

## THE PERSIAN, SIAMESE AND JAPANESE CATS

### C. Bess Higuchi

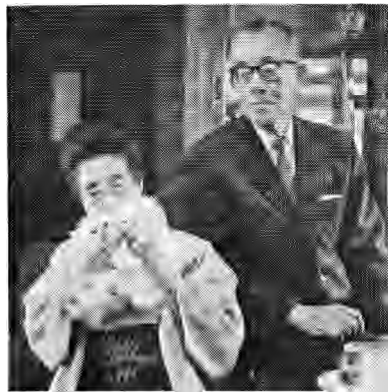
Looking over the 1969 CFA Yearbook, I was amazed in noticing the many cattery names which can so precisely be translated into the Japanese language. Beginning from our dear CFA Yearbook Editor, Mrs. Streetman's Cattery name is CHI-SAI which means "small or dainty," in Japanese\*. Just to mention a few others are, with the owner's names omitted: BON-SAI (dwarf-tree pot plant) ; GEISHA HOUSE (House of lady entertainers) ; HAIKU (17-syllabled Japanese poem) ; HANA-CHAN (Miss Hana, a girl's name) ; JOBA (horse riding) ; JO-DON (witticism) ; KAZOKU NEKO (family cat) ; KEMURI (smoke) ; MAIKO-SAN (dancing girls of Kyoto) ; NEKO (cat), etc. And one that was just out of this world was a name given to a beautiful Persian cat, KAWAII KOIBITO (My Darling Sweetheart) ! I wonder if these names were given because the owners had been in Japan at one time or another, or was it the oriental mysticism that had captured their fancy?



Mrs. Higuchi and Neko

### The Persian Cat:

The domestic cat has been in Japan for many centuries, but the arrival of pedigreed cats into Japan is very recent. As known to this day, the first Persian was introduced into Japan around the late 1930s, just prior to the Pacific War. Madame Kimiko Shirane, whose husband, the former Baron Matsusuke Shirane, Chief of the Imperial



Baron and Madame Shirane with two beloved Persian Kittens

Household Agency who handles the affairs of the Emperor and his Imperial Household, can properly be called the founder of Persian cats in Japan. One day Mrs. Ozaki, wife of the Governor of Tokyo, (who was also the Governor that sent the Japanese Cherry Trees planted along the Potomac River in Washington in 1912), invited Madame Shirane to visit Mr. Burnett, Military Attache at the American Embassy in Tokyo. And it was at this home that Madame Shirane saw her first Persian cat — a magnificent snow-white cat looking like a ball of soft fur, fluffing with

\* . . . and "House of Genius" in Burmese. (ed.)

elegance. A born ailurophile, Mrs. Shirane was instantly impressed at the beauty and rarity of this cat that she just couldn't get it out of her mind. Madame Shirane has had them since childhood, and her marriage to Baron Shirane was no obstacle in continuing her life with cats. Rather, it was she who convinced the Baron what a beautiful and reciprocating relation could be had between people and cats, and how rewarding it is to be owned by them ! When the Burnetts returned to the United States, they presented this cat to Madame Shirane as a souvenir and symbol of their good friendship.



Mme. Shirane and Persian

At around this same time, another American couple, Mr. and Mrs. Welbourne, visited Japan and the Shiranes found out that they too shared a mutual interest and, thereby, a very close friendship was fostered through their common hobby of cats. After the Welbournes returned to the United States, a Miss Yuriko Goo was sent to the United States on a friendship mission by the Japanese Government. Miss Goo stayed with the Welbournes, and when she returned to Japan, the Welbournes sent with her an 8-month-old White female Persian, and a 4-month-old Chinchilla. As a result of the long voyage across the Pacific by ship, the little Chinchilla became sick and died, but the White Persian survived and lived to a ripe age of seventeen.



Mme. Kimiko Shirane  
in her garden

There never was a time when Madame Shirane did not have at least fifteen or twenty cats in her household from childhood days, so she says, which ranged from strays to purebreds. The strays first loiter in her garden and then finding the Shiranes so generous and kind-hearted, the cats just make themselves at home with the Shiranes. She has been asked by many people, "Why do you always have so many cats ?" "Because," she says, "in my very busy daily life, it is this time that I spend with my cats that helps me to be myself and relax, and to forget that I am weary."

