
SINO-PLATONIC PAPERS

Number 231

October, 2012

Encounter with a Tiger Traveling West

by
Heleanor Feltham

Victor H. Mair, Editor
Sino-Platonic Papers
Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations
University of Pennsylvania
Philadelphia, PA 19104-6305 USA
vmair@sas.upenn.edu
www.sino-platonic.org

SINO-PLATONIC PAPERS

FOUNDED 1986

Editor-in-Chief
VICTOR H. MAIR

Associate Editors
PAULA ROBERTS MARK SWOFFORD

ISSN
2157-9679 (print) 2157-9687 (online)

SINO-PLATONIC PAPERS is an occasional series dedicated to making available to specialists and the interested public the results of research that, because of its unconventional or controversial nature, might otherwise go unpublished. The editor-in-chief actively encourages younger, not yet well established, scholars and independent authors to submit manuscripts for consideration. Contributions in any of the major scholarly languages of the world, including romanized modern standard Mandarin (MSM) and Japanese, are acceptable. In special circumstances, papers written in one of the Sinitic topolects (*fangyan*) may be considered for publication.

Although the chief focus of *Sino-Platonic Papers* is on the intercultural relations of China with other peoples, challenging and creative studies on a wide variety of philological subjects will be entertained. This series is **not** the place for safe, sober, and stodgy presentations. *Sino-Platonic Papers* prefers lively work that, while taking reasonable risks to advance the field, capitalizes on brilliant new insights into the development of civilization.

Submissions are regularly sent out to be refereed, and extensive editorial suggestions for revision may be offered.

Sino-Platonic Papers emphasizes substance over form. We do, however, strongly recommend that prospective authors consult our style guidelines at www.sino-platonic.org/stylesheet.doc. Manuscripts should be submitted as electronic files, preferably in Microsoft Word format. You may wish to use our sample document template, available here: www.sino-platonic.org/spp.dot.

Beginning with issue no. 171, *Sino-Platonic Papers* has been published electronically on the Web at www.sino-platonic.org. Issues 1–170, however, will continue to be sold as paper copies until our stock runs out, after which they too will be made available on the Web.

Please note: When the editor goes on an expedition or research trip, all operations (including filling orders) may temporarily cease for up to three months at a time. In such circumstances, those who wish to purchase various issues of *SPP* are requested to wait patiently until he returns. If issues are urgently needed while the editor is away, they may be requested through Interlibrary Loan. You should also check our Web site at www.sino-platonic.org, as back issues are regularly rereleased for free as PDF editions.

Sino-Platonic Papers is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 2.5 License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.5/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, 543 Howard Street, 5th Floor, San Francisco, California, 94105, USA.

Encounter with a Tiger Traveling West
by Heleanor Feltham
University of New South Wales



Figure 1. Pilgrim monk, Five Dynasties/Northern Song dynasty (907–960, 960–1127). Ink and colors on silk. Dunhuang Cave 17. Pelliot Collection, Musée Guimet. (Whitfield 2000, 24)

Introduction



Figure 2. Paul Pelliot in the Mogao Caves. Photo by Charles Nouette. Musée Guimet photographic archive.

Just over a century ago, in 1909, the French linguist, explorer and possible spy, Paul Pelliot (1878–1945), arrived in Beijing with a small sample of texts from Dunhuang, having already sent the bulk of his “purchases” from the famous Cave 17 at Mogao back to Paris with his associate, the photographer Charles Nouette.

While traveling through Urumchi on his way to document the cave paintings of Mogao,

Pelliot heard of the discovery of a cache of manuscripts. In Urumchi he met with Duke Lan, former Beijing Deputy Chief of Police, who had been exiled to Central Asia for his involvement in the Boxer Uprising. Pelliot, who had been sent to Beijing from Hanoi, had himself been trapped in the French Legation, earning the *Legion d'honneur* for his exploits (Hopkirk 1980, 181). The two former enemies found themselves happily in accord, and Lan presented Pelliot with a manuscript from Dunhuang that Pelliot recognized as pre-eighth century, confirming rumors that circulated about it, and firing a determination to explore the document cache himself. He reached the caves of Mogao early in 1908 (figure 2), mere months after Sir Marc Aurel Stein. However, where Stein, an otherwise accomplished oriental archaeologist and linguist, did not know Chinese, Pelliot, a professor of Chinese at the *École française d'Extrême Orient* in Hanoi from the age of twenty-two, was capable of reading and assessing the higglety-pigglety bundles of manuscripts and making a more measured selection. But, handicapped by having a mere three weeks to make a selection, and forced to unroll the scrolls at a rate, he claimed, of some thousand a day, it is hardly surprising that he returned to Paris to find, in addition to acclaim, considerable vilification and accusations of forgery from vitriolic rivals.

Among the manuscripts that found their way to the Bibliothèque Nationale and the Musée Guimet in Paris were two painted on silk dating from the ninth–tenth centuries (Five Dynasties, Northern Song). Very similar in style and composition, both show a wandering monk with a large pack of scrolls on his back, walking through an arid Central Asian landscape, accompanied by a tiger (Figures 1, 10); the monk is frequently identified, more by desire than logic, as the Chinese Buddhist monk Xuanzang (602–664). A similar, though much less sophisticated image (figure 3), in ink and pigment on paper, also from the Library Cave (Cave 17), had been acquired a few months earlier by Marc Aurel Stein (Whitfield 2004, 128), and it is now in the British Museum. Several other examples also exist, including the famous Kamakura (1185–1333) version now in the Tokyo National Museum, and three or four similar to the Stein image, also from Dunhuang, including one in the Korean National Museum and one in the Tenri Library of Nara Prefecture (Mair 1986, 29 ff.).

