

Congratulatory Remarks to Graduating Students (December 22, 2020)

I would like to offer my heartfelt congratulations to the 7 students who have been awarded doctoral degrees today. Of the graduates today, 3 of you are international students who chose to leave your home country to study and complete your research here at NAIST.

Including the graduates today, NAIST has conferred 8,362 master's degrees and 1,739 doctoral degrees since its establishment. International students comprising 384 of the master's and 363 of the doctoral degree recipients is a clear indication of NAIST's globalization efforts.

From when the new coronavirus was first confirmed in Japan in late January of this year, the infection gradually spread throughout Japan and there were fears of an explosion of infections. From early April when a state of emergency was declared for certain areas of Japan and in mid-April the state of emergency was then extended to all prefectures, Nara prefecture was under a state of emergency for about one month. Due to this, activities at NAIST were restricted in various ways.

Rather than the infectious disease disaster coming to an end, it is actually continuing to spread around the country with the 3rd wave of infections now upon us. Therefore today's graduation ceremony is being held on a reduced scale with strict measures in place to prevent the spread of infection.

This is a once-in-a-century world-wide pandemic disaster. I salute you for undertaking your doctoral research and your hard work during such circumstances in obtaining your degrees today.

All of you today will now set out on your careers as professional researchers and engineers and currently science and technology is facing an era of revolutionary changes. A major feature of recent science and technology developments is that these are being led by ICT technology innovations such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Internet of Things (IoT), and Data Science.

This revolution's influence has clearly reached areas of science and technology outside of information science. For example, in the field of biological science there is the research area of bio-informatics and in materials science the presence of materials informatics, a new research area, is increasing.

It can be said that, based upon analysis of huge amounts of real time-collected data that may be accessed from around the world through networks, a new research paradigm is developing that may be called 'data-driven science' or 'AI-driven science.

Revolutions in science and technology in various fields will of course bring about large changes throughout society. It has been said that the computer ability will surpass our human ability in the 2040's and technical singularity will be achieved, and, at that time, the majority of the jobs existing today will disappear and that new jobs and occupations will appear. I believe that with this year's coronavirus pandemic uncertainties will increase even more. In the 2040's though, you will be the central part of society then.

Until now, through your doctoral thesis research you have developed highly specialized knowledge and experience in each of your separate fields, but from now I hope that you will be active as researchers and engineers leading into new eras, responding flexibly to developments in science and technology through further exploration of related fields to gain a broad understanding of various areas of study to continually pursue the opening of new frontiers for exploration.

You have the valuable experiences at NAIST through which you developed the ability to identify problems, explore and implement solutions to these problems, evaluate the outcomes, and write academic papers on the outcomes through discussions with people having various viewpoints.

While this experience, along with the unforeseen situations that you met due to the new coronavirus infection, may have presented you with difficulties at times, I am confident that the networks you have created here will assure your successful future.

NAIST's role does not end with us sending you out into society. Rather, NAIST faculty and staff members consider our role as facilitating the building of strong relationships with alumni so that each and all of you will be able to continue your creative lives in an ever-changing community of science and technology.

Every year we hold our Homecoming Day along with the Fall Open Campus and we hope to continue to hold this kind of event, so please return to our campus at that time to meet with our future students as role models. I believe that we need to consider a hybrid Homecoming Day that includes online participation for not only the current pandemic but also for post corona as well.

Also, in addition to the alumni association activities that are central to our graduates' networking, NAIST is strengthening its international network of graduates who are active around the globe through international satellite offices established in Indonesia and Thailand, overseas alumni associations, etc., so we hope that you actively participate in our pursuits. The in-person NAIST Indonesia Alumni Association meeting that is held every year was held online this year, with many faculty, staff and students participating remotely. This successful event format gave us a large hint for future alumni association activities.

Once again I would like to congratulate you all and in conclusion, we look forward to your future endeavors and success.

YOKOYA Naokazu, President, Nara Institute of Science and Technology
December 22, 2020