

Asahikawa in the Twentieth Century

The town of Asahikawa grew rapidly in the early twentieth century, when the Imperial Japanese Army's 7th Division moved to the town from Sapporo in 1901. Along with some 10,000 troops, migrants from other parts of Japan arrived to work in support industries, infrastructure development, and services for the military base.

A fledgling sake industry emerged to meet the needs of the growing community, and by the 1920s, some 15 breweries were producing sake from locally grown rice. Furniture production also expanded quickly due to abundant lumber and skilled carpenters who initially arrived to support the army, making it a prominent industry. Asahikawa became a city in 1922 and flourished as the hub of northern Hokkaido with rail lines linking the city with Hokkaido's western and eastern coasts, government offices, and schools.

World War II severely impacted the city, as food, materials, and other necessities were directed towards the war effort. Successive conscriptions took men away from the farms, and even children had to tend the crops. Many residents grew their own vegetables in vacant lots and parks to supplement their rations.

The economic boom in the 1950s helped revitalize Asahikawa, with increased demand for produce, construction materials, wood pulp, and furniture for Japan's postwar reconstruction. The city is now the second largest in Hokkaido by population, after Sapporo.