

President's Commencement Address, June 2025

This is a significant day for each of you, as well as for all of us in this hall. We are all excited to celebrate an important milestone in your life.

It is a great honor and a profound pleasure to be here, offering my sincere congratulations to all of you. We are proud of your hard work and resilience that have enabled you to be here today. You should also take pride in what you have accomplished here at NAIIST. But please remember that your parents, professors, family, and friends also deserve your appreciation. My salute is extended to them.

As you may know, the number of people with graduate degrees remains relatively small in the overall population, partly because of the time and effort that graduate training requires, as you have found. Naturally, people expect you to serve as leaders in society with the ability you have cultivated through your graduate training. However, you need to be cautious about a particularly insidious symptom that we all may suffer from: the belief that we are smarter than others.

American writer Mark Twain said, "What gets us into trouble is not what we don't know. It's what we know for sure that just ain't so." We need to be more afraid of the assumption that we know what we don't know than of the lack of knowledge. Indeed, the ability to objectively distinguish between what we know and what we don't know is one of the essential qualifications for researchers, a faculty that you must have been trained in at NAIIST. Therefore, as NAIIST graduates, one way to exercise leadership is to set a good example in society by acknowledging the limitations of your knowledge and promoting better communication and understanding with others.

On the other hand, looking at the current state of the world, you might feel pessimistic about the possibility of communication and mutual understanding. Countries pursuing incompatible interests and desires are engaged in armed conflict. There are also countries where people are divided by ideology, causing serious friction. Such a geopolitical environment today can be aptly described as VUCA, which represents the acronym for Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity.

The term VUCA was initially used at the U.S. Army War College in 1987 to describe the unpredictable multilateral interactions that followed the end of the Cold War. The Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity appear to be progressive to date, making us wonder if human history is stagnating or even regressing. Many of us tend to view historical time as an irreversible flow of development and evolution, maybe due to the influence of Hegelian and Marxist historical perspectives. Still, there is a precedent of apparent stagnation and regression in medieval Europe until the dawn of the Renaissance.

The world we live in is not a perfect place. However, it is essential to keep thinking about how we can improve it for the better without giving up and never losing hope. In one of Oscar Wilde's comedy plays, *Lady Windermere's Fan*, there is an excellent line by Lord Darlington in Act III: "We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars." I want each of you to continue reflecting on what problems in society you'd like to solve, what you'd like your country to be, and how you'd like to change the world, seeking yet another Renaissance.

Our society is shaped by the collective actions of its members; this concept was referred to as "social sculpture" by Joseph Beuys. Beuys was a German artist and art theorist in the 20th century, who extended the definition of art. He asserted that every human being is an artist, and art is the whole process of human beings trying to create a new society through their creativity. Everyone is a co-creator of social architecture, and we are excited to welcome you to the team that works on social sculpture. Our everyday work will accumulate over time and shape the world 100 or 200 years from now. Therefore, we must always look at the stars and aim high.

Before closing, I would like to congratulate each of you again upon your departure. Instead of "graduation," I prefer to call this ceremony "commencement," a word that signifies the end of your training at NAIST as well as the beginning of the next stage of your life, with all its hopes, promises, and opportunities. We are truly proud of what you have achieved here and even more proud of what you will accomplish in the years to come. Show us what you are made of.

May your future be rewarding and fulfilling!

Kaz Shiozaki
President