## *Tatara* Ironmaking Families in Okuizumo

During the Edo period (1603–1867), Japan was divided into hundreds of domains governed by samurai lords called “daimyo.” To bolster his domain’s economy, each daimyo often granted individual families exclusive operating rights in a given industry. In exchange, the domain received a portion of the profits.

Beginning in the early 1700s, all the ironworks in Okuizumo and its surrounding area came to be managed by nine families. Although it had once been possible for any landowner to engage in iron production, in 1726 these families were officially licensed as the sole ironworks proprietors (*tesshi*) of the Matsue domain, which fell under the governance of daimyo Matsudaira Nobusumi (1698–1731).

Each family was responsible for overseeing all aspects of the *tatara* ironmaking process: gathering iron sand, managing forests to ensure a reliable supply of charcoal, recruiting skilled furnace operators, and arranging shipments of smelted metal. Three of the four wealthiest *tatara* families (the Sakurai, Itohara, and Bokura) lived within the boundaries of present-day Okuizumo, while the Tanabe family lived nearby, in what is now Unnan. Today, many of these families’ private estates and gardens are open to the public.