Buddhist Monasticism in East Asia

Places of practice

Edited by James A. Benn, Lori Meeks, and James Robson

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4 The monastery cat in cross-cultural perspective

Cat poems of the Zen masters

T.H. Barrett

If we are to integrate the study of Buddhism into higher education in the English language, not as an exotic extra but as a field of study on a par with any other area of humanistic inquiry, then there is much to be said for allowing due prominence to the study of Buddhist monasticism. For monastic institutions within Buddhism, just as within Christianity, have more than played their part in the preservation of learning. Were anyone interested to do so, it would be quite possible in this regard to compare, for example, the medieval monastery in Britain with Zen monasteries in Japan at the same time, though a full study would inevitably be somewhat lengthy.[1] Western academics, at any rate, whilst generally not evincing much enthusiasm for the celibate life, still tend to feel some form of atavistic respect for monastic communities, at least if they are familiar with universities of the older sort, where, as Gibbon for example noted with his derogatory remark about the "monks of Oxford," muffled echoes of the medieval past still reverberate through court and quadrangle.

I am not too familiar with the seat of learning criticized by Gibbon, but the University of Cambridge, which I know better, is still close enough to its own past to demonstrate features that allow us some insight into what it must have been like to live in a closed community devoted to the spiritual and scholarly life. Thus a remarkable pictorial volume, evidently designed for the tourist trade, *Cambridge Cats,* turns out to be almost entirely devoted to cats associated with specific colleges, where as often as not they seem to make the entire college, rather than the premises of one individual, their homes. The text also reveals that this is a tradition going back by some centuries at least, for it is asserted that the current Pembroke cat, Thomasina, is named after the Pembroke poet Thomas Gray (1716–1771), who allegedly celebrated a predecessor in his *Ode on a Favourite Cat, Drowned in a Tub of Goldfish;* it further asserts that Sir Thomas Adams, an early professor of Arabic, dedicated a translation of Aristotle to the same cat, though since Sir Thomas became professor in 1632, I suspect that there has been some confusion here with William Adams, a Master of Pembroke, whose dates are 1706–1789.[2]

Trivial this publication may seem, but at least it should serve as a reminder that the communal life upon which monasticism is based often benefits not only monks and nuns but certain animals too: in rougher times, no doubt, guard dogs, and, even today, cats prepared to earn their keep by protecting communal food supplies from the attention of rodents. Or is their function purely economic? Today, of course,

college cats would seem to be little different from the pets to be found in many other Cambridge homes, but one may still imagine from farming communities around the world that a much looser relationship between man and animal might originally have obtained, with semi-feral cats living in a form of symbiosis with the community that involved keeping their distance to a far greater extent than their descendants have usually chosen to do, surviving mainly off the rodents attracted by communal stores and being granted in return a certain degree of toleration.[3] In medieval Western Europe, as recent historical research has tended to suggest, Christian suspicions concerning witchcraft and the cat probably discouraged many from pursuing any closer contact.[4]

And what of the Japanese medieval monastic cat? So far, it seems, no one has seen fit to ask, or even to assemble for the tourist trade of today a *Monastery Cats of Kyoto*, or the like. Yet if we collect the surviving materials, particularly from poetry, a picture emerges that illuminates to some extent not simply the status of the Zen monastery cat but also various broader aspects of the cultural situation of the monastery in medieval times. It is with this purpose in mind that the following remarks have been put together. But, before homing in on this topic, we must start by taking a broader view, for the Zen master's cat, at least as a cultural and literary construction, certainly has a history, whatever we may say of Zen.

In order to trace that history, moreover, we must look, as with Zen itself, to the continent of Asia before turning to developments in Japan itself. It is clear from references in Heian period (794–1185) literature that cats actually established themselves in Japan before Zen was able to gain acceptance, which only happened in the Kamakura period (1185–1333). A considerable portion of the *Tale of Genji*, for example, hinges on the consequences of a kitten's actions, and here not for the first time in Japanese literature we find humans sharing their thoughts with cats in speech, suggesting that the aristocracy of the country at least took a more than purely economic view of the cat's role in their company, though perhaps we cannot generalize from the life of the aristocracy to assume that cats were widely kept as pets throughout the land.[5] The *Tale of Genji,* moreover, makes particular reference to "Chinese cats," suggesting that in matters feline the Central Kingdom was seen as leading the way just as much as it did at this point in matters of Buddhist belief.[6] In order to establish the history of the monastic cat, then, we must look to China and even to India before we are able to understand how things stood in the medieval Zen monastery.

In fact, despite what has been said about cats and monasteries, there would seem to be no particular doctrinal reason in Buddhism for cats to have any special status. Those Buddhist sources which may be taken as reflecting the common perception of cats in India through their adaptation of folk tales to religious purposes would seem simply to reflect, as do similar tales in Europe, the perception of the cat as sly and hypocritical.[7] Minakata Kumagusu 南方熊楠 (1867–1941), who was inspired by the Dick Whittington story to publish a wide-ranging essay on cat lore, located in two Buddhist texts translated during the early phases of Chinese Buddhism the belief that greedy people will become reincarnated as cats, something that carries over into later texts written in China.[8] He does, however, point to a passage in the

Vinaya of the Mūlasarvāstivādins suggesting that cats are lazy monks reincarnated, which suggests a slightly more relaxed view.[9] In China itself it is hard to find any early mentions of the cat at all, and it would seem that it was only with the advent of Buddhism that the animal started to be noticed, even if there is no direct evidence that it only arrived in China through trade with India.