The pictures



Figure 3. An itinerant storyteller. Late ninth century. Stein, second expedition: Dunhuang Cave 17. Ink and pigments on paper. The British Museum. (Whitfield 2004, 128)

Images of monks and tigers have a long history in Asian art and culture, and they continue to be produced by Chinese artists. One version, from c.1990 Xi'an, shows a monk playing with his tiger much as one plays with a kitten; another recent work continues the tradition established by the tenth-century Chan Buddhist artist, Shih Ke (figure 9), showing the Tang dynasty monk and poet Fengken, who arrived at his monastery riding a tiger, as an old man snoozing, resting on an equally old tiger as if on a bolster (Bussagli 1969, 62). They can be divided into representations of pilgrim/missionary monks (figures 1 and 10), images celebrating harmony with nature and mastery of primal emotions (figure 9) and transformative storytellers (figure 3). All three forms are interrelated, and all appear well established by the tenth century.

The Musée Guimet describes the second of its pictures (figure 10) as follows:

This painting depicts a stereotyped image widespread throughout China, the Far East and Tibet: that of a missionary monk with pronounced features — the way the Chinese imagined foreigners — weighed down by Buddhist texts. From his load rise mystical clouds within which appears the image of a meditating Buddha. In these icons, a vigilant tiger that leads the way always accompanies the monk. The subject is a pretext for a description of monastic attributes. In this painting we can see the rosary that the monk is counting, his knotty staff and his missionary effects: medicine box, small knives fastened to his belt, fly-whisk, phial, a banner hooked to a pole on the back of his basket, and a little censer dangling at face level. The wayfarer is travelling through an arid, rocky landscape reminiscent of tracks in the Serindian desert. In the background, a bird perched on a rock adds a poetic note. Although the enigmatic figure epitomizes a type rather than referring to any specific individual, the picture nevertheless possesses the distinctiveness of a religious work based on the "portrait" of a monk. (Musée Guimet website 2010)

The "missionary monk" portrait differs from the "pilgrim monk" (figure 1) in several respects. First, it is far more obviously a portrait of a non-Han monk. (The "pilgrim monk" is possibly Chinese, though his features are relatively pronounced.) Second, perhaps more significantly, he does not have a *mandorla*, the Buddhist halo that is more often an attribute of

bodhisatvas and arhats (highly enlightened teachers). This would suggest that the "pilgrim monk" may be a portrait of one of the eighteen Chinese Luohans (arhats), who are conventionally shown with bushy eyebrows, large eyes and mouth and high noses — generally looking more Central Asian than Indian — or even of Xuanzhang, who comes very close himself to being revered as an arhat. Xuanzhang, who traveled with a considerable retinue, including an elephant, and horseloads of scrolls and gifts, as in the Tang dynasty mural in Dunhuang Cave 103 (Whitfield 2000, 25) is, however, not likely to be shown as a lone pilgrim on foot with a pack on his back.

The "missionary monk" also differs in showing a seated Buddha issuing from a cloud, possibly of incense, which appears to rise from his pilgrim staff. The cruder illustrations (figure 3) also include this Buddha. Victor Mair (1986, 31) has suggested that the "constant attribute of a small transformation Buddha seated on a cloud above them which issues from a censer makes sense as a symbol of their creative powers of illusion." He identifies it as a dhyani-Buddha of inspiration; following various inscriptions, specifically Ratnaketu or Ratnasambhava. This name occurs in the inscription on Figure 1, which has the incense cloud, though no protective Buddha, further strengthening an interpretation of the "pilgrim monk" as an arhat, particularly as he is also the only one of the group to be shown wearing a "rice-field" *kasaya* (patchwork outer monk's garment) a feature of other arhat paintings such as the contemporaneous Bezeklik frescos.

The "missionary monk" has a massive pack, hung with various Buddhist emblems and containing scrolls and possibly relics; he carries a rosary and is supported by a staff. The "pilgrim monk" has a somewhat similar though smaller load, though he carries his fly-whisk rather than a rosary, and his very elegant staff terminates in a carved dragon, unlike the rugged tree-branches preferred by all other travelers. Both figure 10 and figure 1 walk through a realistically arid Central Asian landscape, though the "missionary monk's" is enlivened by a bird perched on a bush. By contrast the "itinerant storyteller" (figure 3) has no discernable landscape, though in other versions (Mair 1986, plates 2, 3, 4 and 6), the storyteller appears to walk on scrolling clouds. The "storytellers" are all far more distinctly foreign, with big noses, hanging cheeks, bushy eyebrows and what, in one version, appears to be a reddish beard. They are also

distinguished by large sun-stopping hats and reed sandals (highly impractical footwear) rather than the soft, felt boots worn by the monks in the silk paintings. They also wear very different clothes, trousers and a short caftan of spotted fabric and an undergarment that hangs down to the knees. The clothes alone would suggest that while these characters are transmitting Buddhist teachings, they are neither monks nor arhats. However, they too are accompanied by a tiger.

Similar figures, though without their tigers, can also be found in the Kamakura version in the Tokyo National Museum and as one of the multiplicity of travelers in Zhang Zeduan's early twelfth-scroll, "The Qing Ming Festival along the River" (Palace Museum, Beijing).

Monks on the Silk Road



Figure 4. Votive plaque with riders on a dappled horse and a camel. Sixth century, Stein second expedition, Dandan-Ulik. Ink and pigments on wood. British Museum. (Whitfield 2004, 160)

Silk may not have been the only valuable commodity traveling the Silk Road, but its primacy was assured by several factors: its general use as currency,¹ its value in preventing arrow-borne infections, its importance in denoting high status, and its significance as the material of choice for religious purposes. Buddhist stupas, Christian basilicas and even Islam's Kaaba were draped with silks and hung with banners. Sanskrit texts openly advocated the offering of silk by devotees. In the *Mahavastu* it is stated that "he who has placed a festoon of fine silk on a monument of the saviour of the world prospers in all his aims, both among the gods and among men, avoids base families and is not reborn among them; he becomes wealthy and affluent, a sovereign in this world." (Liu 1998, 13).

