

***Funayado* (Shipping Agencies)**

As Mitarai's port developed, local merchants began to establish *funayado*, businesses that provided lodging and entertainment to ships' officers while their ships were in port. As domestic sea trade grew during the Edo period (1603–1867), *funayado* also began offering additional services as shipping agencies that restocked vessels with provisions, supplied new crew members, and provided weather reports. They also assisted in negotiating trade deals or finding buyers for the ships' goods, essentially taking on the role of wholesale intermediaries. One of these *funayado*, called Wakamoto-ya, was previously owned by the Kimura family and now belongs to the city of Kure. In 1994, it was designated a municipal Tangible Cultural Property.

During the late Edo period, some *funayado* came to specialize in serving the ships owned by the daimyo families of individual domains, which required a special permit from that family. Today, only three of the buildings used by these exclusive *funayado* remain: Wakamoto-ya, which served the Ōzu and Uwajima domains (now part of Ehime Prefecture); Takehara-ya, which served the Nobeoka domain (now part of Miyazaki Prefecture); and Waki-ya, which served the Kagoshima and Kumamoto domains. When lodging at one of these exclusive *funayado*, the members of these illustrious families would announce their presence by hanging their domain's banner above the entrance.

Around the same time, the wealth and power of the merchant class began to surpass that of lower-ranking samurai families. Aristocratic families typically received tax revenues in the form of rice, and they were therefore strongly affected by the decreasing price of rice during the late Edo period. In contrast, merchants were growing more affluent and, consequently, more influential. Outfitting and financing a trade ship was an expensive process, and some samurai families had difficulty bearing those costs. In response, the merchants running the *funayado* began offering a new service: loans to their ruling-class clients.