



Missing cat

a cause for concern with worshippers and temple staff



“Oh no! Niu-niu is gone!” This is what the employees of Yitien Temple, in Taipei County’s Sanchung City, are worried about: a cat living in the temple that has recently disappeared. Apart from the events held to celebrate the birthday of Mazu in the third lunar month that have been keeping them busy of late, the disappearance of Niu-niu seems to be occupying them more than anything else. The temple’s employees would anxiously talk about the lost cat, as if it were their own child. Worshippers at the Yitien Temple, worship Matsuo, the goddess of fishermen. Niu-niu is one of the cats that is often seen around the temple. Other cats, such as Yamaha, the youngest Yuan-Yuan, and the very shy Little Bao Bao are among the eight felines who decided to make the temple their home more than a decade ago. They are free to do anything in the temple. They never steal offerings to the gods because they are always well-fed. Visitors are also familiar with the **presence** of these animals and it is very common to see cats sleeping beside the worshippers.

Among all the sacred temples around Taiwan, Yitien Temple in Sanchung City seems to be the only one that gives cats such freedom. Their “mom” who feeds them, Wang Hsiu-ying, says, “Cats, like people, are also a form of life. If they come to the temple, it’s because of destiny.” About 10 years ago, a female stray cat came to the temple to give birth to kittens. Following that, some people would pick up stray cats and bring them to the temple. Since there is free food and **shelter**, other felines came and settled down.

The temple employees who take care of cats say that the cats are more than welcome. One of them said, “The gods we are worshipping are loving gods, and they won’t mind!” Their love doesn’t differentiate between gods, humans and cats. Therefore, when cats **nestle** beside the goddess Matsuo, the General of Thousand Mile Sight or the General of Brilliant Hearing, temple employees do not see heresy. Instead they see the warmth and love given by the gods. Some worshippers bring their cats, dogs and other pets to the temple so that they could become acquainted with other animals of their kind. According to the employ-

ees, most felines and canines that visit the temple with their masters get along with temple cats very well; only when big dogs meet sensitive kitties do they need to enforce discipline.

The temple hasn’t received a single complaint from worshippers about the presence of cats in all the time they’ve been there, and most people seem happy to play with them. The kitties seem to exude a special magnetic field that calms down the **volatile** moods of people nowadays. It seems that the temple is now more worried that curious visitors might take the kitties home since they would make very good pets!

(LIBERTY TIMES, TRANSLATED BY TAIJING WU)

「姐姐不見了！」這是農曆三月媽祖誕辰進香外，近來三重義天宮另一件大事情，廟方人三五成群交耳討論，話語中透露如自家小孩走失般的焦慮。三重義天宮主祀媽祖，姐姐是廟方包養的貓咪中最具代表的「廟貓」，和牠一樣被廟方收留飼養的還有長著虎斑的YAMAHA、年紀小愛玩逗貓棒的圓圓、怕生的小保寶等共八隻貓咪。十餘年來，牠們以廟為家，如逛大街似地在寺廟內活動，平日餵養吃飽飽的牠們，不會覬覦供桌祭品，信徒也早已習慣貓咪存在，時可看到跪拜椅上香客捻香祝願，一旁貓咪躺臥睡覺，互不干擾的祥和畫面。

走遍全台，三重義天宮可能是唯一貓咪可自由進出神聖廟堂的廟宇，餵養牠們的貓母親、誦經團老師王秀英淡淡地說：「貓咪和人一樣也是生命，牠們來到廟裡也是有緣。」十餘年前一隻流浪母貓來到義天宮生下寶寶，之後善心的廟公陸續撿回流浪貓，再加上平日誦經堂辦公室放有貓飼料，群聚效應吸引貓咪成群。

對這群愛護小動物的廟方人員來說，廟內養貓只是提供「愛的服務」，他們說：「神明本身也是慈悲的，沒有禁忌的啦！」他們心中有愛，沒有神、人、貓之間的世俗規範界線，因此當貓咪依偎在媽祖婆神像旁，或鑽進千里耳衣服內取暖，站在順風耳肩膀上，他們看到的不是對神明不敬，而是神明的溫暖與愛。也有信眾會帶貓兒子、狗女兒等寵物家人來義天宮拜拜，和其他貓咪認識、社交。廟方人員笑說，一般貓狗都能相安無事，除非是大型狗遇見較敏感的貓咪，牠們才需要出面「調停」。

十餘年來，廟方不曾遇過信眾抱怨廟內有貓不宜，多數人的反應是找貓咪玩耍。貓咪似也與媽祖婆一樣，發揮撫慰人心的力量，廟方現在反而比較擔心因貓咪太可愛，被信眾抱回家了呢！

(自由時報記者鍾玉鑫)

流浪貓以廟為家 廟方香客愛相待

Temple cats are pictured in a series of undated photos at the Yitien Temple in Sanchung City.

PHOTOS: TAI DA-HSIANG, LIBERTY TIMES

台北縣三重市義天宮的廟貓。

照片：自由時報記者臺大翔攝



TODAY'S WORDS 今日單字

1. **presence** /ˈpreɪzns/ n.

存在 (cun2 zai4)

例: Kevin's presence at the meeting is sure to cause animosity.
(凱文現身會議無疑引發敵對。)

2. **shelter** /ˈʃeltə/ n.

庇護 (bi4 hu4)

例: The horses were given food and shelter in an old barn.
(老舊馬棚內的馬兒吃住無虞。)

3. **nestle** /ˈnesl/ v.

依偎 (yi1 wei1)

例: We noticed a puppy nestled by the fireplace.
(我們發現有隻小狗依偎在壁爐旁。)

4. **volatile** /ˈvɒlət/ adj.

易變的 (yi4 bian4 de5), 易惡化的 (yi4 e4 hua4 de5)

例: Many actors refused to work with Jack because of his volatile temper on set.
(傑克拍片時喜怒無常，很多影星都拒絕與他合作。)