This made silk not only a valued item of trade, but also the ideal donation for a busy merchant anxious to avoid a Christian hell or a bad Buddhist rebirth.² It also ensured that prosperous religious institutions were a valued market destination, and that monks as much as merchants would travel with silk supplies. Pilgrimage was also a way of attaining merit, and the goal of most pilgrims, monks or merchants with enough time for a special stop-over, was, primarily, the North Indian sites of Buddha's life from birth to parinirvana and the relics and spectacularly carved temples associated with them; and, secondarily, the more accessible Xinjiang temples such as Mogao, Bezeklik and Khotan.

But it was not merely pilgrimage that sent Buddhist monks on the long journey to Gandhara. There were two other concerns, the desire to obtain relics (often highly unlikely objects such as a crystal "finger of Buddha") that were highly valued by both home monasteries and home rulers, and the desire to obtain authentic texts. The travelers in all of the pictures are seen to be carrying scrolls in their packs, and many also have what appear to be reliquaries attached to them. The archetypal pilgrim monk, Xuanzhang, brought back 650 texts and 150 relics of the Buddha (but he employed twenty horses and an elephant!), as well as involving himself in the highly popular court debates on religion.

1 This is extensively documented, from Han complaints about the number of bolts of silk demanded by the Xiongnu for their horses, to the provision of silks to monks such as Xuanzhang to use to ensure transport and accommodation.

2 Much of this section is based on Liu (1998, 2010), Foltz (1999) and de la Vassière (2005)

Buddhism in the sixth and seventh centuries was on the rise in China and on the decline in India. It was also mutating into a number of sects and variant traditions. Many, such as Pure Land, Tibetan Vajrayana and Chan, were brought to China, eventually traveling on to Japan, by adherents anxious to establish themselves in a more welcoming community. Debate was fierce and endless, as was the increasing desire on the part of Chinese and Central Asian communities for authentic texts of sutras and commentaries. Translators were as much part of the religious oecumene as they were essential to trade, and Dunhuang with its endless caves and monasteries was a mecca for the polylingual. Some, like Xuanzhang himself, preferred to travel on to China, where, after receiving a hero's welcome from the emperor, he settled into translating his haul.

For those who could not undertake a pilgrimage, translate a text, or fork out a gold coin (Xuanzhang paid this much to see a bone of the Buddha, and an additional five gold coins to make a rubbing of it), there was the option of commissioning a painting, perhaps a major fresco (and many of the Dunhuang caves had relied on commissions, donors and patrons), or of purchasing a picture, text or amulet (Whitfield 2004, 228 ff.). It is likely, considering the inscription on the "pilgrim monk" painting³ (figure 1) that this was an image conferring spiritual benefits on the owner and/or help in his brother's afterlife.

3 The inscription reads "Ratnaketu Tathagate, one figure. In remembrance of my late younger brother, Chih-ch'iu, on the wake of the third period of seven days, I have had this image painted and offer it to him with praise."

The *kasaya* (*jiasha* [Chinese], *kesa* [Japanese])



Figure 5. Hongbian, chief monk in the Dunhuang region. Late Tang dynasty (618–906), c. 855. Cave 17 Dunhuang. (Whitfield 2000, 85)

The “pilgrim monk” (figure 1) appears to be wearing a traditional triple robe, similar to that worn by Hongbian, the chief monk of the Dunhuang region (figure 5), whose sculptured portrait now sits back in Cave 17, from which it was removed in the eleventh century when the cave was turned into a storage room for manuscripts. Hongbian’s relationship to the pilgrim monks of the paintings is reinforced by his knapsack and water bottle, painted hanging from a tree branch on

the wall behind him. Like the "pilgrim monk," he wears a *kasaya*. While the term "kasaya" or "jiasha" (Chinese) has now come to mean the outer of the three traditional monk's garments (Rutherford 2004, 47), the original Sanskrit term referred to all three, traditionally composed of fabric scraps stitched together, the outer rectangle consisting of seven columns of patchwork squares and borders resembling the divisions of a rice paddy. According to Buddhist legend, the Buddha instructed his disciple, Ananda, to use this construction as a reminder of the rice fields they passed in their travels. The original Sanskrit term, meaning impure or "dirty" in color, referenced the Buddhist vow of poverty; however, this implied asceticism did not last long, and the *kasaya*, while retaining its rice-field patchwork, was increasingly constructed of elaborate and valuable silks. Silks were also a feature of the costumes of painted Silk Road bodhisattvas and arhats. Hongbian's *kasaya* is apparently simple; however, in 851 an imperial decree granted him several titles and the honorary right to wear purple silk, fragments of which were found sealed inside the statue's torso (Whitfield 2000, 85).

