

September 21, 2018

President's September Graduation Ceremony Address for AY 2018

Yuji Oie, President, Kyushu Institute of Technology

It is a joyous occasion for our university to hold this graduation ceremony today. First, I would like to congratulate all of you who are embarking on promising careers. I would also like to extend my heartfelt congratulations to the family members and others in attendance who have provided the graduates with material and emotional support during their paths leading up to this point.

I would like to take this opportunity to mention the university's ties to Kazuo Ishiguro, who was awarded the Nobel Prize in literature last year. His father, Shizuo Ishiguro, was a student of Meiji College of Technology, the predecessor of Kyutech, and studied at this very location. He graduated in 1943 and traveled to England as an oceanographer in 1960, along with his family. These events must have had a profound influence that contributed to the creation of an internationally recognized work of literature. I have a renewed appreciation for the importance of a commitment to learning which is passed on from one person to another, giving rise to a wide variety of knowledge.

It is exciting that the Nobel Prize was awarded to a person having ties to our university. This is something to be celebrated. Ishiguro's Nobel lecture included remarks that are of significance for ourselves as well, and I would like to share with you some of the things he said.

Kazuo Ishiguro touched on science and technology in his lecture. While noting that "stunning breakthroughs in science, technology and medicine" have been made, he pointed out that numerous challenges posed by these breakthroughs are lurking "around the corner – or have we already turned this corner?" Ishiguro mentioned the gene-editing technique CRISPR and advances in artificial intelligence and robotics. CRISPR is a technology that makes genetic manipulation easier than the experts had ever imagined possible, and this is expected to lead to not only improved varieties of crops and livestock, but also to human applications including gene therapy. As you are aware, in addition to providing assistance to people, artificial intelligence and robotics can replace human workers by performing their work, and are being developed with functions that exceed human capabilities. Ishiguro warned that in addition to bringing us benefits, these technologies may also create extreme meritocracies and high levels of unemployment. "If we are to play an important role in this uncertain future," he said, "we must become more diverse." He was referring to the field of literature, but I believe that the same could be said of ourselves as engineers and technical experts. To produce the diversity of ideas and technologies that will be needed in an uncertain future, we also "must keep our minds open... so that we can nurture and celebrate the best" of those that emerge.

Many experts have pointed out the importance of diversity. Amartya Sen, winner of the Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences, stated in a lecture on globalization and human security (published in Japanese by Chikumashobo)¹ that the progress of the world over thousands of years has been shaped by trade, travel, and global interactions that promote the dissemination of ideas, knowledge, art, and culture.

In the future, you will be involved in the creation of technology that will become the foundation of a broad range of activities in the social arena and have an impact on individuals, or even on societies in general. I would like to encourage all of you to develop a renewed appreciation of diversity in people, organizations, and so on, collect and learn from diverse knowledge, and humbly imagine the future from the world of today. My hope is that in so doing, you will choose a bright future and contribute to making it a reality.

To conclude my farewell address, I would like to wish you all great success as you embark on your future careers, drawing on the positive experiences and encounters that you have accumulated here at Kyutech. Once again, my heartiest congratulations.

Reference

- Nobel Lecture by Kazuo Ishiguro

https://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/2017/ishiguro-lecture_en.pdf

¹ *Amartya Sen Kōgi: Gurōbarizēshon to Ningen no Anzenhoshō (Chikumashobo, 2017)*