

Speech at Ceremony to mark the Opening of Hitachi Rail
Europe's Train Manufacturing Facility in Newton Aycliffe,
County Durham

by H.E. Keiichi Hayashi

Ambassador to Court of St James's,

on Thursday 3 September 2015

Secretary of State, Minister, distinguished MPs, Chairman Nakanishi, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are blessed with the weather. As it is raining, am I reading from a wrong text? No, I mean it. The opening of a plant like this is like sowing a seed, a seed of dream. For a seed to grow into a big tree, it needs rain. So it is indeed a good omen.

It is a great honour and pleasure for me to attend this ceremony. May I first extend my heartfelt congratulations on Hitachi and everyone else involved on the opening of this significant facility. Let me set it in a historical perspective. In a sense, through this event the wheel has come full circle in terms of friendship and cooperation between Japan and the UK in the field of railways.

In 1863, five young samurai from Yamaguchi Prefecture, then known as Choshu, surreptitiously left Japan for the UK, defying the law prohibiting Japanese nationals from travelling abroad on pain of death. They were determined to come to the UK to learn about its advanced technology for the modernisation of Japan.

After an excruciating four-month voyage, they arrived in the UK and started studying at University College London. They absorbed a great deal of knowledge and technology with the help of the generous and open-minded attitude of the British people.

After returning to Japan, every one of them was to play a vital role in different areas of Japan's modernisation, with one of them becoming Japan's first Prime Minister and another the first Foreign Minister. Still another member, Masaru Inoue, was so fascinated by the railway system in the UK that, on his return to Japan after five years of diligent study, he decided to import a similar system into Japan.

Helped by British engineers, he oversaw the construction of the country's first railway in 1872, thus coming to be known as the Father of Japan's Railway System. He passed away in London in 1910 while travelling as Advisor for the Department of Railways,

which he had headed before. Thus the wheel of his life as the pioneer of railways, which started in Britain, had turned full circle.

Please forgive me for adding my family history here. My father, who was also born in Yamaguchi, actually worked for a rolling stock company founded by none other than Masaru Inoue. I am also happy to note that the first batch of trains to be used here as a model were produced in Hitachi's factory in Kudamatsu, the town where my father went to study engineering.

Japan's capabilities in railway technology grew steadily, reaching a memorable milestone in 1964 with the opening of the world's first high-speed rail network, the Shinkansen, just in time for the first Tokyo Olympics. Since then it has carried over 10 billion passengers with the impeccable and unprecedented safety record of "zero passenger fatalities" for more than 50 years. It is no secret that Hitachi contributed to this achievement by providing the trains as well as crucial control systems.

The rolling stock manufactured in this factory will be "Made in the UK with the help of Japanese technology". I trust that the facility will produce trains not only for the Intercity Express Programme but also for other projects in the UK – and perhaps beyond.

So, yes, we have come a long way since the middle of the nineteenth century, when this country inspired a young man from Japan to import and construct railways. Japan then succeeded in developing and exporting the world's most advanced trains and railway systems. Now, through the establishment of this facility, Japan and the UK are embarking on the strategic collaboration that we are celebrating today. I am pleased that Japan is returning the favour we received 150 years ago, thus completing the circle. I have no doubt that the venture will be a great success.

Thank you and Congratulations again.