

The Choshu Five

Five samurai from the Hagi domain who took up the challenge of Japanese modernization



The Choshu Five photographed in London (1863)
(Property of Hagi Museum)



150th
ANNIVERSARY



Property of Hagi Museum

1 First Prime Minister Hirobumi Ito

(Shunsuke)

(1841~1909)

When Hirobumi Ito was 17, he studied at a private school (Shoukasonjuku) as a pupil of the great educator, Shoin Yoshida. He went to the UK to study when he was 23. Afterwards, he returned to Japan and joined the anti-Shogunate movement. After the Meiji Restoration, he was appointed as a councillor (Sanyo) and visited many Western countries as the vice-ambassador plenipotentiary of the Iwakura Mission. He was assigned as a councillor (Sangi) and as the first Construction minister (Koubukyo) in 1873. Ito worked for Japanese industrialization. He finally became the first Prime Minister of Japan by gaining positions such as the Secretary of the Interior (Naimukyo) in 1885. During this time he engaged in deliberations for a draft of the Constitution as the Lord President of the Council (Sumitsuin Gicho). He contributed to promulgating the Meiji Constitution and establishing a constitutional government through forming a cabinet four times and through his various positions, such as an elder statesman, until his death at the age of 69.



Property of Hagi Museum

2 First Foreign Minister Kaoru Inoue

(Bunta Shij)

(1835~1915)

When Kaoru Inoue was 16, he studied at Meirinkan School in Hagi. He went to the UK to study at the age of 29. After he returned to Japan, he joined the anti-Shogunate movement. He was appointed a councillor (Sanyo) after the Meiji Restoration whereupon he established the Mint Bureau at Osaka as its head in 1870. After he was assigned positions such as senior assistant to the Finance Minister (Okura Taifu), and the Construction Minister (Koubukyo), he became a chief of the Foreign Ministry (Gaimukyo) in 1879 and later became the first Foreign Minister. He promoted a policy of Westernization and established the Rokumeikan during the Meiji period. Inoue also contributed to the financial world through his various positions such as Minister of Agriculture and Commerce, Secretary of State, Finance Minister and then as an elder statesman until his death at the age of 81.



Property of Hagi Museum

Construction Minister and the
"Father of Japanese Industry"

3 Yozo Yamao

(1837~1917)

When Yozo Yamao was 24, he studied Western learning at Hakodate, Hokkaido. He went to the UK to study at the age of 27. After his return to Japan, his efforts resulted in the establishment of the Ministry of Industry (Koubusho) in 1873. He also proposed a petition to establish "Kogakuryo", which later became the Faculty of Engineering at the University of Tokyo. He assumed the position as senior assistant to the Construction Minister (Kobu-taifu) in 1875. Yamao was then promoted to the Construction Minister (Koubukyo) in 1883 and as such, contributed to the development of domestic industries such as steel, railroad and shipbuilding. In later years, he educated juniors as a chairman of the Japan Federation of Engineering Societies. In addition, he established schools for the blind and speech-impaired until his death at the age of 81.



The Choshu Five

In the middle of the 19th Century, the world surrounding Japan had suddenly changed due to the advance into East Asia by Western powers after the Industrial Revolution. Japan was especially threatened by the arrival of Matthew PERRY's squadron which demanded the opening of the country in 1853.

On 10th May 1863, the feudal domain of Hagi executed a command to fire upon foreign ships passing through the Kanmon Channel in order to keep out foreigners. On the other hand, Hagi also secretly dispatched five young samurai to the UK via the port of Yokohama against the Tokugawa shogunate on 12th May 1863. The Tokugawa shogunate had prohibited Japanese from going abroad during the Edo period. The most famous person to violate this law was Shoin Yoshida, a samurai from Hagi. He tried to go to America in 1854 in PERRY's black ship but he failed. It was a desperate act for a Japanese to stow away because it was punishable by death at the time.

These five young samurai firmly resolved to be "living instruments" in order to learn naval strategies before leaving Japan. They believed that the exclusion of foreigners was the best way to protect Japan from the threat of Western powers. They changed their minds in the UK, however, realizing that the Western powers were incomparable to Japan. They decided to accept a policy of opening the country to foreigners and introducing modern Western civilization with the aim of strengthening Japan.

These five young samurai accomplished a remarkable achievement as leaders of various fields in order to build a modern Japan. They are now referred to as the "Choshu Five" in admiration to their contributions.



Property of Mint Bureau

Mint Master Kinsuke Endo

(1836~1893)

Kinsuke Endo studied at Hagi's Research Institution for Western Military Science, the Hakushudo, and later went to the UK to study when he was 28. After he returned to Japan, he interpreted for his feudal lord when meeting with the British in 1866. When he became the head of the Mint (Zouhei-Gonokami), he promoted modernization of the coinage at the Osaka Mint Bureau. However, he was transferred and became the Senior Secretary of the Finance Minister (Okura-taijo) in 1874 due to a conflict of opinion with a hired foreigner named Kingle. He finally became the Mint Master in 1881 and succeeded in minting the first Japanese copper coin by trained Japanese engineers. He contributed to development of coin minting until his death at the age of 58. He also famously permitted citizens to view a row of cherry trees at the Osaka Mint Bureau, the Sakura No Torinuke.



