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**Shopping Japanese - in London**

By ERIK IPSENAUG. 27, 1993

For years Westerners have heard hoary tales of how expensive it is to live and shop in Japan. On Saturday morning at 10 A.M. Londoners can experience it themselves when a vast new Japanese shopping center opens its doors in north London.

Everything from 1.5-liter bottles of ready-made Japanese teas selling for £4.99 (about $7.50) each to small (200 gram) shrink-wrapped bags of boiled lotus root at £2.79 are on offer.

Executives at the 109,000 square-foot (10,000 square-meter) Yaohan Plaza shopping center in Brent, concede that such prices may put many off. Their primary mission, however, is to serve the needs of people presumably inured to such pecuniary horrors - the 30,000 Japanese expatriates living in and around London. For them the experience will be costly but the cultural reimmersion near total.

Beneath the store's ornamental blue-tile roof lies an experience billed as akin to "stepping into Japan." With shops ranging from Japanese hairdressers and travel agents to toy stores and bakers, there is much to comfort the homesick Japanese. "You might wonder why we need a Japanese bakery," said Miyuki Hazzard, Yaohan's publicity manager.

Although she explains that Japanese bread is "very different," the store's emphasis on all things Japanese knows some bounds. European luxury goods like Liberty scarves and Godiva chocolates also get prominent displays.

In the liquor section bottles of Jim Beam bourbon and cans of Fosters lager compete for shelf space with no less than 70 different varieties of sake. Originally advertised as offering 100 different brands of sake, the store's managers scaled that back at the last minute. "It is still quite a lot," said Hazzard defensively.

"A lot" also aptly describes the 40 different kinds of miso lining the shelves, not to mention the six rows of sandals petite enough for female Japanese feet and too small, we are assured, to be found anywhere else in the land of relatively leviathan Anglo-Saxons.

For Yaohan, opening stores in the West is old hat. The company that began life as a mom-and-pop grocery in Japan in 1928, grew to become an international distribution conglomerate in the 1980s and moved its headquarters to Hong Kong two years ago. The company opened its first U.S. store in 1985, and today it has eight there. It aims to have 20 by 1997.

For Yaohan's British employees the company is anything but business as usual. Of that they are reminded every morning at 9 A.M. sharp. At that hour Yaohan's 190 staffers, from the managing director to the lowliest floor sweeper join hands on the topmost level of the three-story parking garage. There beneath London's cloudy skies they sing the company song, shout the company slogans and recite their own individual pledges.

**"Doing the Yaohan salute [clenched right fist extended at arm's length, clenched left fist on hip] and shouting out Yaohan slogans might sound a bit militaristic," noted Masoud Golshani-Shirazi, the store's sole British manager. "But it is all done in the right spirit, with a sense of humor."**

**HE admitted that even in recession-weary Britain, the company did have difficulty signing up employees. Early on the sensible decision was made to seek those with what he terms "open minds," from among 3,500 job applicants.**

Even Yaohan's local suppliers have had to toe the line. The local cab company the store has contracted to ferry goody-laden customers back to their abodes has not only hired a Japanese speaking dispatcher, but has laid on female drivers as well to serve the store's female customers.

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