President's Address at the 2022 Saitama University Degree Awarding Ceremony

Thank you all for coming to today's Saitama University Degree Awarding Ceremony, and congratulations to our graduates and those who have successfully completed their graduate school program. I wish to express my heartfelt thanks to those family members and others who have warmly looked after and supported our students on their path to this day. Thanks also to our university personnel who have provided these students with guidance and assistance in their studies and research. Today, 31 students are graduating from the undergraduate school, 46 have completed a Master's Program, and 28 have completed a Doctoral Program. Of these, 67 are international students.

Even in this very difficult environment, with all the uncertainty brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic, you have continued going forward with your studies undeterred. All of you who have achieved your graduation or program completion under these difficulties deserve our earnest applause.

The Covid-19 pandemic in Japan is now in its seventh wave, and there is no telling when it will subside. Then on February 24, Russia invaded Ukraine, launching a war that continues today with no end in sight. These circumstances are having deep impacts on many fronts, including the production and distribution of many manufactured goods and agricultural products, and the supply of energy. Considering that two and a half years ago, no one foresaw the kind of global turmoil that has occurred, it truly feels like we are in an age described by the VUCA acronym, one of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity.

Today I would like to talk briefly about two aspects of the coming age into which those of you graduating from the University or completing your program will be living in.

The first is about the information society, including virtual spaces.

Information technology has achieved rapid progress, so that today people all over the world can connect instantly, without the constraints of time or place, and using social networks or other services, can share their own views or situation freely. According to a White Paper on Information and Communications in Japan by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, the 2030s will bring about an era of cyber-physical systems, as the social implementation of AI and IoT advances to realize the integration of cyber and physical spaces. This progress will contribute greatly not only to the solving of problems in society and economic growth, but to achievement of the sustainable development goals (SDGs). As

information technology advances further, it has the potential for sparking social change. In such a society, by gathering real world data in the cloud, analyzing it and obtaining feedback from it, it should be possible to solve many issues for society quickly; or at the individual level, to enable flexible work styles, or communication overcoming language barriers. It will further become possible for each individual to reference the world's data as 3D images, and to communicate with a diverse range of other people in the metaverse. Looking at such possibilities, it may seem at first that we can look forward to a rose-colored future; but we need to be well aware that where there is light, there is also shadow. One issue, for example, is personal privacy. Putting together the internet services that we use daily, and the personal information we make known, it is possible to learn about the individual's behavior, beliefs, and preferences. How to protect privacy will become an even bigger issue than today, while another difficult issue remaining is how to guarantee the reliability of information. What's more, as virtual spaces become increasingly similar to the real world, the boundaries between cyber and physical spaces will become less clear, which will inevitably have a major impact on how people lead their lives. Without a doubt, Web 3.0 and AI will change the coming digital society in ways beyond our imagination. To live a self-directed life in such an age, acquiring information literacy will of course be essential, along with the power of thinking and judgment for sifting and choosing information and acting on it. To that end, I hope you will always maintain a keen interest in phenomena in front of you, and in the unknown, along with a flexible heart to accept these, and an attitude of closely examining the essence at the root of phenomena.

The second aspect is globalization.
The various issues brought about by globalization, and its limitations, have lately come to the fore, including the global gap between rich and poor and loss of jobs resulting from free trade, and the turmoil from the refugee problem. Then in the last two and a half years, we have seen Covid-19 quickly develop into a global pandemic, and conflict make national security issues a reality for many nations due to their strong interdependence in food, energy and other areas. In such ways, we have come to face new negative aspects of globalization. At the same time, it will be essential for the world to come together toward solving the many increasingly complex problems confronting us all, including global warming, energy problems, and the food crisis causing some 828 million people to suffer. In that sense, globalization also offers hope. My wish for all of you is that you never give up your interest in different countries and cultures, and that you will engage with the people of the world with tolerance and empathy, in recognition of the world-scale problems we all face, while not forgetting to take a broad view of matters that are complexly intertwined. Today all the more, when we have been

reminded how easy it is for conflict to cause divisions between nations and people, I strongly feel the importance of dialog and discussions. One step toward dialog is to empathize with and understand the history of other people and nations, their way of thinking, and their story or "narrative." As you go on to live in the global society, this will be essential for you.

Just as twenty years ago, we could not have imagined the society of today, we cannot imagine the changes that will take place in the next twenty or thirty years. To live in such a time, the power to think on your own and to empathize with others will be indispensable. This is something I want you to always be mindful of.

In conclusion, I would like to note that the campus of this University where you spent your time is the starting point for character building. Think about those times when, on the lushly green Saitama University campus, you interacted with instructors, friends, and many others. I am sure the expertise you gained in your major field, the broad education you obtained, and the experience you gained in overcoming difficulties and conflict to go on with your lives, will give you strong courage to take a new step forward when you are confronted with any of life's difficulties in the future. When you have a chance, please come back to visit the University. The Saitama University campus is always ready to give you a warm welcome.

Let me end this address with a heartfelt desire that as graduates of Saitama University, you will use your talents to build a better world, while living the rest of your life with strong minds and cheerful hearts.

Congratulations once again on your graduation or program completion.

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