Kasayas originally came in different solid colors, indicating membership in various schools of Buddhism. In China this meaning gradually fell out of fashion, and the bulk of robes were in shades of red. The outer garment lost its original austerity — it is hard to equate poverty and humility with a textile such as the late Tang example found by Stein in Cave 17, a patchwork confection of fifteen different silk textiles, including gauzes and damasks, tabby-dyed with a pattern of flowering scrolls and brocaded confronted birds. (Whitfield 2000, 260). While this piece may actually be a mat, this kind of luxury silk patchwork became a standard robe for Buddhist monks, particularly in Japan (Sumner 1990, 49), and friends and parents often combined resources to ensure the *kasaya* was as luxurious and beautiful as possible. However, in the "pilgrim monk" painting (figure 1), the color of the *kasaya* is a relatively simple blue, with rice-field borders of dark blue or black patterned with white flowers. All three of his garments appear to be of silk. Blue is the color traditionally associated with the very early Indian branch of Buddhism, Mahasamghika, which originated in the first schism around 320 BCE. This sect questioned the authenticity of certain Buddhist texts and distanced themselves from other groups through the color of their robes, choosing blue or yellow. Mahasamghika and its later offshoots had a considerable influence on Mahayana Buddhism, the principle branch which spread along

the Silk Road, and the "pilgrim monk" may well belong to this or a related group. A possible identification of the figure is with the arhat Dharmatrata, a fourth-century Indian scholar credited with compiling the Chinese and Tibetan Buddhist canons. Textual authenticity and accuracy would continue to be a major concern of Silk Road Buddhism, and those who contributed to this, whether foreign or Chinese like Faxian and Xuanzang, were highly honored and frequently depicted.

Of the three Dunhuang pictures, the other painting on silk also appears to be of a monk, though he does not wear a "rice field" kasaya, while the Stein image (figure 3) is dressed in a very different style. Each of the three is accompanied by a tiger.

The tiger as psychopomp



Figure 6. Tiger with stag horns. Sixth century BCE, Pazyryk Culture, Altai.
Carved leather appliqué. State Hermitage Museum.

In China and among the cultures to the north and west, the tiger has played an important role in art and mythology from the Neolithic period, and white jade tigers have been found in pre-Shang tombs in many areas, evolving into pendants by the Xia dynasty (c2100–c1800 BCE). By the Shang dynasty (1766–1122 BCE) the tiger was not only represented in jade, but also had become a common image in ritual bronzes (Akiyama 1968, 13–20). While it may have contributed to the

development of the taotie mask, a zoomorphic motif consisting of confronted animals that fuse to form a single head, the tiger is also found in a particularly interesting conformation where one or more tigers appear to hold or devour a human or a human head (Akiyama 1968 24; Chang 1983, 62). Two spectacular examples of this motif can be found in the Sumitomo collection in Kyoto and the Cernuschi Museum in Paris. Both items are ritual *yus* (food vessels) on which a tiger, forming the body of the *yu*, is seated on its hind paws, embracing a man who is actually standing on the hind paws with his head immediately below the tiger's open mouth, suggesting a shaman's familiar or a transformative spirit rather than a tiger's lunch.

Tiger bronzes also feature in Zhou (1045–256 BCE) burials. The metallic elements in a Zhou king's grave were said to metamorphose into a white tiger — king of all animals and lord of the mountains — three days after his burial, and to remain crouching on the grave to protect the king's spirit and dispose of demons. The connection between tigers and the dead continued in later dynasties, and tiger jades and bronzes proliferated in Chinese graves.

Nomadic tribes who buried their dead in the Altai in the north-west of China (Rudenko 1970, 268 ff) (like the Ba in the western Yangtze region) placed them in wooden coffins carved with tigers, suggesting a role as both protector and spirit guide. Sometimes, as at Pazyryk, the decoration consists simply of a procession of tigers; at others, notably in the Badashar barrow (sixth-fifth century BCE), the tigers have their mouths open on the head of a deer or foal (Bunker 1992, 106). These images resemble belt buckles from Ninxia and the Ordos as well as the much earlier Shang Chinese bronze *yus*.

Pre-Buddhist Tibetans also had a special relationship with tigers, which appear in petroglyphs and picturegraphs, while early Bon priests wore tiger-skin hats and cloaks (personal communication from John Vincent Bellezza). There was also a belief in weretigers, which still persists among upper Tibetan spirit-mediums. These beliefs, together with images of winged or horned tigers, suggesting a transformational and mediumistic role, add weight to K. C. Chang's theory that the Shang bronzes are shamanistic and ritualized rather than a rather violent form of decoration, perhaps, like the white tiger legend and the tiger-based zoomorphic taotie masks, designed also to protect the grave and its goods from demons and thieves. The positioning of the human figures on the two *yus* and similar images on the handles of a bronze *ting* and the body of

a *tsun* from Funan all suggest a protective and transforming spirit. "Thus," writes Chang "Wangsun Man (in 606 BCE recorded in the *Zho Zhuan*) as much as tells us that among the animals are some which are capable of helping the shamans and the shamanesses in their task of communicating between heaven and earth and that the images of these animals were cast on ancient bronze ritual vessels" (Chang 1983, 64).

Metamorphic tiger imagery, especially the addition of antlers (figure 6) or the wings found on funerary textiles of the Han/Jin period from Niya and Tibet, emphasize the tiger's role as a spirit mediator between worlds — deer have long been the vehicle for ascending from earth to heaven (Eliade, 1974, discusses this extensively). Ritual possession of shamans by a tiger-spirit, and the role of the tiger as a familiar who helps in dispelling evil and curing disease were, until recently, found in Nagaland, Yunan, and Northwestern Tibet (personal communication, Max Deshu). Buddhism in Tibet also co-opted shamanistic tiger stories, and various masters are credited with keeping tigers as companions or even transforming into tigers.

The Tibetans took advantage of the power vacuum left by the Tang withdrawal from the west following the Battle of the Talas River (751) and the An Lushan uprising (754) to invade the Xinjiang region, conquering Dunhuang after a ten-year siege in 781 and remaining in power until 848. During their occupancy some fifty caves were excavated at Mogao (Whitfield 2000, 25), and aspects of Tibetan Vajrayana Buddhism entered the arts and beliefs of the region. Even after the reconquest by local general Zhang Yichao, Dunhuang remained a quasi-autonomous region, more strongly Buddhist than China proper.

