

## Nobeoka: A castle town with two lords

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Kyushu area has rich urban cultures because it has relatively higher density of population. The northern part of Miyazaki Prefecture is an exception due to geographical constraints and difficulty of communication. If you visit Nobeoka (延岡) city by rail from the north, you will see mountain villages with a sparse population for a long stretch of time. It takes more than one hour to get to Nobeoka from Saiki city (the next town) and about three hours and a half from Kokura station.

In spite of the difficulties, the city situated at the mouth of Gokase River (五ヶ瀬川) has developed into a large city with a population of more than 120 thousands. In Edo era, there was a castle of a feudal domain. Nobeoka was a local center while the domain was small. In Meiji era, Miyazaki (宮崎) city became the prefectural capital, the importance of Nobeoka declined. The turning point was the opening of an ammonia plant of Japan Nitrogenous Fertilizer Company (日本窒素肥料株式会社 *Nippon Chisso Hiryo Kabushiki Kaisha*) in 1923. The hydro power plant located on the upper reaches of Gokase River and open of the railway line to Fukuoka Prefecture have contributed to the location selection. Later, this plant was separated and established as an independent company, Asahi Kasei Corporation (旭化成株式会社). Asahi Kasei concentrated various sections and its suppliers in Nobeoka. Asahi Kasei has such a powerful influence on Nobeoka city that the city has been called the “business castle town”.

When I got off the Nobeoka station, Imayama mountain (今山) was in sight. There have been Imayama Daishi temple and Imayama Hachiman Shrine since 8<sup>th</sup> century. A shopping arcade is in front of the gate. After I crossed Gokase river, I entered the center of the castle town. Nobeoka castle is located in a hill between Gokase river and Ōse river (大瀬川), and the castle town at the early stage is surrounded by the two rivers and the castle. The nucleus of the city is still located in this area and there are the city office, financial organs, museums and pubs.

When you look at administrative district, a small green mountain will be in sight. The mountain is the castle remains. No structures of the castle except stone walls and the north gate remain. I finally finished climbing the mountain and enjoyed the view of the two rivers and the factory group with a large chimney.

Actually the environment where Nobeoka city is placed is not good. The number of workers of Asahi Kasei has been decreasing for about 50 years. Population and commercial facilities have relocated to suburb. In the early 2000's, some large scale retailers in centers closed successively. However, I cannot help expecting birth of the new generation in the beautiful city.

延岡の位置 Location



延岡城跡からの眺め(筆者撮影)  
The view from the castle



中心市街地 The central district



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