

Sado Magistrate's Office

Sado's mineral resources were a great source of power for the Tokugawa family, the dynasty of shoguns who ruled Japan during the Edo period (1603–1868). The Tokugawa family took control of Sado in 1600, just as the Aikawa gold rush was getting underway. When the Tokugawa shogunate was formally established in 1603, the shogun wasted no time in establishing formal administration of Sado and the island's gold mines. The island was put under the management of a magistrate named Ōkubo Nagayasu (1545–1613). The following year, a spacious residential compound was built for Ōkubo and the magistrates who would succeed him.

From this large compound, the magistrate governed Sado and oversaw the mining and minting operations. The compound burned down several times during the centuries since its construction, and in 2000, Aikawa gathered a team of specialists to recreate several of the wooden structures as they had existed in 1859. The designs were based on old drawings and written records, along with archeological evidence. The rebuilt area includes the compound's main gatehouse, certain administrative and judicial facilities, storage buildings, and an ore-dressing workshop.

A notable feature of the central building complex is a pair of enclosed courtyards where the magistrate and his deputies presided over local court cases. Petitioners and criminal suspects knelt in the yards below while the officials who pronounced judgment sat above, looking down from raised tatami-mat rooms.

Visitors can try lifting a 41-kilogram slab of lead, one of 172 rough oblong slabs that were excavated from the southern side of the complex. Lead was (and still is) used to extract gold and silver through a process called cupellation, and the slabs were kept on hand for this reason. Local records suggest that two stockpiles of lead had been buried for safekeeping in the late 1600s, but when workers at the complex went to dig them up in 1718, some of the lead went undiscovered. The slabs were finally discovered over two centuries later, in 1995.

Ōkubo Nagayasu and Sado Noh

Ōkubo was appointed the first administrator of Sado, but unlike many appointed officials of the time, he did not come from a samurai family. His father and grandfather were performers of *sarugaku*, a comic predecessor to Noh theater. But Ōkubo had managerial talents that brought him to the attention of powerful patrons, including Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543–1616),

the first of the Tokugawa shoguns. Ieyasu put him in charge of developing several gold and silver mines around Japan.

Despite his magisterial duties, Ōkubo stayed connected to his theatrical roots. In 1605, he had a Noh stage built on the island and invited a troupe of actors and musicians from the mainland to perform. Noh's popularity spread from there: at its peak, there were some 200 stages on Sado, most of them attached to Shinto shrines. Of these, 34 stages remain today.