

President's Address at the 2019 Saitama University Commencement

The lingering summer heat in September has finally begun to subside, and the season is moving toward autumn. Then, the Saitama University campus will move to a colorful outfit. Congratulations to all of you who are here to celebrate your graduation from Saitama University on such a good day. I would also like to extend my heartfelt congratulations to those who have supported you.

The numbers of graduates who got degrees today is 86 in total, and 56 of them are from 17 countries, namely Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Brazil, Cameroon, China, France, Korea, Laos, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Senegal, Sri Lanka, UK, USA, and Vietnam. In addition, the ratio of graduates in the humanities and natural sciences is about 3 to 4. This award ceremony is full of diversity unique to *Saitama University All in One Campus at Metropolitan Area Saitama*.

You have met a variety of professors and colleagues at Saitama University, where you have come into contact with a variety of disciplines to advance your learning and research. The sense of fulfillment that each of you now feels is the fruit of your own enthusiasm and effort in the process leading up to your degree. I would like to express my heartfelt respect for this, and I hope you to continue to play an active role in your respective career path by fully utilizing your experience at Saitama University.

However, it seems to be difficult in the future society. For example, industry and academia are currently discussing the future of recruitment and university education in the context of employment issues specific to Japan. Regardless of whether their final specialty is humanities or natural sciences, human resources in the upcoming Society 5.0 era require not only literacy in areas such as mathematical reasoning, data analysis, logical expression, and foreign language communication, but also abilities of logical thinking, normative judgment, problem-finding, problem-solving, and future society planning. In order to acquire these, liberal arts education as a foundation is important.

Society 5.0 is the future society that Japan advocated as a successor to Society 1.0 as hunting society, Society 2.0 as agricultural society, Society 3.0 as industrial society and Society 4.0 as information society. The environment surrounding the world is in a period of major change, and social issues that must be resolved against economic development are becoming increasingly complex. As a country with advanced issues, Japan aims to realize Society 5.0, which achieves both economic development and the resolution of social issues by introducing new technologies such as IoT, robots, AI, and big data. In Society 5.0, AI and robots based on big data will act as agents and support human tasks and coordination, and everyone will lead a comfortable, vibrant and high-quality life. This is each individual human-centered society, leading to the achievement of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals; SDGs, but is not the future controlled and monitored by AI and robots. For that reason, the human resources who are responsible for the society need logical thinking and normative judgment.

Meanwhile, an interview with Yuval Noah Harari, the author of "Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind", was reported in the Asahi Newspaper on September 8, this year. "With the power of AI and biotechnology, a handful of elite people may dominate most of humanity as Useless Class, and computers with rapidly improving algorithms may dominate humanity in the future." And, "Even at the personal level, there are concerns about the so-called 'data control' in which data collected on the internet are used by computers to determine a person's preferences. But instead of leaving the choice to the computer, you need to know your own weaknesses and characteristics to compete with the computer." AI will continue to evolve, and people will be forced to reform themselves over and over again.

As Charles Darwin in "Evolutionary Theory" put it, "The strongest will not survive, and the wisest will not. The only ones who can survive are those who can change." In order to adapt to the coming age of coexisting with AI, it seems necessary to reform ourselves, that is, to "change".

Regarding this "change", Dr. T. Saito, a psychiatrist who has long been involved in the clinical practice of social withdrawal, points out the importance of "dialogue". He says, "There are various ways in which people change people, but the royal road is to change through dialogue. To the question of whether dialogue changes people, I can easily answer, 'change'. But will you change your mind when someone else preaches you? I probably won't. Not only that, but I will be stubborn and even repulsive." And he continues: "What is done in the dialogue is an exchange of subjectivity and subjectivity, not a proper correction of subjectivity. Changes caused by dialogue have nothing to do with any coercion or pressure. The dialogue is based on a thorough respect for people's initiative and spontaneity, resulting in the utilization of their inherent strengths." It seems that people are likely to change themselves through dialogue to interact with AI well, rather than relying on AI. What should be noted in this case is our initiative and spontaneity, as Dr. Saito says.

The importance of dialogue is also mentioned by Prof. S. Kajitani, the Univ. of Tokyo. According to his words, philosophy, which is also important in Society 5.0, is to ask, think and talk. We begin to think only by having a question. Even if we think in our head, it just floats and disappears, so we need to talk. Talking in proper language makes our thinking clear. What's more, it would be nice if someone could respond our talking, and our thinking would be deeper and richer. Therefore, the dialogue is meaningful in the senses that the dialogue with others in different standpoints and perspectives naturally broadens and deepens our own way of thinking, and also that we become aware of what used to be our constraints and able to think about the possibilities of something different. This also leads to "change".

Today's degree is a milestone, and your study continues forever. I would also like to see you take a flexible approach to "change" through repeated thinking and dialogue, based on a proactive and spontaneous "question". I sincerely hope that each and every one of you will do well in the future society.

September 20, 2019

Hiroki Yamaguchi, President, Saitama University