The Shiranes are also the backbones of the cat fanciers clubs in

Japan. But, of course, their interest is not limited to cats; they have a wide range of social activities. Baron Shirane received the First Order of the Sacred Treasure from the Emperor of Japan several years ago. And then in 1969, Baron Shirane received the Highest Civilian Decoration from Pope Paul VI of the Vatican. Going to Rome to accept the honor, the Shiranes took this opportunity and traveled around the world — Europe, America, Hawaii, etc. They have traveled the world over many times and have made many friends abroad. They have proven by their own experience how rewarding and what a fruitful life one can have, through the common interests in cats. Even now, they have about thirty cats in their household, each cat eager to share their happiness with the Shiranes.



Mrs. Higuchi, M. C., with Mme. Shirane and winner

### Siamese Cats in Japan:

It is presumed that the first Siamese cats were also introduced into Japan at around the same time as the Persians — that is, just prior to the Pacific War. When I visited the late Miss Bess Morse at her residence in Los Angeles, California, she mentioned that before the Pacific War broke out in 1941, somewhere perhaps around 1939, an employee from the Mainichi Newspaper in Tokyo visited her. When this person returned to Japan, Miss Morse presented him with a pair of Siamese cats to take back to Japan. But soon after his return, the war broke out and she lost contact of this friend. Tokyo was raided and devastated to ashes in the interim, and Miss Morse, to her lamenting sorrow, thought that perhaps the two Siamese cats had vanished with the owner. She never heard from him. Japan had no cat clubs and the Japanese had not heard of pedigreed cats in those days. If there were cat clubs then, no doubt these cats would have been registered and the club would certainly have information as to the whereabouts of the two Siamese. It is believed that this pair were the first known Siamese cats introduced into Japan, although regrettably, no record of it exists today.

The Siamese cats which are prevalent in Japan today were brought by the military families of the Occupation Forces, immediately after the termination of the War. They came with the American Servicemen as pets and as a part of his family. When the Servicemen's tours were completed and they returned to the continental United States, they left these cats with their Japanese friends, and the cur-

ning little felines wasted no time in paving their way into the subtle Japanese hearts. Their beauty, affection, and most of all, their intelligence and devotion were all that were needed to soothe and comfort the tired and weary Japanese souls.

### **The First Cat Club in Japan:**

In 1955 the first cat club was established in Japan. Baron and Madame Shirane played no small part in it. They were instrumental in getting the personnel for the administrative staff, to give the club "status" with prominent social figures to join, including members of Royalty and the Ambassador from Australia. In May 1956 the first cat show in Japan was held in Tokyo, in the exclusive Mitsukoshi department store which the Emperor frequents. Prince Mikasa,



**The mackerel Tabbies are still considered household pets in Japan. Judge Paul Raine admiring its beauty.**

brother of the present reigning Emperor, cut the ceremonial ribbon, and thus began the history of cat shows and the cat fancy boom in Japan. There were about twenty cats in this show, mostly Siamese and a handful of Persians. Having no knowledge of cat shows, the Japanese were in a dilemma as to what method of judging should be applied. Having had dog shows, they copied the rules of the dog show in its procedures. Several judges consulted with each other while judging simultaneously, and each owner held its own cat on a leash. No household pets were shown because the Japanese had convinced themselves that Japanese cats were not worthy at all. As it is Japanese nature, they have a tendency to praise anything "foreign" and the cat was no exception.

The Shiranes were also among the organizers of the first international cat shows, which have now become an annual event in Japan, held in the autumn. In 1963, the first CFA-type cat show was held at Camp Zama in the outskirts of Tokyo. And subsequently, a CFA All Breed Cat Judge has come to Japan to judge each year. With each cat show, the general public became more interested and more knowledgeable in cats. And this International Goodwill Cat Show has enhanced friendship between our two countries, through the medium of our gentle and soft-spoken feline friend. I am a firm believer that cats make the best Ambassadors with their distinguished charm and sweet purr-sonality !

