

I am Inoue Masaru. I was born in 1843 in Hagi as the third son of Inoue Katsuyuki, in a high-ranking family of the Choshu clan, called the Ogumi family. I was adopted by Nomura Sakubei from a family of similar rank, and called myself Nomura Yakichi, until I changed my name to Inoue Masaru in 1868 in the first year of Meiji.

This was during the time when foreigners were expelled from Japan, and going abroad was prohibited under the Tokugawa Government's policy of national isolation. However, the leaders of Choshu Clan realized that Japan could learn from Western countries. So, they decided to send 5 young samurai including myself, secretly to the United Kingdom in 1863. The five of us were later called the "Choshu Five", and our mission was to learn about advanced technology and study the Royal Navy in order that Japan could prepare for modernization after all the foreigners had been expelled. This all happened 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 studied in his chemistry class. He arranged study tours to various factories to show us the latest technology. Everything was new and exciting. Especially, it was amazing to me that a steam locomotive could run on rails pulling a carriage full of passengers. We were all astonished that the train started to run under the ground.

I lived at Professor Williamson's house as a working student for the whole five years that I stayed in London. I studied chemistry, mining and railways, and I was the only one of the Choshu Five to actually graduate from UCL.

We, members of the Choshu Five, after our return, contributed during the Meiji Era to laying the foundations for the modernization of Japan. I devoted myself to construction of railways and people now call me "The Father of Japanese Railways". The Meiji Government decided to construct railways, and I was appointed to supervise construction under the British leader of the project, Mr. W. Kargill. It was lucky for me that I could work with him, and we came to trust each other completely.

The first railway was constructed between Shinbashi and Yokohama in 1872. It was a great honour and privilege for me to escort the Emperor at the opening ceremony, and to explain about the railway to him. I told him, "This, is what is known as a railway, Your Majesty."

We were dependent on a team of British technicians and engineers, which numbered more than 150 men at its peak. So, in 1877, I decided to open an education and training center in Osaka offering a 5-year course for Japanese engineers. The 665 meters long Osakayama Tunnel between Kyoto and Otsu was completed in 1880. It was the first time that an all-Japanese team had built a tunnel using Japanese technology and engineering.

I hope you will go to see my statue in front of JR Tokyo Station near the North Exit on the Marunouchi side. The statue was erected to commemorate my achievements in construction of railways in Japan.