It is not possible to be entirely sure, either, when cats started to be accepted as domestic pets in China. A dictionary of the sixth century defines the cat in beguiling terms: "Like a tiger but smaller; people raise them and cause them to catch rats," but even this leaves some room for doubt.[10] By the early eighth century, however, it is clear that experiments had been carried out in turning both kittens and puppies into vegetarians, suggesting perhaps an upbringing in Buddhist monasteries, for we read in a medical work of the period cited by H.T. Huang that "feeding [polished] paddy or glutinous rice to young cats and dogs will so bend their legs that they will not be able to walk."[11] Madeleine Spring has studied some interesting late Tang discussions of the advisability or otherwise of feline domestication.[12] Perhaps the best evidence that cats eventually became not just economic adjuncts to humans but fully accepted as harmless pets, suitable as family companions, is a poem on children's play by Lu Deyan 路德延, a *jinshi* 進士 graduate of 898, which mentions a cat being tugged along on a string, evidently by a child, though this may be later in date than some of the Heian evidence already mentioned.[13] By the ninth century, in any case, cats had clearly joined dogs as the domestic animals kept in the greatest numbers amongst the populace: a somewhat unpleasant street person of Chang'an 長安 at this time, who is said to have survived by eating domestic cats and dogs, is credited with having accounted for a sum total of four hundred and sixty animals, though we are not told by our horrified Buddhist source, a miracle story of divine retribution, in what proportions the two species made up that number.[14]

It is equally obvious by the end of the ninth century that cats and dogs were accounted the most everyday of sights in Zen (or rather, Chan) monasteries as well, for Xuansha Shibei 玄沙師備 (835–908) mentions them in this role in one of his dialogues, along with "the green mountain in front of your face."[15] The cat had already, of course, made its appearance in the Zen tradition some time before this. The *Lidai fabao ji* 曆代法寶記, a work of the late 770s, which describes Vinaya masters of the day as being as intent on the pursuit of fame and profit as a cat stalking its prey, introduces to the tradition a metaphor later used to describe the concentration needed in Zen to gain enlightenment.[16] But as the one mention of a cat that was to have the greatest impact within the longer term within the Zen tradition as it spreads from China to Japan one cannot ignore the alarming case of Puyuan 普願 of Nanquan 南泉 (748–835) and his encounter with a cat over which two groups of monks were disputing their claims to ownership. The *locus classicus* for this incident in the form in which it is most familiar to Western students of Zen is probably the 1228 collection known as the *Wumenguan* 無門關, or "Gateless Barrier," which was translated several times in the mid-twentieth century.[17] This begins: "Monk Nanquan, since the East and West Halls were disputing over a cat, picked it up and asked the monks to say something to save its life, or it would be chopped in half. There was no reply, so he chopped it in half." His best student, Zhaozhou

Congshen 趙州從諗 (778–897), arrived later and on being told what had happened, put his sandals on his head and walked out, which actions, Puyuan declared, would have saved the cat.

Famous though this story may be, the earliest source bearing on it suggests that at the very least it has been refined over time, though this text, a compilation of 952, does at least attest to a strong interest in cats on the part of Puyuan, who is said to have described cats and oxen as "knowing reality," and to have been saved from a tiger which his rescuer treated as a cat.[18] This Zen master's apparent interest in animal life as a whole has been the topic of careful study by Okimoto Katsumi 沖本克己, who is particularly suspicious of the textual foundations of the story just quoted. He notes, for example, that there are stories about chopping earthworms and snakes in half—still not good deeds by normal Buddhist standards, but more understandable—which may have provided the original inspiration for the cat story.[19] Whatever the truth of the matter, the story could not have gained currency if cats had not been commonly kept in Buddhist monasteries, not simply for economic reasons (though it has been suggested that a single cat can save up to 250 tonnes of grain from contamination per annum) but as objects of affection on the part of their human fellow-residents.[20]

For the purposes of documenting the status of cats in medieval Japanese Zen monasteries, however, it is perhaps fortunate that the tradition had another *locus classicus* mentioning the cat to look back to, and to serve as a model for cultural emulation. This is a cat poem, or rather in essence a poverty poem mentioning a cat, that is part of the poetic corpus going under the name Hanshan 寒山, "Cold Mountain." The problems associated with the origins of this corpus are many, and I do not wish to discuss them in detail here, especially since my views are contained in an essay included in a volume of lively translations from Hanshan by the late Peter Hobson.[21] Suffice it to say that I accept E.G. Pulleyblank's conclusion based on his study of rhyme schemes that the corpus must derive from at least two separate hands working in different historical periods and I also accept that Hanshan (to follow, notwithstanding this awkward fact, a convenient designation for the corpus) was not himself a "Zen poet." But he did certainly come to be represented as a Zen poet by the late eighth century, when the corpus seems to have achieved its current state, and his influence on later Zen poets was immense. At the very least, Hanshan's cat poem did legitimate the writing of further poems about cats.

And if, as its rhyme scheme suggests, it derives from an early part of the corpus, which may go back to the seventh century, it may even be the first cat poem in China, though there is another longer seventh-century work by a court poet about a cat and a parrot that should otherwise claim that honour.[22] It is certainly not as old as a trio of cat poems (or rather, dead bird poems) in the *Greek Anthology,* which go back to the sixth century.[23] It may, however, be the first cat poem by a religious figure, unless Hanshan is later than the unknown eighth-century Irish monk who wrote the well-known verse on his cat, Pangur Ban, in the margin of a manuscript, not long before an interlinear drawing of a cat and a rat was inserted in the *Book of Kells*.[24] All translations offered here aim neither at achieving any literary standard

nor at providing an accurate prose equivalent, but simply at giving enough sense of an original poem to allow discussion of the relevant content; otherwise, my chief aim has been to keep to something of their concision.

昔時可可貧，In the past, tolerable poverty;
今朝最貧凍。Today, I'm utterly poor and cold.
作事不諧和，Everything I do goes wrong,
觸途成倥傯。Everywhere I go there's trouble,
行泥屢腳屈，Breaking my legs in the mud,
坐社頻腹痛。Starving at the village feast.
失卻斑貓兒，And since I lost that brindled cat
老鼠圍飯甕。The rats besiege my food supplies.[25]

Again, though there is much that could be said about the spread of Hanshan's influence to Japan, for present purposes it is worth noting that Hanshan and his companion Shide 拾得 are very frequently mentioned in medieval Japanese Zen literature, and that the poems of Hanshan were popular enough to be reprinted by monks of the Gozan 五山 monasteries, the "Five Mountains" of the Rinzai 臨濟 school that dominated that literature. Indeed, this reprint of 1325 from what was evidently a Chinese edition of the Song period is allegedly the oldest reprinting of a Chinese poetry collection in the country.[26] We should not discount, either, the indirect influence of Hanshan mediated via later Chinese Zen poets, and perhaps Koreans as well, since Korean Zen, too, shows evidence of cat poetry.[27] David Pollack also reminds us that Chinese secular poetry of the Song period "seems to abound in eulogies to cats," and this too may well have influenced Gozan poets who were in direct contact with China or Chinese travellers.[28] In the rival Sōtō 曹洞 tradition, however, it may perhaps turn out that cats were less important, though I have not tried to confirm this supposition. The Japanese founder of the school, Dōgen 道元 (1200–1253), was at any rate firmly told by his Chinese teacher, Rujing 如浄 (1163–1228), that "Abbots and others at many temples nowadays keep cats, but this is truly not permissible, the conduct of the unenlightened."[29]

