

**Seminar SAW:
History of Science, History of text**

Abstract

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Understanding is Within One's Grasp (liaoran zai wo 瞭然在握): Hand Mnemonics and Chinese Arts of Memory

What knowledge in Ming China was considered important enough for ordinary people to memorize, how did they memorize it, and where was such memorized knowledge valorised, performed, and used? The Chinese phenomenon of hand mnemonics" (*zhangjue* 掌訣) works as a heuristic device to enter both the mind of the people who likely used them and the social world in which the knowledge summarized on the hand was valued enough to memorize. Medical prognosis and fate prediction were two of the most important arenas of knowledge in which memorization was not only highly valued but also pragmatic in daily life. After the fifteenth-century publishing boon, these bodily arts of memory bridged esoteric and vernacular domains of knowledge, particularly in the realms of astrological prediction and medical prognostication. Hand mnemonics in Ming almanacs and medical texts illustrate not only comparable techniques to memorize medical and mantic numerology but also important connections between medicine and astrology in late imperial China.

In this talk, I will first present an overview of hand mnemonics in Chinese culture, then in medicine and astrology, and finally, focus on examples of arts of memory – enumeration, versification, visualization, and corporealization – and connections between medical & astrological-numerological practices in the early 17th-century physician Zhang Jiebin's classic

medical text, the *Classified Canon with Illustrations & Commentary* (*Leijing tuyi* 類經圖翼1624).