

I am Endo Kinsuke. I was born in 1836 in Hagi as the second son of Endo Hikouemon, in a high ranking family of the Choshu Clan, called the Ogumi family.

5 years before the Meiji Restoration, 5 young samurai, including myself, later called the “Choshu Five”, were sent to the United Kingdom.

This was during the time that foreigners were excluded from visiting Japan. Going abroad was also prohibited under the Tokugawa Shogunate’s policy of national isolation.

The leaders of the Choshu Clan, however, realized that Japan could learn much from Western countries. So, they decided to send us secretly to the United Kingdom, to study advanced technology and the Royal Navy. Our mission was to study so that we would be able to help Japan in the future after all the foreigners had been expelled.

Professor Alexander Williamson of University College London took care of us during our stay in London. He taught us in his class and also arranged study tours to various factories to show us the latest technology. Everything was new and exciting. Especially, I was very impressed by a machine printing a large number of banknotes at the Bank of England.

I returned to Japan after two and half years of study. This was due to illness as well as financial reasons relating to the Choshu Clan. Thanks to my fluent English, I was ordered to work under Katsura Kogoro doing interpretation, translation and collecting information from overseas. I attended the peace negotiations with the United Kingdom after the Bikan War as an interpreter, together with Inoue Kaoru.

Mouri Takachika, the lord of the Choshu Clan, invited Admiral King of the British Royal Navy to Mitajiri in December, 1866, in order to strengthen the good relationship which Choshu had with the United Kingdom. At the reception for Admiral King, Inoue Kaoru and I were the interpreters once again, and we performed the same role when the admiral reciprocated our hospitality on his warship. As we traveled to Osaka on the warship with the admiral, I explained that Mouri Takachika believed that the Tokugawa Shogunate should return political power to the Emperor and that Japan should be opened to foreign countries. I also explained that, in order to achieve this, Choshu was prepared to fight against the Tokugawa Shogunate. The British Government fully appreciated the feelings of Mouri Takachika and thereafter supported the action taken by Choshu.

The Meiji Government soon realized the necessity of minting acceptable coins. At first, the minting technology, the engineers and the equipment were all imported. Inoue Kaoru recommended that I should take charge of the project.

I devoted myself to minting coins for the rest of my life until I retired from the Mint Bureau in 1893. During my assignment in the Mint Bureau, a lot of reforms were made including the education of engineers, and a 5-sen coin was minted for the first time with 100% Japanese technology and engineers in 1883. People now call me “the Father of the Japanese Mint”

It was in 1883, during the time that I was the head of the Mint Bureau, that the path passing through a row of cherry trees was opened to the public alongside the River Yodo, next to the mint in Osaka. The saying “桜の通り抜け” is still used today.