If, however, we look at the two major collections of Gozan literature that have been compiled to date, we do find about a dozen poems about cats—depending on whether you count warnings to rats about cats, and poems by Chinese monks exiled to Japan. This is not a very high total out of a complete corpus of a dozen volumes, each running to more than a thousand pages, and it may well be eclipsed by the aggregate of Gozan poetry about smaller creatures, though no single invertebrate seems to dominate their concerns. Doubtless, too, it is no more than the modern Western interest in pets that has caused about half of these poems to appear in English translation already.[30] This is in fact all the more impressive a total when we take into account the argument that Japanese literature in Chinese has been unduly neglected by Japanologists.[31] But while the cat poetry of the Zen masters does not exactly provide us with a wealth of material to study, it does raise some intriguing questions, of which the most obvious and well-known—a question that, moreover, I venture to take up only because it does not require a detailed knowledge of

medieval Japan in order to address it—is that of the relationship between the Gozan poets and Chinese culture.

As enthusiasts for the introduction of Chinese culture to their own land the monks of the Gozan exceeded even Korean Confucians and Western Maoists in the depth of their devotion to China, since frequently theirs was a passion not even quenched by the reality of having to study there for years at a stretch. But we should remember that Japan at this time was represented on Buddhist world-maps then in circulation as being on the very periphery of Buddhist civilization, if not right off the map altogether, so that studying China, and particularly studying in China, quite literally represented getting oneself on the map.[32] To some of our monk poets stories of the heroic pilgrims who had made the dangerous further journey to India from China or Korea half a millennium and more earlier served as a standing reproach to their own inadequacies: "What sort of men are we, so warm and well-fed?" asks Mugan Soō 夢巖祖應 (?—1374), on reading of their spirit of self-sacrifice.[33] For Japanese culture as a whole, despite the stirrings of independence from the continent that have been detected in some religious developments of the Kamakura age, had already been long accustomed to accepting the continent, especially China, as a yardstick against which to measure itself.[34] The material culture of the Gozan monasteries seems therefore to have incorporated a wealth of art objects exported from China to Japan.[35] A recent study of the calligraphy of Zhongfeng Mingben 中峰明本 (1262–1323) shows this particularly well through its almost total dependence on writings in the autograph of this master preserved in Japan to this day, in several cases because they were first sent there by Mingben in response to requests from Japanese monks or laymen.[36]

Another Chinese monkish calligrapher of a somewhat earlier generation whose work was also transmitted to Japan by Japanese students was Xutang Zhiyu 虛堂智遇 (1185–1269).[37] As I point out in my essay, he was also an admirer of Hanshan, though I notice too that I accidentally imply there (Barrett 2003: 133) that Zhiyu ended his days in Japan, which he did not. But, most significantly for present purposes, he was also a cat poet.

求貓子	Asking for a cat
堂上新生虎面狸,	In the hall there's a newborn tiger-faced thing—
千金許我不應移。	I'd give anything to have it, but they won't budge.
家寒故是無偷鼠,	Yet I'm so poor no thieving rats come near:
要見翻身上樹時。	I just want to watch it rolling over, climbing trees.

Unlike Hanshan's poem, where the old tabby cat obviously had a certain utilitarian role, even if we suspect that the hermit also misses its company, Zhiyu's quatrain constitutes quite explicitly a rejection of the economic argument for cats.[38] But though we have suggested that cats were not especially privileged in the Buddhist tradition, it has been pointed out that Indian Buddhist monasteries clearly extended their compassion, especially at meal times, to animal companions—the Buddha himself, after all, had spent time as an animal in a number of reincarnations, and though animals were all placed in the spiritual hierarchy below humans, their

capacity for improvement over karmic time was recognized, even if Zen masters of the sterner sort found them a distraction.[39] So a non-economic approach to cats would not have seemed amiss. And not surprisingly, in view of Zhiyu's standing in Japan, this poem seems to have been in the thoughts of several Japanese Zen masters when they came to write about cats.

Most obvious is the case of Seiin Shunshō 西胤俊承 (1358–1422), whose own poem "Asking for Kittens" has been translated by David Pollack—in fact, since his translation "kittens" derives from the content of the poem, the titles are identical.[40] But it is also possible to find verbal echoes from the body of the Zhiyu poem elsewhere. Here is a piece by Ryūsen Ryōzei 龍泉令澤, son of an emperor, who died in 1365.[41]

> The cat has had its praise from age to age,
> Its style not always second to the tyger's.[42]
> Rolling over, climbing trees, its faculties at full stretch –
> And, when all is said and done, still my rogue!

And compare also this, by Kampō Shidon 乾峰士曇 (1285–1361), evidently about a successful rat catcher at rest, though since it is in the "Paintings" section of his works, it may not be taken from life, so adding a degree of piquancy to the last line:

> To preserve life, you kill all,
> And, all killed, have great compassion.[43]
> On the roof under the hill you lie –
> I just want to see you rolling over.[44]

Shidon was evidently an avid reader of Zhiyu's writings, for this poem is one of a pair, the second of which reads:

> Tiger-faced little rogue:
> Knows reality, doesn't care.
> The rat's gone down the cow's horn –
> We'll have to await the outcome.

