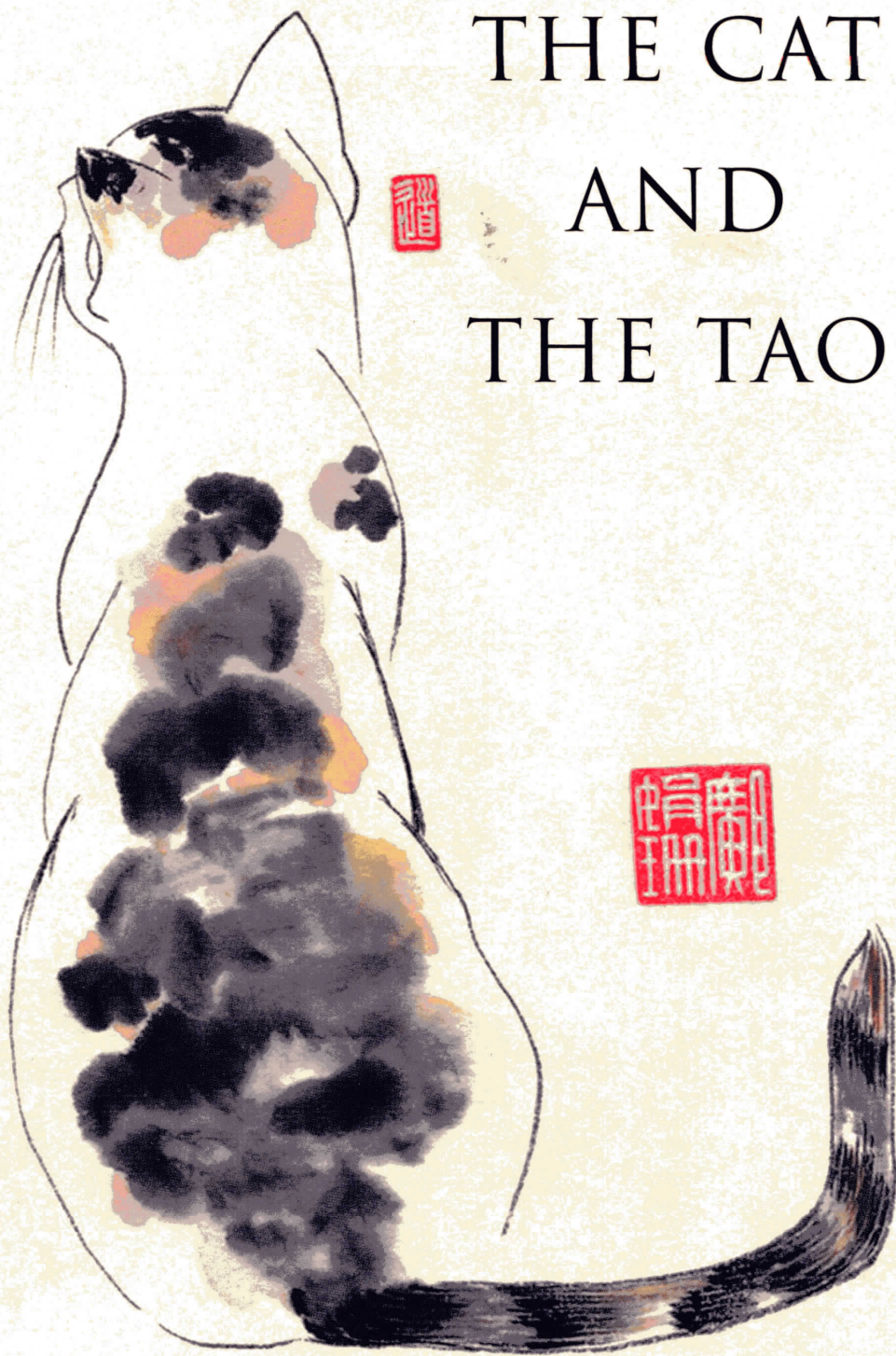
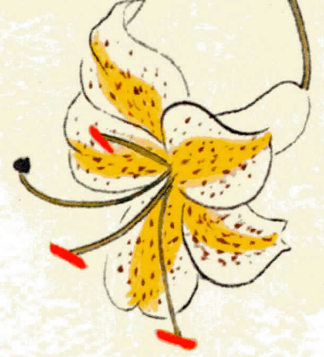


THE CAT
AND
THE TAO

KWONG
KUEN SHAN





Forty original cat paintings combined
with ancient Chinese wisdom:
a book to inspire and delight.

