

NAARA INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY (NAIST)

CONGRATULATORY ADDRESS:

Fali 2026 Commencement

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Dear Graduands, Colleagues at NAIST, Honored Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, First, let us all congratulate the scholars graduating today for successfully completing the rigorous post-graduate programs of this prestigious university, NAIST. Please permit me to say a few words to them as they commence a lifelong journey towards which the scholarship and research environment at NAIST will direct their steps.

Dear scholars, NAIST was founded 35 years ago as an elite postgraduate national university which bridges the fundamental and applied sciences, the natural and engineering sciences. Most national university programs in Japan at the time valued disciplinary depth. For MEXT too, creating an entire new higher education institution valuing trans-disciplinary scholarship was pioneering. So, my first message to you, as you leave this university, is to avoid falling into the trap of disciplinary silos, still strongly prevalent in Japan. Second, seek scholarship and comradeship from those who come from a variety of scholastic and socio-economic backgrounds. This will surely enrich your lives, as it has done my own.

Let me now share a few thoughts as a biologist, architect, and engineer – a hotpot of professional experience over six decades since I entered university. Yes, my dear friends, going beyond disciplines needs time and inclination. So, let me wish all of you a long and healthy life with an abundance of curiosity.

Looking at the evolution of humankind, what struck me the other day when I watched a TV program that popularizes science, is that human brains have evolved much faster than the human body. Perhaps it is this differential in capability that led humans to discover the power of tools and the making of things, so that the body could keep up with the brain. Today, several millennia

later, we have achieved a high level of sophistication in the artisanry and manufacture of artefacts that better our lives. We have made tangible products and intangibles too, like software, systems, protocols and institutions that enhance the capability of this human-machine synergy.

However, fresh challenges have also emerged. With the recent spread of Generative AI and Agentic AI into our daily lives, the brain might further outstrip the body in a new-found synergy between intelligent machines and sentient human beings. Will Physical AI, where Japan is said to have an edge over others, augment our bodily capabilities in a manner that parity can be achieved with the new human-AI driven brain? In such a context, what indeed is the essence of our humanity that we should strive to preserve, even as we harness what appears now to be the near-limitless potential of AI?

In an AI-driven, technologically savvy world, appreciation of what is intrinsically human will shape our shared future. Here, the liberal arts have an important role to play, guiding you toward goodness, with your conduct ethical, honorable and exemplary. The creative arts will inspire you to imagine with greater insight, to think outside the box, and have a lasting place in the hearts of others. A sense of empathy, forgiveness, and generosity of spirit, have bound the weak and the strong in alliances that have created the rich palette of human heritage. Treasure the humanism within you, even as you advance the frontiers of science and technology in your respective careers in the years ahead.

Throughout human history, we have also discovered the power of beauty to move hearts and minds. I am reminded of Sagrada Familia, the astounding masterpiece of architecture that Antonio Gaudi bequeathed to generations of artisans, architects and engineers to complete. A true maestro indeed, who was able to communicate his vision to the generations that followed. I am sure that nothing would make your mentors, friends and families happier than if your transdisciplinary vision could be communicated to posterity, even if you yourself could only complete a small part of this. Do not fear to think big, but to create grand legacies, you must inspire others, even if you are no longer around. That is Gaudi's lasting legacy to us. That inspirational life is what we wish for you today.

Once again, congratulations, and thank you for your time.