

Discovering the Greatness in Your DNA



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In this fast-paced, rapidly changing, information-driven world we live in today, 20 year seems like a long time. Some of the NAIST students here were just learning to walk when concrete was being poured for the foundations of these buildings. Over the past 20 years, we have witnessed many revolutionary changes in our lives such as the advent of the World Wide Web (www), the Human Genome Sequence, Global Positioning Systems (GPS), Blue LED, Nanotechnology, MP3, Wi-Fi, Google and smart phones.

But for an educational institution, 20 years is a very short time. Indeed, the oldest university in the US is 230 years old, which is still young compared to the University of Bologna, which was founded over 1100 years ago. But that is what makes the story of NAIST so exceptional. Never have I witnessed so much accomplished — by so few — in such a short time. And of course, this is not just my opinion but also a fact that is well documented by independent ranking organizations that have identified NAIST as first among 86 national universities in terms of its standards and achievements in education and research.

The purpose of my comments, however, is not to boast about NAIST being “ichiban.” Instead, we should take this time to reflect on those institutional values and personal qualities that have made NAIST such a success in such a short period of time — values and qualities like vision, integrity, hard work, courage and kindness. It is the application of these values and qualities in all aspects of daily life on the NAIST campus that is responsible for its remarkable achievements and success.

2011 will go down in history as an extraordinary year for NAIST and one that the people of Japan will never forget. The challenges facing NAIST (and the nation of Japan) in this post-tsunami era are staggering and will call for bold leadership based on vision, integrity, hard work, courage and kindness. These are qualities NAIST administrators, faculty and students have, and know how to apply to solve serious, complex and global problems. To some extent, the first 20 years of NAIST has been preparation for the year 2011. In the next 20 years, NAIST students and faculty will be called upon to step forward and apply their knowledge and leadership to ensure that Japanese science and technology is the best in the world and a model for emerging markets and developing countries around the globe.

Finally, I would like to say that the story of NAIST is also a story of leadership and greatness. In these troubled times, however, some may question Japan’s future role as a science and technology leader. Some may wonder; has greatness abandoned Japan? Has its greatness been misplaced in the hectic pace of modern life or destroyed by a great natural disaster? Has greatness flown West on the wings of a great white crane, never to return? I don’t think so. Greatness has not forsaken Japan because greatness is in your DNA. It has always been there and always will be. But the price of greatness is responsibility. I believe the most important challenge facing NAIST in the 21st century will be to help others, at home and abroad, discover the greatness in their DNA. For by helping others help themselves is the best way for NAIST to ensure its legacy of leadership and greatness in a world of change and uncertainty.

Congratulations on 20 wonderful years and best wishes on the next 20 years.

Very truly yours,

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