The connection between shamans and tiger spirits is still very much a part of minority cultures. Contemporary Mongolian and Siberian shamans' costumes still include the traditional tiger bells, globular metal jingles impressed with a tiger face, usually on both sides, and similar tiger bells are used virtually throughout Asia as amulets for people and livestock.

The tiger as directional symbol

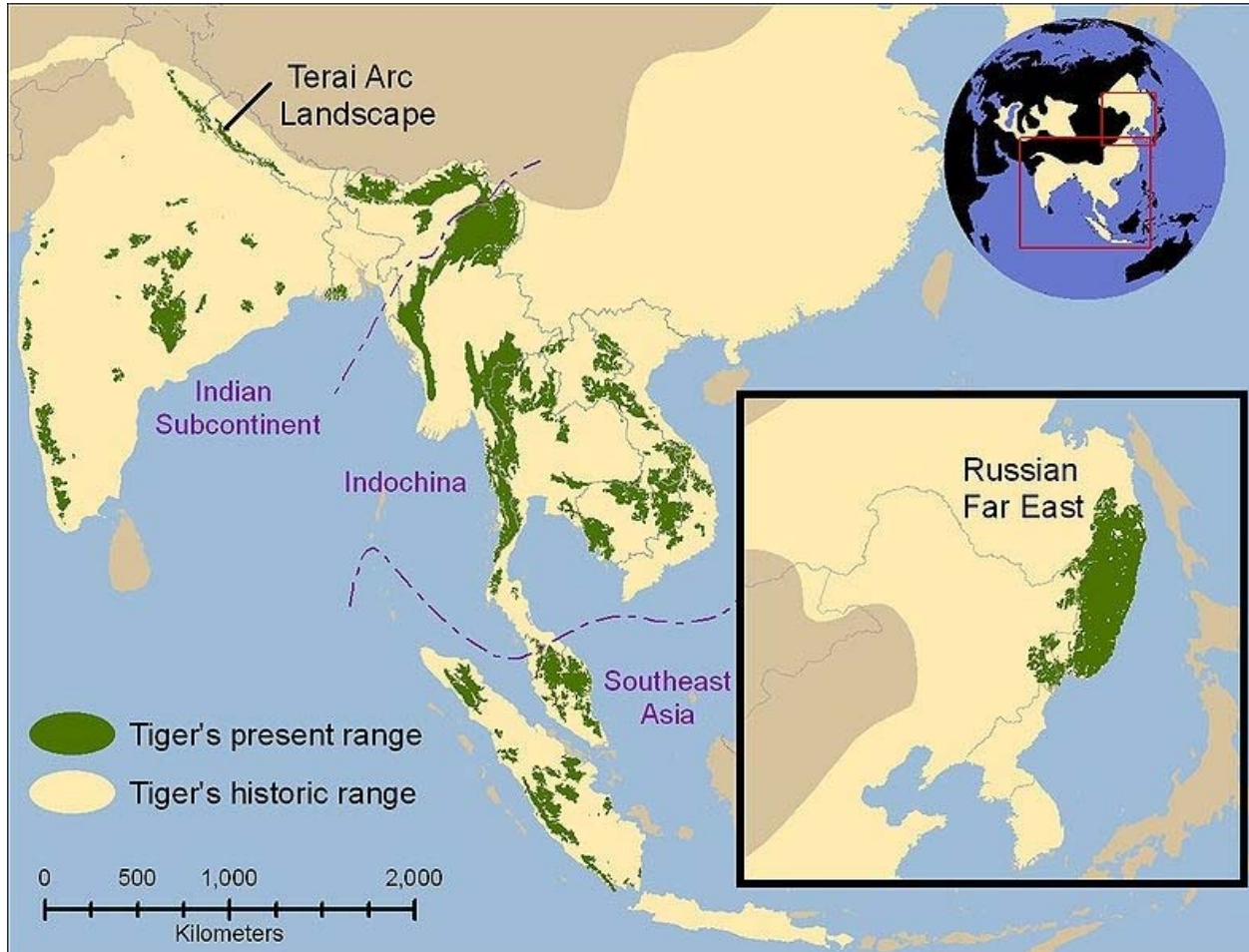


Figure 7. Historic and current distribution of tigers. "Wildlife Extra" on line at <http://www.wildlifeextra.com.au/go/news/mammal-range647.html#cr>

Historically tigers were widespread throughout China (figure 7), though they are now everywhere severely endangered, and the Chinese Amur tiger may be extinct in the wild. Given that they were once as likely to be encountered in spring in the south of China as to be seen descending from their western mountain fastness in autumn, it is perhaps surprising that the tiger has been traditionally associated with autumn and the west. The divine Governor of Fire who presided over the south and who ensures universal order, for instance, is always shown riding a tiger (Christie 1968, 53). While the tiger was well established as one of the four directional guardians by the early Han dynasty (202 BCE – 221CE), it probably took on this role as early as

the Zhou dynasty (1100–221 BCE), whose artists made extensive use of tiger imagery in their bronzes and jades and who originated to the west of the Shang. The tiger's association with metallurgy, the key to sovereignty in dynastic mythology, and the apparent symbol wang (king) which appears in the dark stripes on its head, was established as early as the Zhou, and there is a lovely bronze tiger ritual vessel from the tenth century BC in the Freer Gallery with this character clearly inscribed.