Here the third line is a direct quotation of a saying of Zhiyu concerning the state of one who has been trapped in everyday reality, unable to reach enlightenment.[45] But, as is readily apparent, the second line also contains an allusion to Puyuan's estimation of cats and oxen. Just how much of an education in the Zen tradition and in Chinese literature in general was expected in their readership by Gozan authors is, however, most aptly illustrated by another poem by Ryūsen Ryōzei, which discusses the important question for Zen masters as to whether they could justify keeping cats when it was in their nature to commit murder on smaller animals. By a stylish use of ellipsis, however, no victim is named in the quatrain, nor is the specifically carnivorous nature of the cat explicitly mentioned at all. It is up to the reader to recall a phrase from the ancient philosopher Zhuangzi, aptly

recycled in a verse by Hanshan, to the effect that the famous steed Blossom Red (Hualiu 驊騮) was less well suited to catching mice than a lame cat—though in view of what has been said concerning the murky beginnings of the domestic cat in China, it is worth noting that the original animal indicated by Zhuangzi in the comparison may have been what the Japanese call a *tanuki* 狸.[46] The message, however, is clear enough: we must all fulfil our destinies and do what comes best to us, and catching little animals is what a cat excels at.[47]

> Cat
> Head straight, eyes ahead, every faculty engaged—
> But were Blossom Red to lose its speed, it would look a dolt.
> Master and monks' iron bowls are not the best of vessels.
> I don't know who it is provides the meal.[48]

In other words, these apparently trivial observations of monastic life were not completely spontaneous portraits, documentary snapshots of scenes in monastery gardens, but were written very much within a self-conscious literary tradition. Though I have not explored any further than the particular objects of my own investigation, this fondness for silent allusions may well be there throughout Gozan poetry as a whole, to an extent that earlier translators were perhaps not always able to detect, lacking the dictionaries and concordances that we now have for Zen studies. It turns out, for example, according to the three-volume dictionary of Zen compiled by Komazawa University, that a mention in a poem by Gidō Shūshin 義堂周信 (1325–1388), on a painting of a kitten lying by its mother, to its "blood-oath spirit" actually reflects yet another reference to an allusion first used by Zhiyu, pairing the apparent moral behaviour of cats with that ascribed to tigers, though one I have not managed to locate.[49] Since Shūshin in a second, paired cat poem suggests using the picture of the cat to keep mice at bay, we may even start to doubt that our Zen masters met any real cats at all.

> All night long a crowd of rats, swarming like bees;
> They've gnawed the precious books by my bedside.
> I frivolously hang up my new painting on the wall,
> And all is quiet –no need to chase them out.[50]

Some evidence against this completely gloomy conclusion may, however, be found in a verse by Banri Shūkyū 萬里集九 (1428–1502).[51]

> He mostly sheathes his claws, no need to scratch,
> Under the peonies, asleep, averse to fights.
> But soon it's dark beneath the springtime breeze:
> You rats are many, but you won't survive.

Now it must be admitted right away that a painting of cats and peonies did inspire another of his poems, though evidently a painting with a slightly different content.

So that the peony should have no disordered flowers
The mother cat does not sleep, all through the afternoon.
You butterflies so lightly clad – in whose dream are you?
It's fine to fly together, but don't touch those teeth! [52]

And there even survives in Taiwan a medieval Chinese painting of a cat and peonies of a type that may possibly have inspired the poem just quoted.[53] But whatever the immediate occasion for writing the first poem, it can only have been written by someone familiar with a real domestic cat, since sheathed claws are a detail unlikely to be picked up either from paintings or from brief encounters with semi-feral cats on the monastery outskirts. We can, I believe, feel reassured that it was not just cats brought from China by elderly Chinese masters exiled to Japan that really did end up as full-time residents in Japanese monasteries.[54] Equally, however, we must accept that cats were viewed in those monasteries very much in the light of Chinese ideas about their significance. And here there is one major anomaly by comparison with the Japanese situation that needs to be addressed, one that will already have become clear through the materials I have cited so far.

For right from the start any occurrence of a cat in Chinese or Gozan sources tends as often as not to be accompanied, as in the passage attributed to Zhiyu that I have just mentioned, by some sort of cross-reference to a tiger: "like a tiger but smaller"; treating a tiger as a cat; "tiger-faced thing," "its style not always second to the tyger's"; tiger-faced little rogue" are the instances I have already mentioned. One of the many Chinese poems written in reaction to Puyuan's cat chopping is even apparently gratuitously invaded by the comparison, and speaks of that master "seizing the head of the tiger, while Zhaozhou Congshen got the tail."[55] In a sense there is nothing unusual in this, since until relatively recently in historical terms tigers were much more common than was comfortable in China, and doubtless many Chinese had an opportunity to observe the comparison. For obvious reasons connected to the history of imperialism, the English-speaking world tends to think of the tiger primarily as an Indian animal, ignoring its widespread distribution throughout China, but it is quite clear that the tiger held on for quite awhile against the encroachments of civilization that have now made it a rarity. As late as the seventeenth century, for example, we find the intrepid traveller Xu Xiake 徐霞客 (1586–1641) troubled by rumours of tigers on the road ahead only ten miles from present-day Ningbo, hardly one of the wilder parts of China.[56] Tiger attacks actually increase in the next couple of centuries, though this has been interpreted as marking man's elimination of their natural habitat, and so a prelude to their extinction.[57] In the early 1930s the great sportsman Arthur de C. Sowerby (1885–1954), while noting the more restricted range of the beast in his own day, was presented for example with photographic evidence of the survival of tigers in southwest Shansi, and accepted an account of their presence between Nanjing and Shanghai, though most Westerners in search of a good tiger shoot found the Amoy region their most rewarding territory.[58] Even in 1936 the New Territories of Hong Kong witnessed a tiger panic.[59]

So it is not surprising that the tiger should feature in religious contexts dating back much further than the first appearance of the cat. Tiger cults as such do not concern us, for they are generally associated not with "higher" forms of religion but with regional or "barbarian" forms of worship.[60] But it is worth noting that in pre-Buddhist China tigers were also known as attendants of the immortal Pengzu 彭祖.[61] To this day the great Daoist figure Zhang Daoling 張道陵 is depicted with a tiger.[62] In this tradition, however, at least in the late sixth century, the tame tiger is compared not to a cat, but to a dog.[63] Eventually Chinese Buddhist figures, too, were given tiger companions: Charles E. Hammond, in his study of the weretiger, a particular Chinese concern, remarks with reference to early Buddhist hagiographical writing that "If the biographies of Buddhist monks are to be believed, many monks raised tigers as a matter of course."[64] His research brings out a certain ambivalence in the relationship, perhaps due to the underlying notion that shamans could transform into tigers, though he does also point to the orthodox Buddhist belief that monks should use the dharma to subdue or even convert tigers. This belief came to be symbolized eventually in the mysterious arhat-figure, unknown in Indian tradition, termed the "tiger-tamer," Fuhu 伏虎. In discussing this figure, Victor Mair has pointed to ninth- and tenth-century manuscripts depicting holy travellers accompanied by tigers found at Dunhuang.[65] Though Fuhu does not seem to have been particularly popular in medieval Japan, he is certainly mentioned in Gozan poetry.[66]

