Egawa Tarozaemon Hidetatsu was born as the second son of Egawa Hidetake in 1801 at their Nirayama residence, located in Tama-gun, Kanagawa. He was a true man of culture for his time, having studied practically all of the military arts - including swordsmanship, spear-fighting, equestrian arts, and gunnery - in addition to painting, calligraphy, poetry, and the Chinese classics. He even learned surveying techniques from explorer Rinzo Mamiya. His elder brother Hidetora died of illness in 1821. As the new heir of the Egawa family, Hidetatsu was officially appointed as the governor of Nirayama in 1835, succeeding the name Tarozaemon as a family tradition and adopting the pseudonym Tannan. As governor, Tannan personally took the initiative to adopt a policy of simplicity and frugality in order to improve a tight financial situation, with the residents of his domain affectionately referring to him as “Egawa the great reformer.” He also had a clear vision for the future of Japan and put great effort into advancing the country's naval defense policies, while also devoting himself to the construction of the Nirayama reverberatory furnaces and the Shina-gawa battery islands.

Construction of the Nirayama Reverberatory Furnaces

A reverberatory furnace is a smelting furnace used for casting cannons and the like by melting down metals. Construction of the Nirayama reverberatory furnaces began toward the end of the Edo period at the suggestion of the Nirayama. As the only remaining example of a reverberatory furnace that actually operated in Japan, the furnaces are a precious piece of industrial modernization heritage. The Nirayama reverberatory furnaces were constructed around 160 years ago at the end of the Edo period - a tumultuous time - and operated as part of a cutting-edge industrial facility at the time. Even today, they are considered a symbolic presence by the residents of Izuokushi City, treasured by all as a source of inspiration.

Late-Edo Governor Egawa Tannan: a visionary who was passionate about ensuring the defense of Japan

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World Events

- 1801: Tannan is born
- 1813: Tannan becomes local governor and succeeds the Tarozaemon title
- 1821: Hidetora dies of illness
- 1835: Opens Nirayama-juku Academy
- 1837: First Opium War (1840)
- 1842: Shokasonjuku Academy Opened (1842)
- 1853: Arrival of Perry's Fleet in Uraga
- 1854: Japan-US Treaty of Peace and Amity
- 1855: Revises Russian ship Diana upon receiving news of its stranding
- 1856: Yoshida Shoin Inherits Shokasonjuku Academy
- 1857: Ermine Tokai Earthquake
- 1858: Ansei Tokai Earthquake
- 1861: Tannan dies
- 1863: Construction of reverberatory furnaces completed by son Hidetoshi
- 1864: Permitted to give instruction on Western gunnery
- 1867: Farmer-soldiers are necessary
- 1868: Revolution

Father of the Nirayama Reverberatory Furnaces

Egawa Tarozaemon Hidetatsu (Tannan)

Mortars

The Nirayama reverberatory furnaces were used to successfully cast four iron 18-pounder cannons, but mass production was not possible due to a lack of materials. As a result, production came to include a variety of bronze artillery as well. A replica iron cannon is currently on display at the site.

Iron 24-Pounder Cannon (replica, right)
Bronze 20-Duim Mortar (left)

Farmer-Soldiers & Commands

Tannan called on the shogunate from early on to implement a system of farmer-soldiers in which farmers would learn about gunnery and military arts so that they might provide assistance during times of emergency. Tannan translated drill commands such as "Attention, forward dress!" and "Right, face!" from Dutch into easy-to-understand Japanese.

Shinagawa Battery Islands

Near the end of the Edo period, artificial islands outfitted with cannons were built near Shinagawa to protect Edo from attacks by foreign fleets. These islands made up the Shinagawa Battery. Under order of the shogunate, Tannan was responsible for the construction of these batteries. Of the six batteries completed, two remain today. Battery No. 3 is currently maintained as a public park.

Self-Portrait (Egawa Bunko Foundation Collection)
Nirayama woven hat designed by Tannan (Egawa Bunko Foundation Collection)