

December 2025 – President's Commencement Address

Let me begin by offering my sincere congratulations to both of you, who have just been conferred doctoral degrees. With commendable enthusiasm and perseverance, you have been striving toward one of the life milestones you have reached today. We could not be prouder. Well done!

Today, we have assembled here to celebrate your hard work and remarkable achievements. But you did not do them alone. Let's take a moment to think of everyone who has supported and stood by you during your time at NAIST: your parents, family, friends, professors, and our staff—my heartfelt salute to them.

Having obtained a doctorate today, the highest academic degree, you are about to step into the next stage of your life. It is a significant and interesting transition. For more than 20 years, since elementary school, you have been taught, guided, and supervised by teachers and professors. But after finishing graduate school, there is no more school to go to, except traffic school.

In Japanese martial arts and performing arts, there are three stages of training and learning, called Shu (守), Ha (破), and Ri (離). The concept of Shu-Ha-Ri is said to have originated from the teachings of Sen no Rikyu (千利休), a renowned tea ceremony master in 16th-century Japan. The first stage, Shu, is represented by a Chinese character that means “guard,” “keep,” or “follow.” Indeed, in this early period of learning, you try to follow what your master or teacher instructs, keeping and obeying the way you are taught. Our learning up to the undergraduate level may correspond to the stage of “Shu.”

The next stage of learning, “Ha,” is written in a Chinese character meaning “break,” as it is a phase of breaking the shell. You start exploring other approaches, styles, and views, seeking what you prefer over what you have learned from your teacher or textbook. I would say your graduate study at NAIST corresponds to this phase. In addition to your professor's supervision, you read papers by other researchers and discuss research with your fellow colleagues. By trying different combinations of approaches and styles of your professor and other researchers, or modifying them, you seek new ways to “break” the existing frameworks and establish a better one.

The last stage of Shu-Ha-Ri is “Ri.” The word means “leave” or “stray from.” Having mastered what you were taught and become well-versed with the discipline you explored, you are now ready to leave your professor's school of thought and freely pursue your own style, approach, and mission in life. The doctoral degree you received today is a certificate that you are qualified for this stage of “Ri.” You now depart from your professors and NAIST to start your own quest.

As I mentioned earlier, the concept of “Shu-Ha-Ri” comes from a lesson by Sen no Rikyu. The original saying was, “Never forget the fundamentals, even if you break or stray from the precept after strictly following it.” So, what the Japanese tea ceremony master emphasized was the importance of fundamentals. Before departing from NAIST, I want you to think about what the “fundamentals” you learned here are that you should carry with you into your future career. Of course, they are different from those in the Japanese tea ceremony.

At NAIST, you studied in a particular laboratory and conducted a specialized thesis project. Importantly, they have served as an excellent platform to acquire skills and abilities that can be applied to a wide array of tasks, issues, and problems. Such skills and abilities are sometimes called “transferable skills” because they can be applied across diverse contexts and help identify solutions.

The transferable skills, such as ways to objectively observe, logically think, and critically evaluate thinking of your own and others, are the “fundamentals” that you should never forget. By tackling different problems and tasks with those skills, you can continue to evolve even after you leave NAIST. That’s how you enjoy the final stage of “Shu-Ha-Ri.”

Congratulations again to both of you, our newest alumni. Today, you are joining over 10,000 alumni who have also been trained here at NAIST and are trying to make this world a better place. The NAIST Alumni Association is a global network for our graduates. I encourage you to participate actively in it and stay connected with NAIST. Even after graduation, you remain a member of the NAIST community.

Let me close my commencement address with my parting wish for you: May your future be rewarding and fulfilling! Have fun!

Kaz Shiozaki
President