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TEACHING TUESDAY

MAMACHARI

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Bicycles are a ubiquitous and convenient form of travel for Japanese people and are used for various purposes ranging from commuting to grocery shopping. It is common to see cyclists on roads and sidewalks throughout Japan carrying everything from groceries to umbrellas to their own children. In many big cities, there are large parking areas outside of train stations and shopping centers solely devoted to bicycles.

Unlike in the United States, where mountain and road bicycles are more common, the most common bicycle in Japan is called the *mamachari* (ママチャリ). The *mamachari* features a step through frame with one of the support bars lowered to allow for any kind of clothing to be worn while riding. Some are even specially made for toting around young ones with extra car seat-like bicycle seats installed on the front or back. In addition, electric assist and balance controlled *mamachari* are gaining popularity, as they allow parents to easily—and safely—zip up hills with their children in tow.

The origins of the *mamachari* date back to the 1950s when a bicycle called ‘Smart Lady’ was introduced specifically to cater to female riders who were inconvenienced by the frame of bicycles at the time. However, this type of bicycle—with a basket attached to it and an easy step-through frame—was so popular that it ultimately transformed Japan’s bicycle society as a whole. Whether young or old, male or female, business person or stay-at-home parent *mamachari* are considered an economical and practical choice for people in Japan.