



7228 A bronze koro (incense burner) in the form of a cat. The head turning backwards and a collar tied around the neck.

Inscribed: Da-Ming, Xuande nianzhi (Made during the reign of Xuande emperor of the Great Ming Dynasty)

Japan 17th century Edo period

Dimensions: H. 11cm x W. 17cm D. 11cm (4½" x 6¾" x 4½")

Although this very unusual model of a seated cat bears an impressed reign mark of Xuande (1425-1435) it is almost certainly of Japanese manufacture.

Japan acquired not only the domestic cat (neko) from China but also superstitions about the animal, including the belief that it disguised itself in human, usually female, form. This tradition is reflected in Edo-period woodblock prints of a fierce and huge witch-cat being slain by Inumura Daikaku, a hero of the Hakkenden.

The only widespread emblematic use of the cat in Japanese design involves the maneki-neko, the enticing or beckoning cat. Originally this term referred to a cat's supposed ability to charm and bewitch passers-by. However, these negative connotations gave way to an auspicious interpretation, and today the maneki-neko symbolizes a merchant's success in attracting customers as well as house-holder's

financial good fortune. Such cats, usually crafted of papier-mâché or pottery, sit upright, with one paw lifted in a welcoming gesture. They are frequently portrayed with a charm hanging from the neck or a placard on the chest that has the three ideographs for ten million ryo. The ryo, is a monetary unit used during the Edo period and was equivalent to eighteen grams of gold.

