow the relevant accompanying information.

### CAS-E Lecture Series Summer Semester 2025



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# LECTURE SERIES SUMMER SEMESTER 2025

Tuesdays 6.15–7.45 pm

Seminar room, Hartmannstr. 14, Building D1, Erlangen

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



APRIL 29, 2025	Prof. Dr. Steven Engler (CAS-E Fellow) <b>Views of Healing among Brazilian Spiritists and Medical Professionals</b>	JUNE 17, 2025	Dr. Eszter Spät (CAS-E Fellow) <b>“Divination through the “Written Word” in Yezidi Oral Tradition: ‘Bookish’ Techniques of Prognostication as Sources of Esoteric Knowledge”</b>
MAY 06, 2025	Sr. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Fredrik Gregorius (Linköping University) <b>Dreams of an Enchanted Africa: Esoteric Images of African Diaspora Religions in the 19th and 20th Centuries</b>	JUNE 24, 2025	Asst. Prof. Sergio González Varela (CAS-E Fellow) <b>Facing the Limits of the Extra- Cultural: Discovering “What You Cannot Learn” Through Pain, Body Transformation, and Performance in Afro-Brazilian Capoeira</b>
MAY 13, 2025	Assoc. Prof. M. Shobhana Xavier (CAS-E Fellow) <b>Saintly Shrines and Ruptures of Temporalities: Sufi Pasts and Futures in Post-War Sri Lanka</b>	JULY 01, 2025	Prof. Dr. Birgit Meyer (Utrecht University) <b>Translating Spirits</b>
MAY 20, 2025	Prof. Deborah Kapchan (New York University) <b>Face to Face with the Spirits: Paradox and the Anthropology of the Esoteric</b>	JULY 08, 2025	Dr. Lili DiPuppo (CAS-E Fellow) <b>“Sufi Practices and Knowledge through Surrender: Developing a New Knowledge Approach in and for Uncertain Times”</b>
MAY 27, 2025	Dr. Marta Hanson (DFG-funded CAS-E Associated Researcher) <b>“Knowing Hands: Thinking With the Mind in Hand in Chinese Medicine and Divination”</b>	JULY 15, 2025	Dr. Oleg Yarosh (DFG- funded CAS-E Associated Researcher) <b>“Spiritual Practices of Sufis in the West”</b>
JUNE 03, 2025	Prof. Stephan Palmié (CAS-E Fellow) <b>“Wittgenstein among the Santeros”</b>	JULY 22, 2025	Dr. Jessica Albrecht (FAU, CAS-E Associated Researcher) <b>“Buddhist Psychology as Esoteric Activism”</b>
JUNE 10, 2025	Assoc. Prof. Davide Torri (Sapienza University of Rome) <b>“Nepalese Ghost Stories from Sacred Texts to Social Media”</b>		



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Join us in the **Big Seminar Room**, Building D1, Hartmannstr. 14, Erlangen, or on [Zoom](#).

Find the **extended program** including abstracts [here](#).

You can watch the **recordings of past lectures** on our [CAS-E YouTube channel](#).

More on CAS-E Lecture Series

Check out the Steiner 2025 Lecture Series by CAS-E Associated Scholar [Dr. Diana Lunkwitz](#).

The lecture series, organized by the *Research on Anthroposophy Network* (RAN), is dedicated to the centennial of Rudolf Steiner's (1861–1925) death. The series begins by presenting and discussing the relevance and topicality of research into Anthroposophy and Steiner as a person. Lectures then offer introductions as well as in-depth questions and discussions on central and current topics in Anthroposophy research, such as Waldorf education initiated by Steiner, the worldmaking based on anthroposophical concepts in Demeter agriculture, Steiner and his Anthroposophy in the English-speaking world and the SEKEM initiative as a business enterprise between Islam and Anthroposophy. Invited guests will contribute their perspectives from the fields of education, social sciences, history and religious studies. A concluding discussion will thus also highlight the transdisciplinarity and multi-perspectivity in research on Anthroposophy.

Find the **extended program** [here](#).



