

Omi Merchants

Omi merchants were traveling traders from the province of Omi (now Shiga Prefecture) who made a name for themselves throughout Japan between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. They established enterprises in cities and towns far from home and built up a strong reputation for their shrewd business sense, hard work, and spirit of fair dealing. They also contributed to the modernization of the Japanese economy during the Meiji era (1868–1912), and many of the businesses they started developed into corporations that still operate today.

Merchants from different areas of Omi Province traded in goods specific to their area and were active in different regions. Hachiman merchants typically dealt in mosquito nets, tatami surface matting, and hemp cloth products. They were among the first to open stores in Edo (now Tokyo) and also took part in the development of Ezo (Hokkaido). Some Hachiman merchants traveled as far as Siam (now Thailand) and Annam (Vietnam).