

Modernization of the Port

The main economic activity of Tsuchizaki until the late 1800s centered around its role as a port for *kitamaebune* merchants, who transported goods for trade along the Sea of Japan. Social and political change brought about by the Meiji Restoration of 1868, however, triggered a shift to large-scale industrial manufacturing. The new imperial government repealed Japan's closed-border policy and eagerly imported Western technologies in pursuit of industrialization. In Tsuchizaki, this meant the expansion of nearby oil fields and the modernization of the port.

By the early 1900s, sailing ships had been replaced by steamships, which were larger, faster, and better at navigating rough seas, including the stormy waters of the Sea of Japan. However, Tsuchizaki's relatively shallow harbor could not accommodate large steamships and their cargo had to be unloaded onto smaller boats before being brought ashore, slowing down work at the port. To address this, local business leaders cooperated to build a wharf for steamships in 1902. The facilities were expanded over time, and

when Tsuchizaki was incorporated into the city of Akita in 1941, the name of the port was changed from Tsuchizaki Port to Akita Port.

A major oil refinery was built at the port to process the petroleum extracted from nearby oil fields. Akita Prefecture was one of the largest oil-producing regions in Japan in the first half of the twentieth century, accounting for nearly 70 percent of domestic output from 1945 to 1955.

Given the importance of oil for transportation and manufacturing, the refinery made Tsuchizaki a target during World War II (1939–1945). In the closing days of the war, an air raid caused extensive damage to the port.