

日本の社会・生活 Q&A

< 角隠し / お色直し / 大仏 >

Q : Why do brides wear a white head dressing?

A : This part of the traditional wedding attire is called *tsuno-kakushi*, or "horn hider." Japanese have traditionally believed that a woman might grow mad from jealousy, sprout horns, and turn into a demon; this head dressing was originally a talisman to prevent such a thing from occurring.



Q : Why do brides change clothing during the wedding reception?

A : This is called *oiro-naoshi*, literally "color changing," when the bride is escorted out of the hall to change clothes and then reenters, occurring at least once, and often several times during the wedding reception. The origins of the custom date from the Nara period, when the new bride wore white for the first three days after marriage, then on the fourth day changed into clothing dyed in the color of her husband's household. At the beginning of the modern era the bride wore attire with the crest of her own family to the ceremony and there changed into clothing with the crest of her husband's family. Today's multiple changes, in which even the groom may change clothes, is little more than a pageant with little to do with tradition.

Q : Where is the biggest statue of the Buddha in Japan?

A : Completed in 752, the 15-meter-tall Daibutsu (literally, "big Buddha") at Todai-ji Temple in Nara could hold seventeen smallish people in its left hand. It is enclosed in what is believed to be the largest wooden edifice in existence. The construction of Todai-ji, its outer buildings, and the statues it houses are said to have required the labor of over 2 million workers.

< 仏像 / 招き猫 >

Q : Why is the Buddha depicted the way he is?

A : The Buddha is depicted in so many scrolls and statues in Japan that one tends to forget that for almost five centuries after his death no one even in his homeland sculpted or painted likenesses of him. It was only in the first century A.D. that images of the founder of Buddhism came to be produced. These depictions, which would set the tone for virtually all images of the



Buddha thereafter, reflected the Indian view of the characteristics of superior human beings. An "excellent" being was held to have large feet, a tiny curl of white hair in the center of the forehead, and specially curled hair.

Q : What is the meaning of the figurines of a cat with its paw raised?

A : Often made of pottery or papier-mâché, these *maneki-neko*, or "beckoning cats," are displayed in front of eating and drinking establishments. They appear to be using the Japanese gesture for beckoning and are posed so as to invite customers into their masters' shops.

Traditionally, a *maneki-neko's* left paw was raised above its ear, and sometimes the right paw held a small gold coin. One possible source for the origin of this figure is a ninth-century Chinese work which says that when a cat washes its face even to the point of cleaning behind its ear, a guest is going to appear.

A more recent Japanese story tells of a fishmonger who became ill and unable to work and subsequently fell into dire straits. A stray cat whom he had befriended and to whom he had often given leftovers appeared on his doorstep bearing a gold coin in its mouth, thus momentarily solving his financial needs.



Even a brief look at the *maneki-neko* in restaurant and tavern windows will reveal that not all have their left paws raised. The modern understanding of this is that the right paw beckons "good fortune," and the left paw beckons "customers." From the point of view of the shop, of course, the end result is the same.