

To Market, to Market

Photo and story by Lucy Birmingham

A preference for fresh foods and a lack of storage space prompt most Japanese to shop daily. Neighborhood specialty stores have traditionally been the norm, but supermarkets which offer the convenience of one-stop shopping are growing in popularity.

A friendly neighborhood shopkeeper proudly displays *matsutake* mushrooms, a delicacy only available during the fall. Worn proudly, the number on his hat is the vendor's wholesale market registration number.

The neighborhood *tofu* shop offers an interesting in-

sight into old Japan. *Tofu* and *tofu*-related foods remain an essential part of the daily Japanese diet even though most of the soybeans used are now imported. Made fresh in the early morning hours, *tofu* comes in various shapes and sizes, grilled, fried, and plain.

Vendors' cries of "*irasshaimase, irasshaimase*" (welcome, welcome!) reverberate throughout the large covered market arcade, long a favorite place for Japanese to shop. The food is always fresh and the price is right. Each shop is individually owned and typically specializes in one type of food.



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At a large "Western-style" supermarket, a housewife shops for food while carrying her baby on her back the traditional Japanese way. Small hand-held baskets are typically used rather than the large carts found in the United States.

Japanese department stores have entire floors devoted to food. Usually in the basement, these floors are a gourmet's delight, with everything from raw ingredients to ready-to-eat dishes. Just as in a good market, individual sections are privately owned and promote their goods vigorously. ●