Photocredit: Wikimedia Commons

## **Ownership and Hidden Knowledges in Indigenous South America and Beyond: Human and Non-Human Sounds, Images, and Bodies**

When: **June 12–13, 2025**

Where: **CAS-E**, Big Seminar Room in D1, Hartmannstr. 14, Erlangen

Language: **English**

For more information: [jjriveraandia@gmail.com](mailto:jjriveraandia@gmail.com)


In collaboration with: Prof. Dr. Cecilie Odegard (University of Bergen)

This workshop is dedicated to the comparative exploration of hidden knowledges and ritual practices in four dimensions of life among contemporary indigenous groups in South America (and some comparable areas beyond this region): those closely related to sounds (i.e., production of music and other sonic beings), images (i.e., iconography and chromatism), bodies (i.e., rituals and narratives linked to shamanism, healing, witchcraft, and sorcery), and subsistence practices (such as fishing, hunting, agriculture, and herding).

Find the extended program and participants [here](#).

The DFG Centre for Advanced Studies  
**Alternative Rationalities and Esoteric Practices**  
**from a Global Perspective (CAS-E)**  
invites you to

# Writing with the Phoenix Stylus





The “writing with the phoenix pen” is still very widespread in Taiwan and parts of China to this day. A religious temple community requests a message from a saint. The saint “descends into the stylus” and authorizes a medium to write characters in a container of sand, ashes or on a tabletop. These characters form the saint's message, which either serves the moral renewal of humanity or contains answers to questions from individual members of the congregation. For the first time, a “phoenix congregation” from Taiwan will perform its ritual publicly in Germany.

Introductions in German by **Prof. Philipp Clart (Leipzig)** und **Prof. Michael Lackner (FAU)**


**Entry free**

**Friday, July 4, 2025, 7:00pm**  
Herz-Jesu-Kirche, Katholischer Kirchenplatz 8, Erlangen  
and  
**Sunday, July 6, 2025, 6:00pm**  
Katharinensaal, am Katharinenkloster 6, Nuremberg


For queries: [Michael.lackner@fau.de](mailto:Michael.lackner@fau.de)      Webpage: [www.cas-e.de](http://www.cas-e.de)



INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY  
for the Critical Study of Divination



CAS-E  
Alternative Rationalities and  
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Friedrich-Alexander-Universität  
Erlangen-Nürnberg

Funded by  
**DFG** Deutsche  
Forschungsgemeinschaft  
German Research Foundation

## Daoist Internal Alchemy and Science in Contemporary Taiwan

When: **July 10–11, 2025**

Where: **CAS-E**, Big Seminar Room in D1, Hartmannstr. 14, Erlangen

For more information: [fabrizio.pregadio@fau.de](mailto:fabrizio.pregadio@fau.de)

This workshop addresses a subject barely explored in Western-language scholarship: the modernization and “scientization” of the Daoist practice of Internal Alchemy (Neidan) in contemporary Taiwan. This process actually started

in mainland China around the 1940s but went through major developments in Taiwan, where it continues to the present day.

Find the extended program and participants [here](#).



Photocredit: The egress of the Spirit (*chushen*). From *Xingming guizhi* (Principles of the Conjoined Cultivation of Nature and Existence), first published ca. 1615

More on CAS-E Workshops



## Network

With each newsletter, we present you a different set of people from our CAS-E network. This is also the space where we introduce new colleagues and feature CAS-E collaborations.

### People

This time, we focus on the fellows and associated scholars who have joined CAS-E in the summer semester 2025. Find out more about their work below.



### **Dr. Lili Di Puppo**

Lili Di Puppo's research focuses on the anthropology of religion, anthropology-theology, existential risks, sacred sites and human-nature relations. She has conducted fieldwork in Belgium, Russia's Volga-Ural region, Moscow and Georgia. She was an assistant professor of sociology at the Higher School of Economics in Moscow from 2013 to 2022 and a senior researcher at the Aleksanteri Institute, University of Helsinki, in 2023-2024.

Read more about her research [here](#).



### **Prof. Dr. Steven Engler**

Steven Engler is Professor of Religious Studies in the Department of Humanities at Mount Royal University in Calgary, Canada, and Affiliate Professor in the Department of Religions and Cultures at Concordia University in Montréal. He studies Brazilian esoteric spirit-incorporation religions (Umbanda and Kardecism), with publications on Quimbanda, popular Catholicism and Neo-Pentecostalism. He works also on theory, meta-theory, and methodology (primarily grounded theory and coding).