Various people in the western region made use of tiger symbolism. The rulers of the Ba people of Sichuan who provided military assistance to the state of Zhou in overthrowing the Shang dynasty, claimed descent from a tiger, and Ba wooden coffins carved with tigers are still found in caves along the Yangtze (Pulleyblank in Keightley 1983, 426). While this role is more totemic than directional, it does strengthen the connection between tigers and the west, as does the myth, cited in Sima Qian's *Shi Ji*, but also dating to the Zhou period, that after five hundred years in the mountains, tigers turned white and became immortal guardians.

The white tiger in the Han dynasty is associated not only with the western direction and its signifying constellation, but also with the element metal, the autumn season, the virtue of righteousness and the color white. There are many visual examples of the western tiger, including a painted earthenware *hu* with a central band featuring tiger, phoenix, dragon and the snake/turtle combination, the dark warrior, which was excavated in Honan (Akiyama 1968, 110) and a square tile representing a Han town in microcosm with the same four guardians (Chang 1983, 21). The polar opposite to the yin tiger is the yang dragon, and as Chinese Daoist alchemy developed, the dragon and tiger became associated with the harmonizing and balancing of cosmic forces, fire and water, bright and dark, male and female (Birgitta Augustin in Watt 2010, 150).

The four directional guardians also became associated with the Four Heavenly Kings (Lopakala) of Buddhism and with the Mahayana concept of the Western Paradise. Guangmutian, the lord of limitless vision, and (tiger) Lopakala of the west, represents enlightenment, an appropriate companion for a pilgrim monk traveling west in search of authentic texts, or a transformative storyteller chanting the sutras in cities along the Silk Road.

Ambivalence toward tigers: Weretigers, military insignia, protective clothes and papercuts



Figure 8. Dong Chinese minority group child's tiger hat, late nineteenth–early twentieth century, silk, seeds and feathers. The embroidered and highly stylized tiger faces look in both directions for additional protection. Personal collection.

Tigers are and always have been extremely dangerous animals; whether lurking in the southern jungles, or descending from the western mountains, they were a hazard to travelers and a danger to herdsmen and their flocks. This is how they appear from time to time in the Book of Songs:

Shu in the prairie.

The flames rise crackling on every side;

Bare-armed he braves a tiger

To lay at the Duke's feet.

Please, Shu, no rashness!

Take care or it will hurt you. (Waley 1937, song 31)

Not surprisingly tigers became associated with military prowess and rank. A decorative element on swords, helmets and other weaponry, they also manifested as the imperial tiger tally (*hulu*), a tiger-shaped inscribed object, usually of bronze. The tally seems to have emerged during the Warring States period, coinciding with the development of professional standing armies with iron weapons, crossbows and trained cavalry. The tally was split in two, each half containing the same inscription, usually a command to a leading general. One half-tiger was held by the emperor, the other went to the senior officer. Tallies continued to be made up to the Ming dynasty. Military bureaucrats of various ranks (depending on the dynasty) also wore identifying embroidered tigers, the first appearing during the reign of Empress Wu (Liu 1998, 188). Later these would re-emerge as the military mandarin squares of the Ming and Qing dynasties.

Tigers were also associated with male potency, which has turned out to be most unfortunate for Chinese tigers whose skins, bones, even whiskers have been and are used in traditional medicine to help men encourage and sustain an erection into old age. The drug Viagra, after all, derives its name from the Sanskrit for "tiger."

But the principal role of tigers in popular culture, both among minority groups such as the Miao and the Dong, and among rural Han, was as a protective amulet. Papercut tigers in brilliant red decorated threshold doors. Women lavished time and skills on creating complex and beautiful embroideries for their young sons, frequently featuring tigers. Tiger shoes kept the child from tripping when he first learned to walk, tiger collars encircled him with protective force to keep off evil spirits, especially when worn on such special occasions as New Year and the child's first birthday, while tiger hats, often with two faces, one each looking forward and backward (figure 8), often decorated with additional silver Buddhist and/or Daoist elements,

flowers, fish and other magical emblems, protected the vulnerable young from demonic attack or all too earthly accidents (Berliner 1986, 153ff) .

But tigers are not always so benevolent: minority tribal shamans, particularly women, and solitary widows were often vilified as weretigers, and a popular children's story, documented from the late fifteenth century onward tells the story of two children (much like Little Red Riding Hood or Hansel and Gretel in the West), on a journey through a mountain forest to visit their grandmother, encountering an old lady who turns out to be an evil weretiger, and who eats the boy — the luckier and more resourceful girl escapes (ter Haar 2006, 37 ff).

Monks and tigers



Figure 9. Two old friends meditating. Probably a thirteenth-century copy of a tenth-century painting by Shi Ke. National Museum, Tokyo.

Are any of the images of monks and tigers founded on fact, or are they, like the Catholic images of St. Jerome and his lion, fantasies celebrating the power of sanctity and love over the violence of the natural world? There is actually a strong possibility that the monk and tiger images have

some basis in reality. In the mid-seventeenth century, the Dutch East India Company sent four embassies to the Qing court. On the first of these, one of its officers, the purser Johan Nieuhoff (1618–1672) was specially instructed to observe, document and draw the people and places visited. Returning briefly to Holland in 1658, he entrusted his drawings and notes to his brother, who in 1665 produced a major study, complete with some 150 illustrations. A publishing success, it was soon translated into several languages, including English (1669).

Among the various people observed were mendicants, beggars and other itinerants. He describes and illustrates them in detail, including itinerants, perhaps monks or storytellers, who were traveling with tigers.

There are likewise many Mountebanks, who use several wild Beasts, especially Tygers, made tame by Degrees, on which, to the admiration of the Beholders, they sit and ride through many Cities and Villages, which walk along the Streets very softly, with a Branch in its Mouth, which holding wide open, is very fearful to look upon, besides his Tail, which he swings to and fro, yet hurts none.