But at about the same time, though apparently independently, the Zen tradition also acquired a tiger-keeper, the monk Fenggan 豐干. This individual is first attested in the preface to the poems of Hanshan, which to judge from references to it must also have been written by the tenth century, if not before. Fenggan is supposed to have been a monkish friend of Hanshan who worked in some monastery kitchens; one day he is alleged to have amazed his fellow-monks by riding a tiger into his place of work.[67] Amongst the monks of the Gozan he is a figure almost as well known as Hanshan, and like him seems to have been the subject of both poetry and painting. A particular innovation in the latter medium, first attested by a poem in praise of a painting by Dōgen's teacher Rujing, was a type of composition featuring Hanshan, Shide, Fenggan and the tiger all snoozing together in a heap. Gozan artists in turn produced their own versions of this scene, so that we now possess both Chinese and Japanese variations on the theme.[68]

Now the tiger, it would seem, plays something of the same role in religious thought in East Asia that the lion plays in Europe. You may know, for example, that there is a Chinese, tiger-related version of the story of Androcles and the lion, though one which has a somewhat ironic twist to it. We find it related by the famous Tang period poet and statesman Liu Yuxi 劉禹錫 (772–842), who was asked to provide a job for a relative of someone to whom he was himself somewhat indebted for his own position.

> There was once [said Liu] an old lady who encountered a tiger which lifted up its foot, and she saw that it had a thorn in it, which she plucked out. The tiger ran off gratefully, and from time to time repaid her by tossing her fresh

> game. One day, it tossed her a dead man, and her fellow-villagers detained her as a murderess. The old lady then climbed the wall and said to the tiger "I'm certainly grateful, but please, sir, no more dead men!"[69]

In Christian circles the parallel story, which would seem to date back to a real incident during the reign of Caligula, first assumed a religious dimension in the apocryphal *Acts of Paul and Thecla,* where its presence in the text is first alluded to in the third century.[70] Here Saint Paul meets up in the circus with a lion whom he has already baptized rather than saved from lameness—and the Christian lion knows better than to reward him with dead men, though a lion rewarding its benefactor with its prey is mentioned by Pliny.[71] It is not gratitude that motivates the lion in Christian thought, but its recognition of the superiority of holy men, to whose aid they or other animals frequently come in early Christian literature. In Jerome's biography of Paul, for instance, lions help to dig a grave to bury the saint.[72] Symbolically, moreover, the submissive lion has been interpreted as representing the control of sexuality.[73] How much of this has any relevance for the tiger as companion I cannot say, though as I have observed elsewhere the notion of the animal helper, whatever its significance, is quite prominent in Asian religion.[74] Even so, research on the meaning of the cat in ancient Egypt does present an interesting picture of the cat taking the place of the lion in religion in much the same way as the cat takes the place of the tiger in East Asia: we find for example the case of goddesses with both awesome lion and more friendly cat manifestations.[75] Might it not be therefore that the cat functions in the Zen monastery as a miniature tiger substitute, or rather "hand-reared tiger," to use what seems to have been the Japanese expression?[76] For as surely as there are no snakes in Ireland, there are no tigers in Japan and in all matters tiger-related, medieval Japanese, at least, were completely and unequivocally obliged to depend on China. Given, too, Japanese feelings about their peripheral position, there are some grounds for believing that, rather than congratulate themselves on this absence, Japanese monks somewhat regretted their lack of opportunity to live life on the heroic scale.[77]

We have, however, already noted the presence of tiger paintings in Japan, and one of the Gozan poets, Ōsen Keisan 横川景三 (1429–1493), does actually react to a picture on a fan of two tigers amongst some bamboo by imagining them as his companions.[78] Indeed, Japanese pictures of tigers among bamboos survive, at least from a slightly later period, but they can only have been painted on the basis of Chinese originals.[79] Even in the late eighteenth century, when live tigers were occasionally imported from China into Japan, most artists either had to copy Chinese work or rely on their imagination, with the result that one painter, Nagasawa Rosetsu 長澤蘆雪 (1754–1799), who created a famous tiger image in 1787, "seems to have converted into huge size and power the playful ferocity of a domestic kitten," to quote a modern verdict on his work.[80] As it happens, one of our monastic Gozan cat poems is precisely about this entire problem, a short verse written by the great historian and scholar of things Chinese, Kokan Shiren 虎関師錬 (1278–1345), as part of a series on animals, including tigers and mice.[81]

The cat
Making friends with the wild fox, the cat is a true rogue,
Seeing the breeze stir the grass, it's off into the undergrowth.
Though it bears a certain likeness, it's not the real thing:
When I can't paint a tiger, my mistake is that my model's too remote.[82]

The last line of the poem was evidently written for readers with a fair degree of sinological education, for the more common Chinese proverb is "When you can't paint a tiger right, it may end up looking like a dog."[83] But does this lack of tigers explain the attention paid to cats by medieval Japanese Zen masters? Did they wish to walk with tigers, but in their absence found solace in the company of cats, whom they could imagine as very much bigger than they were? It is surely preferable to believe that this explains the situation, than to suspect that these men had a secret hankering for domesticity, in preference to walking on the wild side. For we should not imagine for a moment that the world they lived in consisted solely of cats sleeping quietly under well-cultivated peonies, even if this was perhaps a more common sight in the civilized urban gardens of the Song. Kampō Shidon, for instance, wrote not only cat poems but also a funerary lament for a former guard dog, which says that "Over the many years he was kept as 'dragon guarding the household'/ Not the hint of a bandit ever troubled the gate."[84] In an age marked by constant warfare and disruption other monasteries were doubtless not so lucky.[85] That is not to deny, of course, that the Zen tradition showed a strong interest in the ordinary and everyday, and cats were, with dogs, as we have seen, the quintessential everyday animals.[86] But surely it is precisely the simultaneous presence of cosy domesticity with the spontaneity of a wild animal, the tiger's untroubled killer instinct dressed up in a pet's clothing, which made cats unusually intriguing to Zen masters, with their studied appreciation of immediacy. If the law of the jungle operated in human society, too, in Ashikaga Japan, then the lessons to be learned from cats were that much more valuable.