Read more about his research [here](#).



### **Prof. Marta Hanson**

Marta Hanson was Assistant Professor of late imperial Chinese history at the University of California, San Diego (1997-2004), Associate Professor of East Asian medical history in the History of Medicine Department, Johns Hopkins University (2004-2021), and is now a retired faculty member of The Academy at Johns Hopkins (2025-present). She publishes broadly about the history of medicine in China, early modern Sino-European medical exchanges, and public health in East Asia.

Read more about her research [here](#).



### **Dr. Diana Lunkwitz**

Diana Lunkwitz is a postdoctoral researcher in Religious Studies and Intercultural Theology at FAU Erlangen-Nürnberg. She completed her degree in theology with a specialization in the study of religions at MLU Halle-Wittenberg. In her diploma thesis, she dealt with questions of mission and marginalization in the process of shaping the unity of Christian denominations. Since 2017, she has been leading seminars on topics in the fields of ecotheology and religion and ecology, first in Halle, then as a research associate at the University of Hamburg.

Read more about her research [here](#).



### **Dr. phil. habil. Stephan Palmie'**

Steven Palmie' obtained his Dr. phil. from the University of Munich in 1989, and his Habilitation in 1999. At present he is Norman and Edna Freehling Professor of Anthropology, The University of Chicago. Among his monographs figure *Wizards and Scientists: Explorations in Afro-Cuban Modernity and Tradition* (2002), *The Cooking of History: How not to Study Afro-Cuban Religion* (2013), and *Thinking with Ngangas: What Afrocaribbean Ritual Can Tell Us about Scientific Practice – and Vice Versa* (2023).

Read more about his research [here](#).



### **Prof. Fabrizio Pregadio**

Fabrizio Pregadio has taught at different universities in Italy, Germany, the United States, and Canada. His research interests are Daoist thought and religion, alchemy, views of the human being, and self-cultivation traditions. He is the editor of the *Encyclopedia of Taoism* (2008) and the author of *Great Clarity: Daoism and Alchemy in Early Medieval China* (2006). He has just published a *Dictionary of Taoist Internal Alchemy* (2025) and is currently working on a monograph on the Taoist master Liu Yiming (1734-1821).

Read more about his research [here](#).



### **Dr. Eszter Spät**

Eszter Spät has been researching religious minorities and popular religious practices in the Middle East. Her work focuses on the oral religious tradition of the Yezidis and how its ongoing scripturalization affects the content and structure of Yezidi religion, along with traditional religio-social hierarchies and institutions. She has conducted extensive fieldwork among Yezidi communities in Northern Iraq, as well as their Christian and Muslim neighbors. Read more about her research [here](#).



### **Assist. Prof. Sergio González Varela**

Sergio González Varela is an Assistant professor at the Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology of the University of Warsaw. He holds a Ph.D. from University of London (awarded in 2009). Before joining the Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, he was Associate Professor at Universidad Autónoma de San Luis Potosí, Mexico. He has done ethnographic fieldwork in Brazil, Mexico, and the U.K. He has studied capoeira, an Afro-Brazilian ritual-martial art dance, for more than twenty years and is a leading expert in the field.

Read more about his research [here](#).



### **Assoc. Prof. Merin Shobhana Xavier**

Shobhana Xavier is a Tamil (Sri Lankan)-Canadian Religious Studies scholar at Queen's University in Canada. She thinks and writes on contemporary Sufism across global and transnational contexts. Using ethnographic research she maps shrines, pilgrimages, rituals, praxis and gender dynamics. She has written on Canadian and American Sufism and Islam, especially as they intersect with popular spirituality.

Read more about her research [here](#).



### Assoc. Prof. Oleg Yarosh

I am a Ukrainian academic with a background in Intellectual History and Philosophy. My initial interests lay in Comparative Mysticism and the Philosophy of Religion. Since the mid-2000s, my research has shifted to the study of Sufism in the West and Muslim minorities in Ukraine and Central-Eastern Europe. Over the past ten years, it has also incorporated ethnographic methods. I have examined Sufi communities in Germany and Sweden, focusing on conversions, the development of charismatic authority, and spiritual practices.

Read more about his research [here](#).