The Rider, who knows without either Bit or Bridle to govern the Tyger, onely by moving his Body and Feet, hath a wide Coat over his under Clothes, with Sleeves so large, that they hang down half way to the Calfs of his Legs. (Nieuhoff 1669)

The illustration shows a portly, bearded gentleman in what may be a monk's robe, looking rather like the Daoist Zhang Daolin, sitting on a small, rather depressed-looking tiger. The "mountebank" holds a bowl or cup in one hand and a sword in the other; the tiger has a leafy branch in its mouth. The poor beast has a seriously hangdog expression, but its domesticated state is undoubted. In this it resembles the current crop of tigers in the somewhat notorious Thai Buddhist Tiger Temple, the Wat Pa Luangta Bua Yannasampanno Forest Monastery, where around fifty tigers live in a large compound and are available to tourists for patting. Once relatively freeranging, they are now mostly chained during the day, are caged at night, and are possibly subject to some mistreatment from the monks. On the other hand, they have not been

turned into Chinese traditional medicine, nor have they been stuffed and mounted for someone's trophy room.

The Tiger Temple monks are lauded as examples of the overwhelming power of virtue and benevolence in subduing the more violent natural emotions symbolized by the wild and extremely dangerous tiger, who transforms into a loving and gentle companion when confronted by a charismatic monk. This attitude has its parallels in the West in stories of St. Francis and the wolf of Gubbio, and especially of St. Jerome and his companion lion, shown causing a panic among the monks when first brought to Jerome's monastery in Vittore Carpaccio's 1502 painting, and sleeping happily like a big cat in Jerome's study in Albrecht Durer's famous woodblock of 1514. Legends of Chinese monks who meet with a tiger on a narrow path on their journey to the west, only to have the tiger become a friend and companion, are a probable aspect of the Dunhuang images, but are a definite part of paintings of the eighth-century Chan monk and poet Fengken, as seen in Shi Ke's famous ink on silk portrait "Two Old Friends Meditating" (figure 9), which was created at much the same time as the Dunhuang traveling monk images. Fengken is said to have arrived at the Guoqing temple in the Tiantai Mountains near the East China Sea, unshaven and riding on a tiger. One of his surviving poems celebrates the pilgrimages he undertook as a wandering monk.

I have been to Tiantai
maybe a million times
like a cloud or river
drifting back and forth.
Roaming free of trouble
trusting the Buddha's spacious path
while the world's forked mind
only brings men pain.

He and his tiger took up residence behind the monastery library, where he became close friends with two other legendary Chan monks, Hanshan and Shide. The four friends were a popular theme, especially in Japanese Zen Buddhist art. Mokuan Reinen (d.1345) a Zen monk

who studied at a Southern Song Chan temple, painted the three monks and the tiger snoozing together (Tanaka 1972, 59ff.):

Old Feng-kan embraces his tiger and sleeps,
All huddled together with Shih-te and Han-shan
They dream their big dream, which lingers on,
While a frail old tree clings to the bottom of the cold precipice.
Shao-mu of the Hsiang-fu [temple] salutes with folded hands.

Conclusion



Figure 10. Missionary monk with tiger. Dunhuang, ninth century. Ink, gold and colors on silk. Pelliot Mission, Musée Guimet.

Traveling the Silk Road was an often dangerous and always time-consuming activity. Merchants made the journey by camel or horse, usually grouped together in large caravans for mutual protection. Itinerant traders sometimes walked their segments of the long route (the remains of one solitary traveler from the Tang dynasty has been found, complete with his pack of trade goods from the West). Pilgrim monks, often carrying loads of valuable silks as currency, traveled from China to Gandhara in search of authentic texts. Missionary monks from India or Central Asia traveled east to China to preach their particular interpretation of Buddhism: Mahayana, Vajrayana, Pure Land or Chan. Itinerant monks and storytellers made shorter journeys carrying their illustrated scrolls, preaching the word almost as a form of entertainment.

Silk was a valued commodity, used as currency in its own right, and seen as an appropriate gift to religious communities by busy merchants or officials wanting to insure a better afterlife but unwilling to renounce the world. Traveling monks such as Xuanzhang carried silks with them to ensure a welcome on their journeys, and silks were draped over stupas and altars, formed canopies in temples, and were used in the burials of spiritual and secular powers. Buddhism was not the only religion to honor silk — Byzantine and Western Christianity followed much the same practices, ensuring a continuing international silk trade. Individual monks extolled poverty, but their patchwork robes were often of silk.

Several paintings depict a pilgrim monk or storyteller, the earliest extant dating to the ninth or tenth century, and the similarity of their imagery implies an existing and well-established iconography. While details vary, especially in the faces and costumes, almost all include a tiger walking on the right of the traveler. This accompanying tiger is a multifaceted symbol, and some or all of its meanings would have been apparent to the original artists, patrons and owners. At its simplest, the tiger's association with the west reminds us of journeys along the Silk Road westward to the realm of Buddhist authenticity in Gandhara. But in Buddhist mythology the tiger is also associated with the King of the West, the Lopakala Guanmutian, and in this form can represent the desire and search for enlightenment. As such it becomes a manifestation of the committed pilgrim monk and his quest for authenticity. It is also significant that the traditional virtue of the western directional tiger is righteousness, another quality distinguishing the true Buddhist. Tigers have a long and continuing history in Asian shamanism,

and the tiger spirit is frequently seen as a psychopomp, a leader of the soul and a bridge between earth and heaven.