All this, of course, can only be speculation, since as I have attempted to demonstrate, the handful of poems I have submitted in evidence are not themselves unpremeditated reactions to cats, but complex poetic statements that can doubtless be read in a number of different ways, and perhaps especially so by those familiar with the Zen way of life. Though we have been criss-crossing cultural boundaries quite a bit already, mainly from China to Japan but also with the odd excursion to ancient and medieval Europe and North Africa, it may now be time to look at the broader picture of animals and monastery dwellers in a completely cross-cultural perspective. Of course any such perspective cannot prove anything, either: things that may be so in one culture just are not so in others, and that is precisely why trying to understand separate cultural patterns like man–animal relations on their own account is so important. But modern Western research on the significance of pet ownership does bring out some interesting possibilities that may be relevant to medieval Japan.

Thus while some have sought to interpret pet ownership solely in terms of the human need for dominance, a considerable body of research suggests that

there are much broader physical and psychological health advantages to keeping pets.[87] Could there have been a call for such therapeutic presences in the cloisters of medieval Japan? We know that monastic pets were kept in medieval Britain, for William of Wykeham (1324–1404) was obliged to warn the nuns of Romsey Abbey that they were thereby bringing their immortal souls into peril, a spiritual disincentive to what was evidently a widespread practice even more cogent than that offered somewhat earlier by Rujing to Dōgen.[88] At first it may seem strange that the cloistered life should apparently warrant such stress-reducing measures. But if we think back to the way in which I introduced monastic communities of East and West, as centres for the spread of learning, then it is possible to point to a problem common to all such institutions. For just as British and other West European monasteries were islands of Latinity in a no doubt somewhat threatening sea of vernacular culture, so the Gozan monasteries were islands of contemporary Chinese learning in the equally stormy waters of medieval Japanese life.[89] It has, of course, always been important to monasteries both of East and West to maintain good relations with their benefactors, and with all capable of extending their protection and patronage to such vulnerable communities, whoever they were.[90] But like all institutions of higher education, even today, they no doubt experienced a degree of cultural tension with their immediate surroundings, and not just with the would-be bandits, but also (to adopt again a piece of Oxbridge terminology), with the whole Town beyond the identifying uniform of the Gown. Indeed, according to David Pollack, this tension surfaces quite clearly in some of the lines by Mugan Soō on meetings with the peasant tenants of his monastery.[91]

So if today academics often find that their work goes more smoothly thanks to the presence of some four-legged friend, be it a loyal dog or a congenial cat—or even some other form of animal life, such as a mute, finny presence swimming with dependable regularity in its own miniature watery world—perhaps, as I suggested at the outset in the case of the Cambridge college cats in particular, this is a widespread tradition passed on down from the days of monastic learning in East and West. And if we are to establish the study of Eastern traditions of religious learning within the Western academy, as I also proposed at the outset, then I hope that the notion that the great masters who resided in medieval Zen communities faced some of the same human problems as we do, and found like us some of the best solutions to involve calling on the companionship of another species, will bring them all just that little bit closer culturally than might at first sight seem to be the case.

Or is this all that our sources can tell us? Before a final recapitulation and conclusion, let us return to the place where we began, for a story told to me of Cambridge college life. There lived in the recent past in a certain college a brilliant scholar devoted to the criticism of texts who kept a cat as a companion in his rooms. Unfortunately, his college was one that was riven with dissension, and even more unfortunately the fact that keeping pet cats in college was a practice not allowed by college statutes became the pretext for complaints from a rival faction. The master of the college supported him, but was voted down by the majority of the fellows. The master then resigned, and cat and don decamped to another

college where regulations were less severe. All hostilities then appeared to have died down, and the new master therefore concluded that the entire episode had been a bit silly, and invited the exiles back. This proved a sad miscalculation, for exactly the same thing happened again, and yet another master was voted out. Exhausted, however, by their quarrels, both sides now agreed to look for a compromise candidate, and duly elected a scholar of such unworldly and obscure interests that he was deemed incapable of generating further strife. And so it was: my informant, a former school friend who acted as student representative under this new regime, told me with some bemusement of the—shall we say—Daoist approach to governance that then prevailed. On his retirement, however, the compromise master was enabled through his unexpected elevation to public eminence to found a research institution in his field that stands to this day. And in his study in this building during his long years of retirement there hung a prominent photograph of one of his chief academic collaborators, holding in his arms a very handsome cat.

Now the cat in the picture had no special meaning, except as a clue to another story. In the same way the cats in Zen poetry allow us to reconstruct only the most slender of feline histories, but they do serve as suggestions to us of some important stories that we might otherwise overlook. Thus several essays in this volume, and several other earlier volumes besides, remind us of the complex history of the Buddhist monastery as an institution in society. A patient and insightful reading of the sources is beginning to allow us to recover dimensions of Buddhist institutional life in India in a way that has been neglected for too long.[92] For China, at least for the time and place covered by the Dunhuang manuscripts, a rather vivid picture of the monastery in local society has been pieced together on the basis of a longer tradition of research.[93] But as we are just beginning to achieve something in these areas, research elsewhere is moving on to consider not simply socio-economic history, but environmental history besides, in a way that as yet the history of religion in Asia has so far ignored almost completely. Even so the cat does serve to remind us that Buddhist monasteries formed part of a larger ecological history—a history, for instance, of land reclamation or forest preservation. [94] As part of a network of communications, too, Buddhist monasteries served not only as habitations for humans, but for other life forms whose effects could be very important for human society. A pioneer of this approach in the West has pointed out for example that the spread of cats in Europe seems to connect with the spread of black rats, the prime bearers of plague infection—perhaps this correlation may help explain the association between cats and witchcraft noted above.[95] In the case of East Asia, we simply do not know yet if this correlation applied or not, but the notion of using cats as an indicator of the spread of rats may be worth exploring.