To know
is to recognise what you understand
and what you do not understand

CONFUCIUS



This beautiful book combines forty original cat paintings with a selection of ancient Chinese wisdom, ranging from proverbs to Confucian sayings.

The paintings, reproduced in full colour, are by a Chinese artist living in Britain. Kwong Kuen Shan has carefully chosen words from the Chinese masters to complement her exquisite cat pictures.

The result is a rare and inspiring book that will delight cat-lovers everywhere.

Kwong Kuen Shan grew up in Hong Kong where she studied classical Chinese literature, history and calligraphy. She now lives in Britain and works as an artist exhibiting her paintings locally in Brecon and the Welsh mountains.

The Cat and the Tao

KWONG KUEN SHAN

DEDICATION

To my senior cat, Healey, who cured me of cat phobia.

To my junior cat, Joseph, who keeps up the good work.

And to my husband, Christopher,
without whose support and immense patience
this book would not have been possible.

INTRODUCTION

I suffered from cat phobia. I never had a cat until six years ago. My first cat adopted me. Healey belonged to my ex-neighbour. They moved away taking all their cats with them. Healey returned four times to the land where he was born and brought up. The fourth time my husband and I felt we had to keep him on humanitarian grounds.

For a year he was kept outside and fed out in all weather. I could not bring myself to touch him, let alone allow him into the house. I knew the fear was irrational. I froze every time he was near me. Quietly and patiently he changed all that. I have had more cats since.

At the time I was developing a new painting project and something was missing in the plan. One day while gardening I saw Healey sun-bathing between me and the stone buddha, our garden gnome. He curled around the buddha, looking relaxed and happy. I found the missing element.

What seemed to be a good idea at the time landed me on a very steep learning curve. I had no knowledge of cats. I had never painted them before. An amazing journey began. I started observing and studying cats; my own cats, Healey, Rocco and Joseph; other people's cats, stray cats. I was totally charmed by their elegance, agility, resilience, and above all

their independence and mental toughness. I wanted to capture all these in the only way that I know, the Chinese way. It took me two years to produce enough sketches to work from, but now I have an ever expanding cat album. They are painted in Chinese styles with Chinese tools, materials, techniques and perspective. I have exhibited these paintings several times.

I painted the pictures in this book using both the meticulous and freestyle techniques. The meticulous method involves detailed drawing and refined elaboration, while the freestyle uses deceptively simple and economical brush strokes to capture the character and spirit of the subject. It is not concerned with detail.

My understanding of cats continues to develop and my affection for them to grow. I want to do more with these lovely creatures who share our lives. I want to share my appreciation of them with others, for them to see my vision of cats! I want to add an extra dimension to my cat album, and I have drawn on my knowledge of Chinese literature to achieve this.

I studied classical Chinese literature, history, and calligraphy as a child growing up in Hong Kong. This contact continues. While my husband reads English books, I read my collection of old and new Chinese books: Confucius's teaching, *300 Tang Poems*, *Dreams of the Red Chambers*, Zen, Sun Tzu's *Art of War* and contemporary Chinese literature. So many of the wise say-

ings in these classic texts cry out to be linked with a painting, to illustrate and be illustrated, to illuminate and inspire. I have had a wonderful time seeking out the best match for each picture, and then translating them into English.

Many books have been published on cats. I have tried to do a different kind of cat book. My paintings of cats should depict them in action, at rest, when they are aloof or tough, philosophical or just themselves, though never humble! My hope was to combine feline character and wisdom with appropriate oriental philosophy and teaching, to point out the Way towards some answers to man's quest for respite from everyday stress.

When I speak of the Tao, I do not mean Taoism as such, and I am not talking about Taoism in this book. Tao is used here in the generic sense, meaning the way to wisdom and inspiration. It means a direction for a journey from beginning to end. It refers to the way we search for the truth, the way we conduct ourselves. It means observing the law of nature, living in harmony with other living things, and distinguishing what is important to life from what is accessory.

The texts in this book are selected from ancient Chinese proverbs, poems, and sayings of great teachers: Confucius, Lao Tse, Chong Tse and Sun Tzu. Their teachings have played a major part in shaping Chinese

thought for centuries. They have handed down templates for life which can be used by anyone in any circumstances. The choice of quotes in this collection is based on their sympathetic resonance with the paintings, and personal taste. I translated them all from the original Chinese. Ancient Chinese literature is very condensed, very crisp, and a great deal is contained in a few words. There is no standard English version, and I have tried hard to preserve the vision, the truth and essence of the original text. I hope I have succeeded in sharing with you their meaning and wisdom.

I hope you will enjoy my book, and if it inspires you, so much the better!