More CAS-E People



## Bulletin

In this section we update you on the latest news of CAS-E members, fellows and alumni on matters such as external lectures and publications, awards and positions, media coverage, and more.

### CAS-E in the News

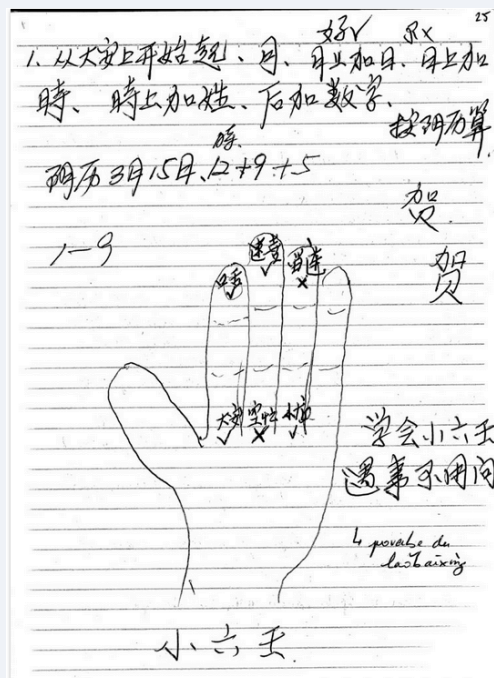
**CAS-E Alumna [Dr. Dominique Hertzner](#) was interviewed by Matthias Jakoby to introduce the *Yijing, Book of Changes*, to the [FAU Instagram](#) community**

The *Yijing*, also known as the *Book of Changes*, is a Chinese divination companion that is over 2000 years old. It is one of the most important books in Chinese culture and also deals with philosophical topics, particularly ethical issues. View it [here](#). English version [here](#).



**CAS-E Associated Scholars [Prof. Marta Hanson](#) and [Prof. Stéphanie Homola](#) spoke about their project "[Knowing Hands](#)" with FAU University**

(Article in German) Die Hand als Merkhilfe und Orakel: In China existiert seit Jahrhunderten die Tradition, die Hand zu nutzen, um sich Informationen einzuprägen, praktische Probleme zu lösen und Dinge vorherzusagen. Im Rahmen des Projekts „Knowing Hands“ untersucht die Medizinhistorikerin Prof. Dr. Marta Hanson an der Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg (FAU) nun bisher unerforschtes historisches und ethnografisches Material über diese besondere Technik. Dessen Ziel: diese Praktiken wieder in die Wissensgeschichte einzugliedern. Weiter zum Artikel [hier](#).



Photocredit: Stéphanie Homola

[More Media Appearances](#)



## Media

Through our media output, we wish to expand conversations on esoteric matters beyond CAS-E. Among our primary outlets feature the CAS-E Blog, YouTube Channel, and accounts on various social media platforms, which you can find and follow at the bottom of this newsletter.

### CAS-E Podcast

The second episode of the CAS-E podcast is out! Listen to a conversation on **"The Resilience of Magic in Modernity"** by CAS-E Permanent Fellow [Dr. Bernd-Christian Otto](#), Prof. Judith Noble (Arts University Plymouth), Prof. Marco Pasi (Center for the History of Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents, Amsterdam) and Andrea Centore (Co-founder of the Research Network for the Study of Esoteric Practices) on [here](#) (Spotify) or [here](#) (YouTube Music).



Dr. Bernd-Christian Otto, Prof. Judith Noble, Prof. Marco Pasi, Andrea Centore.

CAS-E Podcast

### CAS-E Blog

Our blog features short writings by the scholars who presented their work at the CAS-E lecture series. In their blog entries, scholars reflect on their research and address broader societal, political, cultural or religious questions in an essay format, making it attractive for academic and non-academic audiences alike.



### Reflections upon "Dreamcraft in the Malay Art World"

By Douglas Farrer  
Read the blog [here](#).



### Blurry Labels and Fluid Faiths: Managing Multireligiosity in Havana

By Joanna Katharina Kiefer  
Read the blog [here](#).

CAS-E Blog

## CAS-E YouTube Channel

On the CAS-E YouTube channel you can re-watch the talks from our lecture series and catch up on the ones you missed. You will also find brief interviews where our fellows, alumni and team members introduce their respective research areas and interests. Don't forget to [subscribe](#) to the channel to keep up to date with the latest lectures! Have a look at some of the lectures below:



### Mystical Regimes of Order: Ritualistic Practices and Conflict Resolution in Everyday Uttarakhand

Kalindi Kokal  
Watch it [here](#).