If, however, the story of the cat as part of the total ecology of the monastery remains unwritten, when it comes to human culture we are on much more familiar ground. The Buddhist saṃgha was without a doubt first founded to serve a soteriological function, as James Robson's introductory analysis makes clear from the outset, but in this role one of its most basic functions was to transmit the dharma, originally through collective memorization and recitation—another important area of recent research.[96] Over the centuries, however, the monastic community

developed a prominent role in the preservation and dissemination of Buddhist culture in a much broader sense. In the course of Buddhist history this culture could be carried far from its point of origin in time and space, just as tales of the people of Israel still preserved a meaning in Irish monasteries a long way from Palestine in the West. Thus any community of monastics in medieval Japan preserved—sometimes in a complex mixture of textual and oral forms—a wealth of stories going back through continental East Asia to South Asia a millennium or more earlier.[97] The Gozan monks, as we have seen, are particularly associated with a further wave of cultural importation. But whether new or old, the culture of the monastery served—in whatever local society it was located—to open up cultural horizons, and to give access to a world far wider than any local culture could ever do. This aspect of Buddhism is evidenced quite graphically in Japan by the circulation of the world maps already mentioned, depicting the Five Indias at a time when no Japanese ever travelled thither—and when, lacking experience of tigers, Zen masters found cats more than "good to think with" as representatives of that wider world.[98] Domestic our Zen poets may sometimes appear to be, but they are never parochial.

And, finally, when we look at the Zen cat neither as an element in an ecological nor a symbolic system but simply as a human companion, we are brought up against yet another phenomenon that James Robson likewise stresses in his introductory remarks: that the single term "monastery" covers a very wide diversity of institutions. If we were to consult normative texts on monastic life in East Asia, we might conclude that cats were entirely absent, for as we have seen the sacred texts determining the parameters of that life left no room for them, and one might add that great interpreters of the regulations from Daoxuan (596–667) on to Rujing consistently reaffirm that point.[99] Yet just as some Cambridge colleges seem to have been more flexible than others in the matter of admitting cats as companions, so our poems testify to a flexibility on the part of some but not necessarily all monasteries that we might otherwise have overlooked. A cross-cultural perspective on the Zen master's cat may not be central to the study of Buddhist monasticism**,** but it does give us an angle on the world of the Buddhist monastery that affords some views not otherwise easily obtainable—and no doubt more than the three views chosen here to conclude these tentative remarks. The monastery cat certainly deserves its place in the historical record, just as much as the college cat, and concerning both there still surely remain many other tales that are worth the telling, even if here and now we come to an ending.

Notes

1 For a summary of British monasteries as centres of scholarship, see Burton 1994: 187–209. For an institutional overview of the main centres of Zen scholarship, see Collcutt 1981, and for contemporary institutional ideals in the distinct Sōtō tradition, Ichimura 1993. One significant difference in Japan is the presence of printing in the Zen monasteries, for which see Kornicki 1998: 119–125.
2 Jedrej 1994: 72.
3 Note the remarks on "barn cats" versus "village cats" in Engels 1999: 11–12.

4 For a recent summary of research on the fate of the cat in medieval Western Christianity, see Engels 1999: 152–162.
5 See Seidensticker 1981: 582–583, 589–590, 614, 626: I am grateful to Tom Harper for pointing this out to me. Imamura 1986: 254–260, provides some additional references in Heian sources.
6 "Chinese cats [*karaneko* 唐貓 in the original] are different"—Seidensticker 1981*:* 589.
7 Grey 2000: 45, 106–107, provides the main references, which in some versions substitute other animals for the cat.
8 Minakata 1971. His references are to texts now in the Taishō Canon edition vol. 17, specifically to passages on pp. 447c and 521a. These are earlier translations than those discussed in Barrett 1998: 22–23.
9 Minakata 1971: 103; *Genben shuoyiqie youbu pinaiye* 根本說一切有部毘奈耶 (*Mūlasarvāstivādavinaya vibhaṅga*), T. 23.880a–b.
10 Barrett 1998: 19, and 36 n. 74.
11 Huang 2000: 581.
12 Spring 1993: 53–63.
13 Imamura 1986: 134.
14 *Youyang zazu,* 202, translated in Reed 2001: 115–116.
15 See App 1997: 346, reproducing the text of p.364b16–17 of the *Zoku Zōkyō* edition of the collection *Gu Zunsu yulu* 古尊宿語錄.
16 See App 1996: 310, reproducing the text of this work found at T. 51.194b24-26. For this metaphor in later texts, see Barrett 1998: 21.
17 See App 1994: 118, reproducing the text of *Wumenguan* 無門關 T. 48.294c12–22. For early translations of this source into English and German, see Miura and Sasaki 1966: 343–344.
18 Barrett 1998: 15.
19 Okimoto 1997: 394–421.
20 The estimate is that of Engels 1999: 17.
21 See Barrett 2003: 115–147.
22 See Imamura 1986: 124–125, for a discussion of this work.
23 See Engels 1999: 148–50.
24 For Pangur Ban, see Engels 1999: 138; I am indebted to Professor Jan N. Bremmer of the University of Groningen for sending me a card illustrating the detail concerned from folio 48r of the *Book of Kells*.
25 *Quan Tang shi* 806, p. 9083.
26 This according to Ōtani daigaku toshokan 1961: 74–75.
27 Okimoto 1997: 413–14, quotes one example from a compilation by Hyesim 慧諶 (1178–1234), which I have not had to hand.
28 Pollack 1985: 156.
29 Cf. Kodera 1980: 121, 231.
30 See principally Pollack 1985: 136–137, and also Ury 1992: 73, for a further example.
31 Note Wixted 1998: 23–31, a very useful survey of the state of the field.
32 Ayusawa 1953: 123–127.
33 The text cited may be found in *Gozan Bungaku Zenshū* [*GBZS*] vol. 3, p. 817, below. Cf. Pollack 1985: 157–158 for biographical details on this poet.
34 This theme is well treated in Pollack 1986, of which the first five chapters are very relevant to the poems considered here.
35 Note Collcutt 1981: 79–80.
36 Lauer 2002.
37 Lauer 2002: 30, Miura and Sasaki 1966: 206–207, 361–362.
38 Text in *Xutang heshangu yulu* 虛堂和尚語錄 7, T. 47.1035a. For the significance of Zhiyu's poetry in China and Japan, see Parker 1999: 29, which refers to some of the secondary literature on the subject in Japanese.

