

# Japan's Feline Talisman

The *maneki-neko* 招き猫 is Japan's famous lucky symbol. It reveals the country's affinity for felines, while suggesting a trustful and welcoming attitude towards outsiders.

The key prop held by the cat is a gold coin. This currency was used in feudal times until the yen replaced it during the half-century reign of Emperor Meiji, who was responsible for sweeping reforms, radical Westernization, state adoption of a Shinto religion, wholesale destruction of Buddhist temples, and massive invasions across Asia until its loss in the second world war meant forfeiting claimed territories (including Korea, which was then divided between victors—Soviets north of the 38th parallel, U.S. forces south). The inscribed value is one million ryō (equivalent to ¥800,000 or \$8,000).

While the creature waves and appears to be friendly, it's crucial to bear in mind her role: beckoning forth a next client, much as one might expect to find in the doorway of a Yoshiwara brothel, the now defunct red-light district prominently located in Tokyo prior to the Meiji-era "filth" clampdowns.

