April 5, 2017

President's Address

Entrance Ceremony, April 2017

Yuji Oie, President of Kyushu Institute of Technology

Congratulations on your entrance to our university.

On the occasion of today's entrance ceremony, I would like to offer my heartfelt congratulations to all of you on this auspicious day, and also express my great respect for all of the efforts you made to arrive at this point. It is the ultimate pleasure for us to welcome you to the National University Corporation Kyushu Institute of Technology. To all the family members in attendance, I can only imagine the great joy you must feel. On behalf of all the faculty members, I would like to deliver this celebratory address.

As you begin your academic life at Kyutech, I would have you know that the school was originally founded in 1909 as a private institution called the Meiji College of Technology. The founder, Mr. Keiichiro Yasukawa, was a prominent figure in the business community of Kitakyushu and the Chikuho region, and he established various businesses, such as YASKAWA Electric Corporation, that served as the foundation of our nation's industrial growth.

In the Meiji Period, Japan lagged far behind the great nations of the world industrially and economically, so it was vital to develop human resources to support the country. Based on his belief that "profits earned thanks to the country should be used for the country," Mr. Yasukawa donated a large part of his private fortune to found the Meiji College of Technology, with the aim of training engineers who could support the industrial advancement of Japan.

He entrusted education and research at the Meiji College of Technology to Dr. Kenjiro Yamakawa, then president of Tokyo Imperial University. At the opening ceremony of the college, Dr. Yamakawa declared that the Meiji College of Technology was a school that produced "gentlemen well-versed in technological skills," aiming to develop human resources with dignity and creativity. Dr. Yamakawa's aims have been adhered to through the generations, and still guide us today after more than 100 years as our university's founding principle of "instilling a deep knowledge of science and engineering in high caliber students." I would like the new students here to learn by heart the phrase "high caliber students with a deep knowledge of science and engineering."

The Meiji College of Technology became the National University Kyushu Institute of Technology in 1949, and then it was transformed into the National University Corporation Kyushu Institute of Technology in 2004. During this time, the Faculty of Computer Science and Systems Engineering, which marked its 30th anniversary last year, was established in Iizuka City; the Graduate School of Life Science and Systems Engineering at the Kitakyushu Science and Research Park of Wakamatsu was founded 17 years ago; and Kyutech has become one of a select number of distinctive engineering universities in Japan, with two undergraduate schools and three graduate schools that serve approximately 5800 students.

I became president of the university in April of last year. Currently we are making improvements intended to enrich and energize university instruction, research and student learning. As one part of this, I visited eleven universities in six countries and regions to strengthen coordination with foreign universities. One such university that I visited was the City University of New York (CUNY), a US university that includes eleven four-year universities and other schools.

One of its schools, the City College of New York (CCNY) on Manhattan, agreed that we should strengthen exchange between students and faculty and we signed a cooperative agreement to that effect. The City University of New York was originally founded in 1847 as the tuition-free Free Academy. This was still during the Edo Period in Japan. Moreover, the founder of the university was none other than Townsend Harris, the American who dedicated himself to the 1858 Treaty of Amity and Commerce Between the United States and the Empire of Japan. Author Ryotaro Shiba writes about this in his book *Kaido o yuku 39: Nyuyoku sanpo* (Travels #39: Walking New York), describing how Harris, who was then president of the New York City Board of Education, created the Free Academy "for the sake of poor boys and girls, by investing his personal fortune." It was out of this school that today's City University of New York grew.

Though the eras and countries may differ, when I think about the people who established Kyutech and City University of New York, I am reminded that we exist today as we do because people then understood the great importance of learning.

Now I would like to take this opportunity to talk to you about two important things to remember as you continue in your studies at Kyutech after you enroll.