## Sufi Saints and their Contestation in the Modern Islamic Revival

Tommaso Previato  
Watch it [here](#).



## Podcasting and Popular Media as Research Advocacy in Magic and Esoteric Studies

Heather Freeman  
Watch it [here](#).



## Translating Western (?) Esotericism (?) The People's Republic of China

Davide Marino  
Watch it [here](#).



## Art, Dreams, and Witchcraft in the Malay World

Douglas Farrer  
Watch it [here](#).

CAS-E YouTube

## Where We Stand Thus Far

As we are in the midst of writing our extension proposal, we have taken stock of where we have reached thus far. Below, you can see CAS-E in numbers over its first two years of existence.

# CAS-E YEAR IN REVIEW 2022/23



## Research Team

- 3** Directors
- 3** Postdoctoral Research Coordinators
- 4** Permanent Fellows
- 10** Research Fellows
- 1** PhD Student

## CAS-E Publications

- 20** Blog Articles
- 4** Monographs by CAS-E Team/Fellows
- 4** Edited Volumes/Translated Works
- 1** Guest Edited Journal
- 22** Journal Articles and Reviews
- 17** Chapters in Books, Encyclopedias and Edited Volumes

## CAS-E Activities

- 16** Research Projects
- 24** Public Lectures
- 2** Distinguished Lectures
- 25** Colloquia
- 6** Workshops:
  - 3** Tandem Paper Writing WS
  - 1** 3-Day Writing WS
  - 1** Welcome Day WS
  - 1** "Dialogues" WS
- 8** Open Circle Seminars

## CAS-E Outreach

- 6** Keynotes and Distinguished Lectures
- 3** Organized Conferences
- 4** Conference Panels
- 83** Lectures and Conference Presentations
- 43** Video Contributions with **6000+** Views of which **13** Video Lectures

## Management and Technical Team

- 1** Managing Director
- 1** Secretary
- 1** IT Technician
- 5** Student Assistants

Team and Fellows from **14+** Countries

Research Projects in **13+** Countries

**1** Annual International Conference with:

**13** Conference Talks, **1** Roundtable, **120** Participants from **18** Countries

**9** Advisory Board Members

**7** International Cooperation Partners



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# CAS-E YEAR IN REVIEW 2023/24



## Research Team

- 3** Directors
- 3** Postdoctoral Research Coordinators
- 4** Permanent Fellows
- 9** Research Fellows
- 1** PhD Student
- 1** Humboldt Research Awardee Guest Researcher

## CAS-E Publications

- 22** Blog Articles
- 2** Monographs by CAS-E Team/Fellows
- 2** Special Issues Guest Edited by CAS-E Team/Fellows
- 16** Journal Articles and Reviews
- 11** Chapters in Books, Encyclopedias and Edited Volumes

## CAS-E Activities

- 19** Research Projects
- 30** Public Lectures
- 19** Colloquia
- 8** Workshops:
  - 2** Welcome WS
  - 1** 4-Day International WS in Rome
  - 1** 3-Day Writing WS
  - 3** IGPP WS
  - 1** Theory WS
- 5** Open Circle Seminars
- 5** Esoteric Film Screenings

## CAS-E Outreach

- 1** Keynote Lecture
- 3** Organized Conferences
- 4** Conference Panels
- 57** Lectures and Conference Presentations
- 38** Video Contributions with **5000+** Views of which **24** Video Lectures
- CAS-E Podcast Launch with first **2** Episodes

## Management and Technical Team

- 1** Managing Director
- 1** Secretary
- 1** IT Technician
- 5** Student Assistants
- 1** Internship Student

Team and Fellows from **15+** Countries

Research Projects in **17+** Countries

**1** Annual International Conference with **17** Conference Talks

In Preparation: **6** CAS-E Edited Volumes + **4** CAS-E Special Issues

**9** Advisory Board Members

**11** International Cooperation Partners



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DFG Kollegforschungsgruppe „Alternative Rationalities and Esoteric Practices from a Global Perspective“  
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