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I am Itoh Hirobumi. I was born in 1841 at Tsukari in Yamato-cho, now a part of Hikari City as the first son of Risuke Hayashi, farmer.

My name was changed to Itoh when my father was adopted by Naouemon Itoh, a low-ranked samurai. I moved to Hagi when I was 8 years old. I studied very hard and became one of the students of Yoshida Shoin at Shoka-Sonjuku.

It was the times that foreigners should be excluded from Japan. I was also a follower of this thought and joined the group headed by Takasugi Shinsaku to burn British Consulate under construction at Shinagawa.

Going abroad was also prohibited under the Tokugawa Government's National Isolation Policy.

However, Choshu Clan Government realized that Japan could learn from western countries. So, they decided secretly to send 5 young samurai including myself, called "Choshu Five" later, to study advanced technology and navy in the United Kingdom in 1863, for the future of Japan after the success in exclusion of foreigners. This was 5 years before the Meiji Restoration.

Professor Alexander Williamson of University College London took care of us during our stay in London. All of us stayed first at his house and studied at his Chemistry class. He arranged study tours to various factories to show the latest technology. Everything was new and exciting.

Inoue and I, however, returned to Japan in 6 months after we arrived in London, because the newspaper reported that the allied fleet of 4 countries planned to attack Choshu. We came to know the strong power of those countries and realized already that our thought of exclusionism was wrong, so we tried hard to persuade Choshu Clan Government not to fight against them, but in vain.

We, Choshu Five contributed to laying the foundation for the modernization of Japan after our return during Meiji Era.

I became the first Prime Minister of Japan.

Before we left Japan, we were forced to cut our chonmage, or topknot, and leave our swords away. This meant to lose samurai's honour.

So, I made a tanka before we left Japan,

[ますらおの 恥を忍びて 行く旅は 皇御国(すめらみくに)の為と こそ知れ]

I will keep in my mind the shame as a brave samurai, because I know this journey leads to the bright future of the land where our Emperor reigns.