Minister of Railways Masaru Inoue

(Yakichi Nomura) (1843~1910)

Masaru Inoue studied Western learning at Hakodate, Hokkaido. He went to the UK to study when he was 21. Upon his return to Japan, he became the head of Mining and Railways (Kouzan-no-kami and Tetsudou-no-kami) in 1871. He built the first domestic railway between Shinbashi and Yokohama in 1872. After he was assigned as the Director-General of the Railway Bureau (Tetsudokyokucho) in 1877, he established a training school (Kougiseiyouseisho) for industrial engineers in Osaka. He succeeded in opening the first tunnel in Osakayama in the Kansai region constructed by trained Japanese engineers. He finally became the Minister of Railways through positions such as a senior assistant to the Construction Minister (Kobu-taifu). After his resignation, he established a limited partnership for the purpose of producing domestic engines. He continued to contribute to the development of domestic railways until his death at the age of 68.

Timeline of the Choshu Five

- 1863 Hagi dispatches five young samurai to the UK
- 1864 Hirobumi Ito and Kaoru Inoue return to Japan
- 1866 Kinsuke Endo returns to Japan
- 1868 Masaru Inoue and Yozo Yamao return to Japan
- 1870 Kaoru Inoue and Kinsuke Endo establish the Osaka Mint Bureau as heads of the Mint. Hirobumi Ito and Yozo Yamao strive to establish the Ministry of Industry (Koubusho)
- 1871 Yozo Yamao strives to establish the Kogakuryo, now the Faculty of Engineering at the University of Tokyo
- 1872 Masaru Inoue builds the first domestic railway between Shinbashi and Yokohama
- 1873 Hirobumi Ito becomes the first Construction Minister Koubukyo
- 1879 Kaoru Inoue becomes chief of the Foreign Ministry Gaimukyo
- 1880 Yozo Yamao becomes the Construction Minister Koubukyo
- 1881 Kinsuke Endo becomes Mint Master
- 1885 Hirobumi Ito becomes the first Prime Minister and Kaoru Inoue becomes the first Foreign Minister
- 1890 Masaru Inoue becomes the Minister of Railways



Memorial stone inscribed with the names of Japanese students at University College London

Satsuma Domain, Kagoshima also dispatched nineteen samurai to the UK in 1865.

The names of the nineteen samurai dispatched by Hagi and Satsuma Domain are carved on it.



University College London where the Choshu Five studied.

Professor Williamson permitted their participation in natural science classes and laboratory work such as analytical chemistry as auditors.

Their names still exist in the UCL register.

Follow the footsteps of The Choshu Five

There are many historic, cultural and natural sites preserved in Hagi by the concept of city planning "Hagi Machijuu Hakubutsukan" (regarding the whole city as an unroofed museum). Travellers can enjoy searching for area associated with Choshu Five.



1 Hagi Museum

It holds and exhibits a variety of historical artefacts related to Hagi. A short movie about the Choshu Five introduces their contributions.



2 Enseiji Temple

Hirobumi Ito used to study reading and writing here at the age of 11. It is also said that Shinsaku Takasugi used to play at this temple when he was a child.



3 Meirinkan - The Hagi Domain School

It was called "Number One in Western Japan" due to its high level of education at that time. Kaoru Inoue and Masaru Inoue used to study at this school



4 Former residence of Masaru Inoue

As a middle-class samurai of Hagi, Inoue's father, Katsuyuki, assumed leadership of Ougumi (the central area of the Hagi Domain). Masaru was influenced by his father who had the experience of living in Nagasaki and opportunities to study Western learning.



5 JR Hagi Station

It was built in 1925 and has been designated a registered national tangible cultural property. It exhibits photographs and other things regarding Masaru Inoue as a memory of his contributions to the Japanese railways.



6 Shokasonjoku Private School

Shoin Yoshida educated people who contributed to the Meiji Restoration, such as Hirobumi Ito, Genzui Kusaka and Shinsaku Takasugi in this small building. Hirobumi Ito was deeply affected by Shoin Yoshida. It is a national historical site.



7 Former residence of Hirobumi Ito

Hirobumi Ito lived here between 1854 and 1868 until he became prefectural governor of Hyogo. Here, Hirobumi Ito grew as a student of Shoin Yoshida.



8 Villa of Hirobumi Ito

It was built at Ooimura, Tokyo in 1907. Parts of it, such as its entrance, hall and detached room, were moved and reassembled here. The superior design of its panelled ceiling, amongst other things, are worth seeing.

Hagi City Tourism Section

510 Emukai, Hagi City, Yamaguchi Prefecture,
Japan 758-8555
TEL +81-0838-25-3139 FAX+81-0838-26-0716
URL <http://hagi-kankou.com/>
E-mail kankouka@city.hagi.lg.jp