

Today I would like to talk about Yamao Yozo of the Choshu Five.

Everybody knows the song, Hotaru-no-Hikari which is sung at graduation ceremonies in Japan. The melody of the song is a traditional Scottish folk song, called *Auld Lang Syne*. In the UK, this song is sung on New Year's Eve at the stroke of midnight to say good-bye to the old year. Not many people know that Yamao was probably the first Japanese person to hear this song.

Yamao Yozo was born in Aio Futajima, which is part of present day Yamaguchi City. In 1863, he and four others secretly left Choshu in order to travel to the UK and study various kinds of engineering at University College London. At that time, it was against the law to leave Japan.

After studying in London, Yamao wanted to study shipbuilding technology, so he went to Glasgow in 1866. Glasgow was the center of the British shipbuilding industry. He worked hard at a shipyard in the day and studied hard at college at night. At the shipyard, there were deaf and mute people among the workers. He was very surprised that workers with hearing difficulties could work well by communicating with each other through sign language.

After working and studying in Glasgow for two years, he came back to Japan to work for the Meiji Government. He strongly believed that engineering could make Japan prosperous. He worked hard to create the infrastructure of modern Japan including railroads, shipyards, lighthouses, coalmines and so on.

He also made efforts to found the Imperial College of Engineering which would later produce many young engineers.

While Yamao Yozo is well known as the “Father of Engineering,” we should not forget that he also set up the first school for the deaf and mute in Japan and played an important role in the education of children with special needs.

Let me conclude my speech with his words, “I would like to become a living machine.” 「生きた器械になりたい」 in Japanese. His spirit will live on in our hearts forever.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.