

Philosophy By Hand

2025-2026 LECTURE SERIES

THE AGENCY OF MANUSCRIPTS IN SHAPING HUMAN THOUGHT

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Philosophising by Hand?

Manuscripts and Print in Song Neo-Confucianism (11th–12th Centuries)

Traditional Chinese philosophy is not genetically related to Greek traditions. Therefore, it has to be clarified first what can be considered philosophy in the Chinese context. Second, unlike circum-Mediterranean traditions, the early spread of printing led to an almost complete loss of (paper!) manuscripts before the eleventh century. As a rule, we do not have manuscripts of the ‘works’ appearing in the schoolbooks for the period under investigation. The only noteworthy exception consists of some calligraphic pieces, but these are extremely rare for the first centuries of the ‘print age’, requiring a particularly cautious reflection. Following these preliminary reflections, the sources for writing and philosophising of the Neo-Confucian philosophers will be presented and discussed, paying special attention to the goal of their intellectual activity and the status of writing and written objects in their thought.

Professor Michael Friedrich earned his Ph.D. in 1984 and his habilitation in Sinology in 1990 at Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München. From 1994 to 2021, he held the Chair of Chinese Language and Culture at the University of Hamburg. His academic interests focus on Chinese intellectual history, including early Chinese Buddhist thought, Chinese and comparative manuscript studies, and the European reception of Chinese culture.



Venue: Institute for Jewish Studies

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