

ISA INTERNATIONAL GUEST LECTURE  
VIENNA DIALOGUES IN MEDICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

**Ethnographies of trans-regional pharma-craft and  
science in contemporary China: One family as a  
case of encounters between providers of crude  
*materia medica*, and refiners of distinct formulae**

Lena Springer

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Institute for Social Anthropology (ISA)  
Seminar room 1, 1030 Vienna, Apostelgasse 23

Medicinals in China are on the one hand just crude substances that may be turned into scientific pharmaceuticals, into traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), or into “minority” medicines. The latter tend to be classified according to the “minority nationalities” (*shaoshu minzu*) of 1950s Maoist China. Labels of products, however, increasingly contradict those ethnic classifications. Lena Springer’s ethnographic fieldwork shows that refined formulae and delicate techniques of processing constitute material cultural domains where various artisans, scholars and scientists negotiate: Where do these medicinal substances belong and whom do they identify? As a methodology, the case of one family provides unofficial histories of such Chinese *materia medica*. The various family members deal with their own and with broader Asian regional historiographies, they have found ways to engage with translocal disciplinary and scientific realms, and Springer investigates how occupational encounters play out in their relations and envisioned developments.



**Lena Springer** is Research Fellow at *EASTmedicine*, University of Westminster in London where she works on the Wellcome Trust-funded project „Beyond Tradition: Ways of Knowing and Styles of Practice in East Asian Medicines, 1000 to the present”: Based on fieldwork at sites in China where providers and prescribers of medicines with conflicting histories coexist, she is writing a monograph about Chinese medicinal substances. Lena has taught courses in Sinology at the University of Vienna (2006-2013) and was visiting researcher at the China Academy of Chinese Medical Sciences during 2008. In Vienna she investigated how highly-skilled Chinese medicine practitioners and their colleagues, clients and family undergo (or are excluded from) processes of establishing their positions in society. Her forthcoming first book reconstructs narrated careers of senior Chinese medicine practitioners in the PRC.