

Yasugi and the Founding of Unpaku Steel

The rapid industrialization of Japan during the Meiji era (1868–1912) required large amounts of iron and steel. As more and more of this demand was met using imported Western furnaces, owners of *tatara* ironworks feared they would be unable to compete. In 1899, in a collaborative effort to build on the long tradition of ironmaking in the region and improve *tatara* technology, a group of five entrepreneurs in Yasugi founded Unpaku Steel, Ltd. In addition to producing iron and steel, the company was an authorized broker for smaller ironworks in Okuizumo.

Steelworks with imported furnaces could produce steel in larger volumes, but they were less competitive in the production of high-grade metals. Engineers at Unpaku Steel developed more efficient and cost-effective methods for producing these high-grade metals, which became their market niche.

The developments at Unpaku Steel eventually led to the creation of Yasugi Specialty Steel (YSS), which is renowned for its hardness and durability. This steel is particularly suited for products that demand precision and uniformity, such as steel tools, razor blades, ball bearings, and electronic equipment. As the production center of this new material, Yasugi became known throughout the country as a “steel town.”