39 This participation of animals in the Indian monastic community has been particularly noted by John S. Strong in his research into the animal phase of the career of another Buddhist figure: see Strong 1992: 51.
40 Pollack 1985: 137, and biographical section, 162–163: for the original text, see *GBZS,* vol. 1, p. 810.
41 Biography in Pollack 1985: 162, text in *GBZS*, vol. 2, p. 579.
42 The author uses a somewhat recondite synonym for "tiger": cf. *Wenxuan*, p. 5.9a.
43 Perhaps a hint of the folk view of the cat as hypocrite, which still survives in Chinese proverbs: see e.g. *Xiehouyu cidian*, 234.
44 Text in *Gozan bungaku shinshū* [*GBSS*], p. 645.
45 *Xutang heshang yulu* 4, T. 47.1017a15.
46 Barrett 1998: 16–17, 25–26. "Blossom Red" is the translation of this equine name in Graham 1960: 63; compare, however, Graham 1981: 147.
47 For this hidden allusion, see Henricks 1990: 13, 88.
48 Text in *GBZS* vol. 1, 612.
49 Ury 1992: 73, and *Zengaku daijiten* 1978: 1000d.
50 *GBZS*, vol. 2, p. 473. We should perhaps note that for all his frivolity the poet, to judge by his other writings, was well aware of issues concerned with reality and illusion: see Parker 1999, chapter 5.
51 Biography in Pollack 1985: 145–146; text in *GZSS*, vol. 6, p. 711.
52 For this second poem, see *GZSS*, vol. 6, p. 771: note the allusion to a famous saying of Zhuangzi 莊子 in the third line, one that, as far as I am aware, was not used by Hanshan.
53 Cahill 1980: 231.
54 For a Chinese Zen master's cat exiled to Japan, see the two poems translated by Pollack 1985: 136.
55 See Jingfu, comp., *Zongmen niangu zongji* 9, p.308c, in edition of *Zoku Zōkyō* 2A-20: I have been unable to identify the author, one Wu Shengyu; the compilation dates to 1664.
56 Strassberg 1994: 320.
57 Marks 1998 shows how information on tiger attacks can be put to good historical use.
58 Sowerby 1933.
59 Alec-Tweedie 1936: 193.
60 Note the Han example given in Sterckx 2002: 62.
61 Sterckx 2002: 152.
62 Sowerby 1933: 94.
63 See the biography of the Taoist priestess Xiao Lianzhen, translated in Bumbacher 2000: 295.
64 See Hammond 1992–1993: 245. These phenomena had earlier attracted the attention of Minakata Kumagusu (1994) see pp. 22–23, 71–72.
65 Mair 1986: 29–42.
66 See *GBSS*, vol. 5, 879.
67 See Wu 1957: 413, 415.
68 Brinker 1987: 76–82.
69 This tale comes from the *Liushi jiahua*, a collection of jottings about Liu Yuxi 劉禹錫 (722–842) that I do not have to hand. Note, however, the approving comment on the story by the iconoclastic Li Zhi 李贄 (1527–1602) in his excerpts on "Friends and Teachers": *Chutan ji* 17, p. 282.
70 See Adamik 1996: 71.
71 Adamik 1996: 68.
72 Adamik 1996: 73.
73 Adamik 1996: 65, 67.
74 Barrett 1998: 2–3.
75 See te Velde 1982: 128, 135–137. My thanks once again to Jan Bremmer for providing me with a copy of this article.

76 Minakata 1994: 9.
77 Thus even much later, in the seventeenth century, Kumazawa Banzan 熊沢蕃山 (1619–1691) is obliged to defend Japan's failure to follow China in using oxen in sacrifice by arguing that Japan was just "a small country": see McMullen 1999: 207.
78 Text in *GBSS* vol. 1, p. 245.
79 See Watson 1981: 14–15, dating to 1631.
80 Watson 1981: 57–58. Apparently at least one classical Western artist seems to have got into trouble by using a cat as the model for a depiction of a leopard: see Engels 1999: 175.
81 Kokan Shiren 虎関師錬 (1278–1346) and China is the topic of the fourth chapter of Pollack 1986. For his work as a historian, see Bielefeldt 1997: 295–317.
82 *GBZS,* vol. 1, p. 154.
83 See Wen 1989: 363–364.
84 *GBSS*, Supplement 1, p. 630. Cf. *GBZS* vol. 1, p. 640 for another lament, though I have not searched systematically for these.
85 Cf. Collcutt 1981: 165, which gives some revealing excerpts from monastic regulations.
86 For a discussion of this aspect of the tradition, see Prince 2002: 49–73.
87 Serpell 1996, chapter 6, and note also the arguments against Yi-fu Tuan, p. 52.
88 Serpell 1996: 159.
89 Parker 1999 provides a compelling though of course far from comprehensive picture in English of just how "Chinese" the culture of the Gozan monks became; for one aspect of sinology that he does not cover, see Ng 2000: 6–10.
90 On the British situation, see Burton 1994, chapter 10; on the Gozan, see Collcutt 1981: 57–78, 84–89, 98–102. It has recently been suggested, however, that in China cultural tensions between contemporary Chan monasteries and the imperial bureaucracy were less than one might imagine: see DeBlasi 1998.
91 Pollack 1985: 158.
92 I have in mind Schopen 2004a.
93 A revealing contribution to this field is Trombert 1995.
94 Note on the latter score Elvin 2004: 78–80, for one example.
95 The correlation is remarked in passing by McCormick 2003: 21; my own gloss on this is just a guess.
96 For a statement on oral tradition that has formed the starting point for much recent research, see Norman 1997: 41–57.
97 Insight into this legacy may be found for example in works such as Mills 1970, where stories going back to India and China turn up in what is largely a collection of Japanese stories.
98 Besides the article by Ayusawa mentioned above, the Buddhist influence on conceptions of the world in East Asia is also explored concise in Harley and Woodward 1994: 173–175, 371–376.
99 Daoxuan, *Liangdu qingzhong yi* 量度輕重儀, 2, T. 45.845b26. Keeping cats was in fact a problem for lay Buddhists as well as the clergy, so Buddhist ethics and the cat could easily form the topic of another study: see Martine Batchelor 2004: 76 (where "breeds" signifies "raises"); Shih Heng-ching 1994: 82.