

September 20, 2019

President's September Graduation Ceremony Address for AY 2019

Yuji Oie, President, Kyushu Institute of Technology

Today's graduation ceremony for the 2019 year brings great joy to our university. As you turn this auspicious corner in your lives, I offer you my congratulations. I also wish to sincerely congratulate the guardians and family members whose joy is even greater, given both the material and emotional support they have provided their students up until this day.

This year, our university celebrated 110 years since its founding. I am deeply grateful for the understanding, support, and cooperation shown by so many institutions, including the state, local government, corporations, and foreign and domestic universities, the local community and by so many individuals—from our more than 60,000 alumni, to our current students and university faculty.

110 years is a long time and, during that time, many changes have taken place throughout the world. Domestically, Japan too has undergone significant changes. For instance, Japan began conducting its statistical survey of industry in 1909, 110 years ago, to understand the state of manufacturing in Japan. Production at the time was valued at roughly 800 million yen, with more than half of that in industries such as silk reeling and dyeing. By the time of the 100th survey in 2008, the survey found that shipments were valued at 338 trillion yen, a more than 400,000-fold increase. Today's top products, which include vehicles and other transit machinery, followed by electrical machinery and general machinery, represent 46% of all production. This is a dramatic change. More recently, manufacturing as a percentage of gross domestic production has been declining, while services have been growing (<https://www.meti.go.jp/statistics/tyo/kougyo/wagakuni/2011.html>). Such changes would have been exceedingly difficult to imagine 110 years ago, just as we cannot easily predict what the future will be like 100 years from now.

On the relationship between social change and technology, Yuval Noah Harari has the following to say in the last chapter of his book *Homo Deus* (Kawade Shobo Shinsho). He writes that technology is not deterministic and that identical technologies can produce societies of completely different kinds. Moreover, because our thoughts and behaviors are significantly conditioned by today's social systems, etc., he says that it is important that we relax such constraints, transform our behaviors, and face the future with a rich imagination.

On the other hand, today we see truly unfortunate conflicts of various kinds surfacing between countries and

regions. Resolving issues between states is not easily done. Amid such concerns, the Kyutech campus brings together international students from various countries to study, collaborate, and live together. At institutions with such diversity, learning enriches individual creativity and provides opportunities that instill new ideas and spark new behaviors. This leads to new discoveries about yourself and the invention of a new you.

The early 20th-century French philosopher Alain left behind many famous statements. Among them, one oft-quoted statement is that “Pessimism comes from the temperament, optimism from the will” (Alain, *Propos sur le bonheur* [On Happiness], Japanese translation by Yu Ishikawa, Kadokawa Bunko). He also writes that all happiness comes from the will and self-discipline. Although feeling is very important, should you find yourself becoming pessimistic because of it, you should exercise your will and orient yourself toward happiness. In *On Happiness*, Alain also says that society is not like the shade of a tree, which is more comfortable or less comfortable depending on changes in the weather or wind. On the contrary, he says, it is a place of miracles where magicians cause rain to fall or the weather to clear.

Each of you, I hope, will use your rich imaginations and the expert knowledge and skills you have acquired here to help build a future filled with hope.

In closing, I wish you great success as you turn this auspicious corner in your lives today and hope the many beneficial connections you have made at Kyutech serve you well in your productive futures to come. Once again, congratulations.