

【The Highway and Post-Town System】

In the early seventeenth century, the Tokugawa Shogunate (1603–1868) established a network of highways known as the *gokaidō*, or “Five Routes,” which connected the outer provinces of Japan to the capital city of Edo (now Tokyo). The Ikedaya inn faced the Mikuni Road, which ran through Echigo province (now Niigata prefecture) to the Sea of Japan and was an unofficial branch road of the *gokaidō*. The Mikuni Road served officials from the Sado Island gold mines and daimyo making their mandatory biennial trips to the capital. The traveling daimyo and their large retinues were a boon to the economies of post towns like Mitsumata, which had lodging for travelers and temporary storage facilities for goods. These towns also served as staging posts for horses, which transported travelers and goods, and for foot messengers, who sped the transmission of written communications.

Mitsumata, the largest and most prosperous post town in this area, had one inn (*honjin*) that was authorized for use by high-ranking travelers, and three secondary inns (or *wakihonjin*) for use on a rotational basis when the *honjin* was occupied. The *wakihonjin* also acted as lodgings for general travelers and merchants. The heads of the families operating these four inns were the town headmen, who policed the area, collected taxes, and guarded the checkpoint. The checkpoint in Mitsumata was located near Yagisawa Kannondō Hall. Strict inspections were conducted there to ensure that no specially designated local products were transported to other domains. Today, the only surviving inn of the four is Ikedaya, a former *wakihonjin*.

After the abolition of the official post-town system in 1872, traffic along the Mikuni Road decreased, patronage of the *honjin* and *wakihonjin* inns dropped off, and the town of Mitsumata languished.