

The Merchant's Heritage of Being Proactive, Agile, and Rational

Chubei Itoh I was an extremely progressive business leader. The “store rule” clearly demonstrates his efforts to overcome old-fashioned practices with state-of-the-art management practices. These included a system of meetings, Western bookkeeping, the hiring of university graduates, and the use of shipping insurance.

Rather than sticking stubbornly to precedent or being swept away by the tides of the times, he followed his own senses as a merchant and perceived the essence. His management philosophy emphasized proactive implementation of whatever was determined to be rational. This “proactive, agile, and rational” philosophy has been passed forward over the years. One example was the Company’s concentrated effort to strengthen business in the non-resource sector quickly around 2013, when it anticipated that the “commodities super cycle” was coming to a close. Other practices introduced on the basis of “whether it leads rationally to sustainable increases in corporate value” included human resource strategies such as health management, the establishment of nomination and remuneration systems in the corporate governance system, and management’s decision not to formulate long-term management plans based on the “idealistic” theory.

Merchants Upholding the Unwavering Ideal —“*Sampo-yoshi*”

The merchants of Ohmi followed a business philosophy of “*Sampo-yoshi*” (good for the seller, good for the buyer, and good for society). This philosophy is said to be rooted in Chubei Itoh I’s personal motto, “Trade is a compassionate business. It is noble when it accords with the spirit of Buddha by profiting those who sell and those who buy and supplying the needs of the society.” Doing business outside their own lands, to some extent the merchants of Ohmi were always considered as outsiders. To be permitted to engage in economic activity outside their own lands, the merchants always strove to be humble and contribute to local communities, and they naturally cultivated a spirit of putting the customer first. Chubei Itoh I’s “store rule” called for net profit to be evenly split three ways—to the head family, to the accumulation of stores, and to employees. The fundamental thought of “*Sampo-yoshi*” is relevant to today’s idea of Creating Shared Value (CSV), recognizing a company as a “vessel of society” that aligns its interests with those of stakeholders and shares the profits it generates. “*Sampo-yoshi*” is an unwavering ideal that underpins the Company’s daily business.

ITOCHU’s client industries are having to face unprecedented change, prompted by two factors. First, the world is undergoing vigorous digital transformation that is being described as the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Second, we



must live with COVID-19. Surmounting the challenges of this business environment will require the understanding of “what sets ITOCHU apart,” emphasizing values for which all can relate, and further strengthening bonds of solidarity throughout the Group. In line with these efforts, in April 2020 the Company revised the corporate mission to “*Sampo-yoshi*” which has sustained the ITOCHU Group’s development for more than 160 years, and positioned the corporate message of “I am One with Infinite Missions” as its Guideline of Conduct.

By encouraging each individual employee to consider their own conduct as they go about their business, ITOCHU aims to simultaneously enhance sustainable corporate value and resolve social issues.

Sources of Strengths Deriving from the Way of the Merchant

Consistent corporate behavior based on the unwavering ideal has underpinned ITOCHU’s strengths over the years. During Japan’s period of rapid economic growth, the Company kept pace with the changes in the country’s industry structure, expanding into the non-textile sectors and diversifying its business. However, ITOCHU lacked the heavy industry connections, unlike the general trading companies associated with the former *zaibatsu* industrial groups. As a result, we concentrated our strengths on the non-resource sector, centering on areas of expertise such as food, clothing, and housing. Different from the merchants of Osaka and Edo, which operated out of free-standing stores, the merchants of Ohmi had to peddle their wares on foot. This cultivated a pioneering spirit and the independence of developing trade on their own, or “individual capabilities.” Even after ITOCHU diversified its business, it continued to adhere to these “individual capabilities,” carrying forward especially in the food, clothing, and housing sectors, where the number of customers is large and individual transactions are small. In 1972, we became the first major general trading company recognized as a friendly trading company by Chinese