But the tiger is also and has always been a dangerous beast to encounter; poems and paintings emphasise the fierceness and deadly skill of the big predator. However, these very qualities make it an ideal guardian, if only it can be got on one's side. Traditionally tiger amulets were worn, and even today among minority groups and peasants in China, valued small children are decked out in tiger hats, collars, tiger bells and even shoes, while vermilion papercuts of tigers decorate doors, all designed to ward off evil and provide a spiritual layer of protection. All of the pilgrim paintings emphasize this sense of protection: the monk or storyteller is alone on the Silk Road with his pack of scrolls — alone, that is, except for his guardian, and what bandit would tangle with a tiger?

So the tiger in the paintings becomes an indicator of spiritual power, a symbol of righteousness, a metaphysical guide and a physical protector. These days, with tigers among the most endangered of all species, one can only hope that somehow the roles can be reversed, and that we, in our turn, can become the guardians and protectors of the tigers.



Figure 11. Save China's Tigers Organization logo:

<http://english.savechinastigers.org/>

Bibliography

- Akiyama, Terukazu, et al. 1968. *Arts of China: Neolithic Cultures to T'ang Dynasty: Recent Discoveries*. Tokyo: Kodansha International Ltd.
- Berliner, Nancy Zeng. 1986. *Chinese Folk Art: The Small Skills of Carving Insects*. Boston: New York Graphic Society, Little, Brown & Co.
- Bunker, Emma C. 1992. "Significant Changes in Iconography and Technology among Ancient China's Northwestern Pastoral Neighbours from the Fourth to the First Century BC," *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 6: 99–116. Bloomfield, Mich.
- Bussagli, Mario. 1969. *Chinese Painting*. Trans. Henry Vidon. London: Paul Hamlyn.
- Chang, K. C. 1983. *Art, Myth and Ritual: The Path to Political Authority in Ancient China*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Christie, Anthony. 1968. *Chinese Mythology*. London: Paul Hamlyn.
- De la Vaissière, Étienne. 2005. *Sogdian Traders, a History: Handbook of Oriental Studies, Section 8: Central Asia, vol. 10: Sogdian Traders*. Trans. James Ward. Leiden, Boston: Brill.
- Eliade, Mircea. 1974. *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton/Bollingen.
- Foltz, Richard C. 1999. *Religions of the Silk Road: Overland Trade and Cultural Exchange from Antiquity to the Fifteenth Century*. New York: St Martin's Griffin.
- Hermitage Museum. http://www.hermitagemuseum.org/html_En/index.html. Accessed October 20, 2010.
- Hopkirk, Peter. 1980. *Foreign Devils on the Silk Road: The Search for Lost Cities and Treasures of Chinese Central Asia*. London: John Murray.
- International Dunhuang Project. <http://idp.bl.uk>. Accessed September 5, 2010.
- Juliano, Annette L., and Judith A. Lerner. 2001. *Monks and Merchants: Silk Road Treasures from Northwest China*. New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc., with the Asia Society.
- Lewis, Mark Edward. 2009. *China Between Empires: The Northern and Southern Dynasties*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

- Li Zuding. 1988. *Chinese Traditional Auspicious Patterns*. Shanghai: Shanghai Popular Science Press.
- Liu, Xinru. 1998. *Silk and Religion: An Exploration of Material Life and the Thought of People, AD 600–1200*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- . 2010. *The Silk Road in World History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Liu, Xinru, and Lynda Norene Shaffer. 2007. *Connections Across Eurasia: Transportation, Communication and Cultural Exchange on the Silk Road*. New York: McGraw Hill Higher Education.
- Mair, Victor. 1986. "The Origins of an Iconographical Form of the Pilgrim Hsuan-tsang," *Tang Studies* 4: 29–42. Boston: Maney Publishing.
- Musée Guimet des Arts Asiatique. <http://www.guimet.fr/-English->. Accessed September 2010.
- Pulleyblank, E. G. 1983. "The Chinese and Their Neighbours in Prehistoric and Early Historic Times" in *The Origins of Chinese Civilization*, ed. David N. Keightley. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Rudenko, Sergei I. 1970. *Frozen Tombs of Siberia: The Pazyryk Burials of Iron Age Horsemen*. Trans. M. W. Thompson. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Rutherford, Judith, and Jackie Menzies. 2004. *Celestial Silks: Chinese Religious and Court Textiles*. Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales.
- Silk Road Seattle. <http://depts.washington.edu/silkroad/>. Accessed October 10, 2010.
- Sumner, Christina. 1990. *A Material World*. Sydney: Powerhouse Publishing.
- Tanaka, Ichimatsu. 1972. *Japanese Ink Painting: Shubun to Sesshu*. Trans. Bruce Darling. *The Heibonsha Survey of Japanese Art, Vol. 12*. New York, Tokyo: Weatherhill/Heibonsha.
- ter Haar, Barend J. 2006. *Witchcraft and Scapegoating in Chinese History*. Leiden: Brill.
- Waley, Arthur, trans. 1937. *The Book of Songs*. New York: Grove Press.
- Watt, James C. Y. 2010. *The World of Kublai Khan: Chinese Art in the Yuan Dynasty*, with several essays. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art; New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Heleanor Feltham, "Encounter with a Tiger Traveling West"
Sino-Platonic Papers, 231 (October 2012)

Whitfield, Roderick, Susan Whitfield and Neville Agnew. 2000. *Cave Temples of Mogao: Art and History on the Silk Road*. Los Angeles: The Getty Conservation Institute and the J. Paul Getty Museum.

Whitfield, Susan, ed. 2004. *The Silk Road: Trade, Travel, War and Faith*. Hong Kong: Serindia Publications.

Since June 2006, all new issues of *Sino-Platonic Papers* have been published electronically on the Web and are accessible to readers at no charge. Back issues are also being released periodically in e-editions, also free. For a complete catalog of *Sino-Platonic Papers*, with links to free issues, visit the *SPP* Web site.

www.sino-platonic.org