TRENDING

The Fascinating History & Meaning of Maneki-Neko: Why We All Need this Japanese Lucky Cat!

By bestfolkmedicine · 23/08/2021 · 3 min read



If you've ever visited Japan or other parts of Asia, you've probably seen those small, maneki-neko ornaments waving at you from window stores and wondered what they mean.

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Also known as the welcoming cat, money cat, and happy cat, this figurine is a symbol of good fortune for business. Today, it's recognizable worldwide, but its iconic charm dates back to the 17th century.

Many think it's Chinese because it's popular in Chinatowns. But this figurine actually appeared for the first time in the Edo period in Japan. Although its exact origins remain unknown, one of the earliest records of it is noted in 1852.

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What Is a Maneki-Neko?

This popular Japanese figurine is believed to bring fortune and good luck. It can be made from ceramic or plastic. It depicts a Japanese Bobtail cat with a paw raised in a beckoning gesture.

The paw also moves back and forth in a swinging motion. Some of these figurines may have motorized arms so that the waving can go all day long.

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Usually, you'll see them placed at the entrances of different businesses, including bars, restaurants, and even laundromats so that they entice customers to go inside.

In western culture, a beckoning gesture is sticking out the index figure out of a clenched fist and the palm facing the body. You move the finger repeatedly towards yourself, similar to a hook, to draw somebody nearer.

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On the other hand, in Japan, this inviting gesture is made by holding your hand up and palm down and repeatedly folding the fingers down and back.

That's why the maneki-neko's hand is faced down. If the left arm is raised, the maneki-neko is there to invite more customers whereas if the right paw is lifted, it's an invitation for money and wealth.

You can find this amazing figurine in various colors, depending on what type of fortune you're seeking.

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White is for happiness and purity, black is for safety from evil spirits, red is for protection from disease, gold is for prosperity and wealth, pink is for romance and love, blue is for success in

education, and green is for safety in your family.

The Fascinating Legend of the Japanese Lucky Cat

According to Japanese folklore, felines have protective powers and are a symbol of good fortune. The maneki-neko is a representation of one quite legendary cat.

Namely, the legend says that a poor, 17th-century monk who lived in a temple in Setagaya in Tokyo had a bobtail cat. They lived a quiet life until a lord samurai li Naotaka of the Hikone Domain came to visit.

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While on a hunt, a big storm erupted and he took shelter under a tree just outside the temple. While he was hiding, he noticed the cat of the monk with one paw up, looking as if it was calling him inside the temple.

As the samurai moved towards the cat, lightning struck the tree where he had just been standing under. He was grateful that the cat saved his life and became the temple's patron.

He helped repair it and build more space for the monk. When the cat passed away, a statue of it was made to commemorate it. The location is considered sacred to this day and this story is the reason why a lot of people believe that beckoning cats are a sign of good fortune.

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If you can't make it to Japan to purchase your lucky cat, visit the Lucky Cat Museum in Cincinnati, Ohio where you can find more than 2000 versions of this iconic cat.

Sources:

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