The first is about "thinking and studying." *The Analects of Confucius* says: "To study and not think is a waste. To think and not study is dangerous." Postwar Japanese opinion leader Shuichi Kato explained this quote in a talk he gave (Shuichi Kato, "Manabu koto, omou koto," Iwanami Booklet) as follows: "It's useless to study without thinking for yourself. Your knowledge won't be genuine. If you do think for yourself but don't study, your actions or those of your group will be dangerous." He goes on to say that "thinking" is being conscious of the issues at stake. In other words, "thinking" begins by discovering what is unknown and what is at issue. Therefore, we must actively think about what we need to study. Both thinking and studying are important. For example, when you study history, it is not enough to grasp history as the mere accumulation of facts. As historian E. H. Carr explains in his book, history is "an unending dialogue between the present and the past." History is not to be understood as the mere memorization of events and dates. Rather, deciphering past events, relating them to issues faced by society today, and engaging in wide-ranging inquiry is what is important. By connecting thinking and studying, you not only learn to understand your object of study appropriately but also gain the opportunity to change and grow as a person.

The second thing is "how to study." Our forms of understanding are strongly influenced by the knowledge, experiences and various kinds of information we possess. One way or another we also absorb the

circumstances surrounding us. We all have experiences—some happy, some sad—that we remember as vital knowledge and information. At the same time, the Roman Caesar had the following to say about our understanding of things even before the Common Era: "People see only what they wish to see" (Nanami Shiono, *Romajin no monogatari*, Shinchosha). What does this mean? Do we not try to use the knowledge and various kinds of information we possess to understand things appropriately?

Recent research on the brain has brought to light some interesting facts. Our brains have an advanced ability to apply "interpretations" and form conclusions based on information taken in by our brains. This interpretive mechanism is referred to as the "interpreter module." Inside the brain, "the interpreter module is driven to infer cause and effect. It continually explains the world using the inputs it has from the current cognitive state and cues from the surroundings. The left-brain interpreter process is driven to seek explanations or causes for events" (Michael Gazzaniga, *'Watashi' wa doko ni aru no ka: Gazaniga nokagaku kogi / Who's in Charge? Free Will and the Science of the Brain*, Kinokuniya Shoten). This ability enables us as humans to imagine, think, judge and act, and has no doubt made it possible for us to overcome challenging issues. That said, it also suggests the ease with which prejudices and misunderstandings can arise when we look for cause and effect without enough information. It is very important that we rely not only on our own intelligence but that we learn from the intelligence of others through dialog and exchange with people with a diverse range of knowledge, experience and information.

At Kyutech, we currently stress forms of study that encourage such dialog and exchange and have been working to create various learning opportunities and environments to support them. Through curricular studies, extracurricular learning communities, student clubs and organizations, and various other opportunities for dialog and exchange, students learn together with each other, not in isolation, in a reciprocal way that enables them to better know and improve themselves.

An example of extracurricular learning community activities are Student Project, to which students who have formed a group of their own and developed a plan can apply. These projects bring students on campus together around topics that interest them, such as robots, rockets, miniature satellites, automobiles and so on, and gives them extremely valuable experience by participating, for instance, in domestic and foreign technology competitions. Through the process of creating something, students integrate their piecemeal knowledge and skills and have the important opportunity to apply such knowledge and skills elsewhere. The projects are also a chance for students to experience first-hand the importance of abstract theory and logical thinking in concrete problems. Above all, we believe the projects are an opportunity for students to learn and develop habits of reciprocal learning by participating and contributing to something on their own.

As part of such learning opportunities, we encourage our students to study abroad. The number of students who went overseas to study was 330 in 2014, 430 in 2015 and more than 500 last year. These included some students who participated in internships at overseas companies and others who spent roughly six months at European universities. The globalization of learning at Kyutech is steadily progressing. Living in different countries and thinking and studying alongside people of various cultures gives our students the opportunity to change and grow in terms of their thought and behavior.

I encourage everyone to study not only in the classroom but also by actively participating in opportunities

for reciprocal learning, such as student projects and study abroad, as a means to furthering your own thinking, learning from others and growing.

Kyutech is also striving to become an even better university—an essential university—through dialog of various kinds with industry, local government, media outlets and others in society, and through our international partnerships with other universities.

Let me conclude my address by saying that our university is a place that brings people with a love of knowledge together. I hope you, our new students, will stay in good health and pursue a meaningful undergraduate or graduate life at our university by taking advantage of the diverse study opportunities and environments. Congratulations once again.