### **The Japanese Cat:**

As compared to the Persians and Siamese Cats which came to Japan just recently, within the last 30 years, the Japanese cats have

been here for centuries. The Japanese cat is similar somewhat to the American shorthair, or shall we say, the American household pet. They come in practically all colors today. The average Japanese cat is medium in size, about 6-8 pounds, with larger and smaller cats as you would see in any other breed. It is said that the first cats that stepped on Japanese soil hundreds of years ago were pure black, then came the pure whites and then a mixture of the two. In later years when cats were brought from Southeast Asia, this mixture produced the present **mi-ke** (tri-color)



The Thinking Cat

cats. "Meekay" means "three fur" thus referring to the three colors of this cat — black, orange and white. The black is a brilliant black, the white a snowflake white and the orange a distinct crimson reddish orange. This **mi-ke** cat is said to be the cat most typical of Japan and is the cat that has been acclaimed and most praised by the judges who have come to Japan to judge for us. The **mi-ke** is a beautiful specimen and would remind one of the oriental philosophy **wabi** or **sabi** which means "peace, tranquility, serenity," and possesses that discernible personality befitting to the Orient. As compared to the extroversive and limelight-lover Siamese cat, the Japanese cat is introvesive by nature. But he will answer if spoken to, and will even carry on a conversation with you if he likes you. Also, as all cats are clean, the Japanese cat is extremely fastidious.

As there is a cat boom in Japan for foreign and unusual cats, there is a growing interest in Japanese cats in the United States.



Judge Lynne Beck thrilled over a bobtail Japanese mike kitten.

Japanese cats are being exported to the United States, just as Persians and Siamese cats are coming to Japan. Who started the excitement of these Japanese cats? The CFA judges who have come to Japan to judge the shows were greatly impressed with the fine-textured little Japanese cats; the **mi-kes** in particular. They were fascinated and warmly touched by the innocent-looking eyes and its dexterous and charming personality. Also appropriate credit must go to Judy Crawford, who worked ardently to do something for and with the Japanese **mi-ke**. Miss Crawford originally came to Japan with the military forces during the early Occupation Days. She has had cats in her household ever since. By nature, like the Shiranes, Judy cannot tolerate seeing an aban-

done cat in the streets or loitering in her own front porch. She would take them in, give them a bath and bedding and provide food for them. During her almost twenty years of residence in Japan, she has experimented in breeding the various colored cats and has come up with some beautiful mi-kes. Judy at times had over fifty cats in her house. There were unfortunate days when cruel nature would conduct a mass abortion. But Miss Crawford never gave up her untiring efforts to elevate the Japanese cat.



Miss Judy Crawford with one of her cats at a cat show.

Then one day a miracle happened. A lady in Virginia, Mrs. Elizabeth Freret, whom Mr. Winn, C.F.A. attorney, introduced me to at the Madison Square Garden Cat Show in 1967, wrote me and mentioned that she desired to import some Japanese cats from Japan, after seeing a beautiful Japanese bobtail at a pet shop in Maryland, which was brought back by an Army family who had been stationed in Japan. I immediately contacted Judy. And, in 1968, trembling with joy that finally someone is taking interest in what has been her burning desire for many years, Judy sent three of her Japanese cats to Mrs. Freret in Virginia. The mi-ke was named Madame Butterfly, Richard is a red and white male, and Prunello was the name given to the unusual cinnamon colored tabby female. After an elapse of one year, Butterfly had her first litter of five kittens, all with short tails. Amazed at the whole litter of five kittens all having short tails,



Judging a Japanese mi-ke (tri-color).

Mrs. Freret decided to study the authenticity and genetics of the bobtails. She was especially impressed by the bobtail because of its distinct head and body type. In 1969, another shipment of eight Japanese cats was sent to Mrs. Freret in order that she may have ample outcross for her project. Early in 1970 four beautiful Japanese cats, three of which were mi-kes were sent to Mrs. Lynne Beck of Chicago, Illinois. Judy Crawford, before returning to the United States to settle in Seattle,

Washington, sent approximately forty Japanese cats including several bobtails, prior to her departure from Japan.

Thanks to the genuine interest shown by the cat breeders in the United States and the CFA judges who have come to Japan, and the extended efforts of Mrs. Freret in exhibiting at various cat shows in the United States, the popularity of the Japanese cat is flowering. Likewise, the various breeds of cats in America are becoming most popular in Japan. It reminds me of President Nixon's recent State of Union message where he said, "America and Japan as partnership serve as the linch-pin for peace in the Pacific." It is my firm belief that as cat fanciers, our common interest in cats serve as a "linch pin for better understanding between the American heart and the Japanese heart."

#### Editor's Note

I had the pleasant experience of visiting with Mrs. Higuchi in Japan on my vacation and met some of her cat-owning and exhibitor friends. The Japan shows will be held in September and naturally Bess is very busy with plans. Many U. S. Service personnel are stationed there. The Allan Baths formerly of California with Conalan Cattery, are still very committed to their cat fancying; Tokyo fanciers are all quite enthusiastic and dedicated, with Bess an interested mentor and leader.