

In Memoriam Anna K. Seidel (1938–1991)

The editorial board of *Asia Major* dedicates this issue of the journal to the memory of Anna Katherina Seidel, who passed away suddenly on September 29, 1991. As the articles gathered here attest, her contributions to the study of Chinese religions rejuvenated the field. Over the past twenty-five years her work has succeeded not only in setting new standards but in establishing the research agenda for a large sector of Sinological scholarship. Because a proper *nécrologie* and bibliography are being published elsewhere,¹ we offer here only a selective summary of some of her major contributions.

Anna Seidel's early focus on the Later Han dynasty has proven crucial in redirecting the field of Chinese religious studies. *La divinisation de Lao tseu dans le taoïsme des Han*,² published in 1969, offered the most convincing validation of the research program advanced first by Henri Maspero and later by Seidel's own teachers, Maxime Kaltenmark and Rolf A. Stein, who placed the beginnings of the Taoist religion in the beliefs and practices of the Later Han dynasty. Seidel's early work examines the deification of Lao-tzu in Taoist mythology and delineates the messianic strains in early-Taoist thought. She documents the variety of Lao-tzu's transformations – as personified supreme principle, counselor to emperors, supreme deity of the Celestial Masters, hero of popular movements – and discusses his centrality to different forms of Taoism. She also identifies a theme that scholarship now takes for granted as a defining feature of Chinese thought during the late Han and Six Dynasties, that of messianism, the belief that current social ills and political chaos will come to an end in an era of peace ushered in by a supernatural figure. Like all of her research, it is based on reading in a broad array of materials (including standard historical sources, texts from the Taoist canon, epigraphical evidence, and manuscripts discovered at Tun-huang), a critical attitude toward all of her sources, the mastery of secondary studies, and the unerring ability to stake out a clear argument within a dense and complicated web of evidence. In "Imperial Treasures

¹ See *BEFEO* 80.1 (1993); *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 6 (1991–92); 8 (1995); and 9 (1996).

² *La divinisation de Lao tseu dans le taoïsme des Han*, Publications de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient 71 (Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1969).

and Taoist Sacraments"³ she addresses the tangled issue of the relationship between the Chinese state and Taoism as an organized religion, arguing that as both mythology and social institution, Taoism was formed on the model of the Han cosmocratic empire. In this view, the perennial relevance of Taoism to the political realm is explained by Taoism's origin as a nostalgic attempt to replicate the idealized order of Han times. The state turned to Taoism not simply because it offered a religious justification for a political regime. Rather, emperors were initiated into the ranks of the Taoist hierarchy, and the government accepted Taoist oracles also because the Taoist church enabled the Chinese state to perform its primordial function, that of ordering the universe. Anna Seidel's command of the full range of scholarship on Taoism is reflected in "Chronicle of Taoist Studies,"⁴ which is not just a bibliography but a definitive statement of the issues confronting a field that Seidel herself did much to create and transform.

Never content to lodge in a particular time and place, Seidel made serious scholarly forays outside of early medieval Taoism. In "Traces of Han Religion"⁵ she puts to rest the accepted wisdom that the bureaucratization of the pantheon was primarily a Taoist phenomenon. The organization of the other world into graded ranks, interaction with gods via formal, written requests, and a comprehensive system of surveillance by supernatural agents were all, she demonstrates, components of the religion practiced by a broad range of people in the Former Han. The later manifestation of those same traits in Taoism and Buddhism marks the influence of traditional Chinese religion on the two organized churches. Embarking in another direction, Seidel wrote important essays (many to be published posthumously) in the fields of Buddho-Taoism, the institutional history of Chinese Buddhism, and Japanese religions.⁶

³ "Imperial Treasures and Taoist Sacraments: Taoist Roots in the Apocrypha," in vol. 2 of Michel Strickmann, ed., *Tantric and Taoist Studies in Honour of R. A. Stein* (Brussels: Institut Belge des Hautes Études Chinoises, 1983), published as *Mélanges chinois et bouddhiques* 21 (1983), pp. 291-371.

⁴ "Chronicle of Taoist Studies in the West 1950-1990," *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 5 (1989-1990), pp. 223-347.

⁵ "Traces of Han Religion in Funerary Texts Found in Tombs," in Akizuki Kan'ei 秋月 観映, ed., *Dōkyō to shūkyō bunka 道教と宗教文化* (Tokyo: Hirakawa shuppansha, 1987), pp. 21-57.

⁶ On the field now aptly described as "Buddho-Taoism," see, e. g., Anna Seidel, "Le sūtra merveilleux du Ling-pao Suprême, traitant de Lao-tseu qui convertit les barbares (le manuscrit TH S. 2081): Contribution à l'étude du Bouddho-taoïsme des Six Dynasties," in vol. 3 of Michel Soymié, ed., *Contributions aux études de Fouen-houang*, Publications de l'École

Anna Seidel's influence on the academic world is undoubtedly related to her personality and the particulars of her life. For over twenty years she was a member of the Kyoto branch of the École Française d'Extrême-Orient, a position that afforded her the opportunity to turn the study of Chinese religions into the global enterprise it has become today. Seidel came early to international education. Born in Berlin and raised in Bavaria, she completed her secondary education in the United States. After attending college in Munich and Hamburg, she undertook doctoral study in Paris at the École Pratique des Hautes Études. There, Kaltenmark and Stein oversaw her studies in the cinquième section, Sciences Religieuses. In 1969 she was appointed to a research position in the École Française d'Extrême-Orient and posted to its small branch in Kyoto. In that capacity she launched not only a prodigious career of research – and a publication record envied by all of her colleagues, researchers and teachers alike – but also an enterprise of international cooperation and support. It is no longer possible to count the number of scholars who first met each other, or who were first introduced to the topic that would constitute their primary research, at the informal seminars she organized in Kyoto. Amidst all of that she collaborated in the editing of the French encyclopedia of Sino-Japanese Buddhism, *Hōbōgirin*, and succeeded in accelerating its publication. In 1984 she launched the bilingual journal *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie*, now the premier scholarly journal devoted to East Asian religions. She held brief appointments as a visiting professor at the University of Hawaii and the University of California at Santa Barbara; she delivered the Evans-Wentz Lectures at Stanford University; and in 1992 she was scheduled to deliver the Stewart Lectures at Princeton University.

The scholarly world has slowly begun to register the loss that Anna Seidel's passing represents and to reflect on her contributions. Books and articles have been dedicated to her memory, and a memorial issue of *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* is planned. This issue of *Asia Major* is one small part of the international effort to address her legacy. We gather here the work of English-speaking scholars in the field of Chinese religion; some are her

française d'Extrême-Orient 135 (Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1984), pp. 305-52. On Buddhist institutional history, see her "Chōsamboshin 朝參暮請 (règles monastiques du bouddhisme chinois)," in Paul Demiéville, Jacques May et al., eds., *Hōbōgirin: Dictionnaire encyclopédique du bouddhisme d'après les sources chinoises et japonaises* (Tokyo: Maison Franco-Japonaise, 1929-) 5, pp. 407B-20B. On Japanese religion, see her "Kokuhō 國寶: Note à propos du terme 'trésor national' en Chine et au Japon," *BEFEO* 69 (1981), pp. 229-61.

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teachers, some her students, and some only know her writings, but we have all have been touched by her grace, wit, and intelligence.

Stephen F. Teiser, for the Editorial Board