

I am Inoue Kaoru. I was born in Yuda-Onsen, Yamaguchi City in 1836.

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 the Choshu Clan realized that Japan could learn from Western countries, so, they decided to send five young men to study advanced technology and the Royal Navy in the United Kingdom. They were planning for the future of Japan after all the foreigners had been expelled.

In 1863, I was ordered to go secretly to University College London in order to study there as a member of the so-called "Choshu Five". This was 5 years before the Meiji Restoration.

The Choshu Clan had paid 1,000 ryo for each student to Jardine Matheson, an English trading company, so we should have been treated as high-class passengers. However, Itoh Hirobumi and I were on the same ship and were trained as sailors during the voyage. We had to keep the deck clean, and raise the sails etc. This was because I mistakenly told them in English that the purpose of our visit was "navigation" instead of "the navy". I'm very sorry, Itoh, that my mistake made you work so hard.

Professor Alexander Williamson of UCL took care of us during our stay in London. All of us stayed at his house to begin with and we studied in his chemistry class. He arranged study tours to various factories to show us new technology. Everything was new and exciting.

Itoh Hirobumi and I, however, returned to Japan after being in London for only 6 months, because a newspaper reported that a fleet of warships from 4 countries was planning to attack Choshu. By now we had come to realize the strength of Western countries and we had already realized that the plan to expel foreigners was mistaken. We tried in vain to persuade the Choshu Clan not to fight against the Western powers.

The Choshu Clan was divided into two groups with different opinions, and I was attacked by the other group near Sodekibashi Bridge on my way home. I asked my elder brother to kill me because I was almost dead, but my mother covered me with her body and begged him not to kill me. Tokoro Ikutaro sewed 6 of my deep wounds with a tatami needle. Miraculously, I recovered.

When Takasugi Shinsaku organized the Kihei-tai, I joined it as the leader of the Kojyo-tai and fought for the Meiji Restoration.

As had been planned, we members of the Choshu Five contributed to laying the foundations for the modernization of Japan after our return to Japan during the Meiji Era. I became the first Japanese Minister of Foreign Affairs, and I also served in other ministries of the Meiji Government and worked for the development of finance and industry.

My birthplace is now open to the public as Inoue-Koen Park.