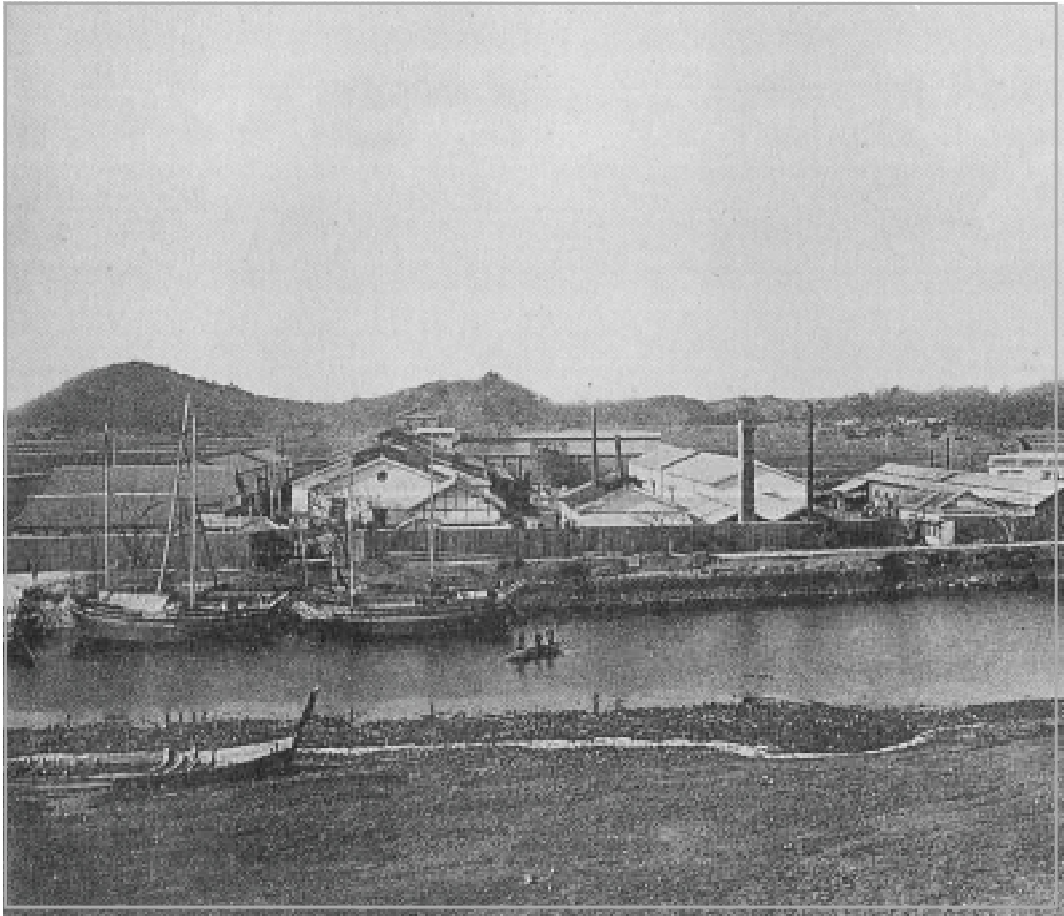


#### 4. WHAT KIND OF COMPANY WAS CHISSO?



**The former Chisso factory constructed in the Meiji period**

Chisso began as a hydroelectric power company in the late Meiji period. (1908) It built a carbide factory in Minamata, using the electricity, and before long began producing chemical fertilizers, becoming one of Japan's major chemical companies.

As Chisso grew so did Minamata. Its population increased, and Minamata became one of the leading industrial cities in Kumamoto prefecture. A former factory director once served as mayor, and Chisso's influence on the region and the residents' dependence on Chisso grew.

In addition to chemical fertilizers, Chisso produced acetic acid, vinyl chloride and the plasticizers that were necessary in their production. Chisso became one of the companies that made possible postwar Japan's rapid economic growth.

Since the Taisho period (1912-1926), pollution of the ocean by the wastewater from the Chisso factory had occasionally become a problem. However, from 1932 to 1968 the company continued to use inorganic mercury as a catalyst when producing acetaldehyde.

It was used to make acetic acid and the plasticizers, and in the course of production methyl mercury as a by-product was discharged into the sea until 1966 virtually without treatment.

Even after Chisso knew the factory wastewater was the cause of Minamata disease, it did not suspend its operations. In the judgement in the first Minamata disease trial, this type of negligent corporate morality was severely criticized.