

President's Address at the 2023-Autumn Saitama University Entrance Ceremony

To everyone who has entered the graduate school at Saitama University, congratulations on your enrollment. Today, we are welcoming 25 students into the doctoral preliminary course and 30 into the doctoral advanced course, including 51 international students, to our graduate school. It brings us great joy to welcome all 55 of you as comrades who will walk the path of academic research together. We sincerely welcome you all. Additionally, we extend our heartfelt congratulations to the families and associates who have supported all of you who have enrolled, thus far. All of us, the faculty and staff, will support your student life in various aspects. Please step forward confidently as you embark on this new journey from today.

Now, I wonder how each of you is envisioning the upcoming days at the graduate school. Some may have clear goals already, while others might still be finding their way. Regardless of your individual circumstances and backgrounds, I believe that everyone here harbors high aspirations and attends this entrance ceremony with the hope of achieving something significant. Please don't forget those aspirations, and immerse yourself fully in cultivating a deeper knowledge and engaging in research in your respective fields. I pray that your time as students will be fruitful.

On the other hand, I want to share something important with all of you who chose to delve deeper into studies and research at the graduate school. That is, in this place called graduate school, the deeper your scholarly pursuits become, and the closer you get to the forefront of research, the more likely you are to encounter seemingly insurmountable walls, which no one can see beyond. You may question whether the direction of your study was correct or if your research methods will lead to the answers you seek. Please be prepared to face moments where you harbor such doubts and may find yourself at a standstill. Naturally, the path of academia and research is never easy to tread. Hitting a wall can indeed signify something genuine, something real. I speak this from my unfeigned experience as a researcher who has walked the same path.

Given that facing difficulties is inevitable, how should one confront them? This is the most crucial point I want to discuss with you today. Everyone needs some form of guideline or a solid foundation to overcome challenges. Having something to lean on and guide you during tough times will help you find your way amidst confusion. I sincerely hope that you will find guidelines that not only empower you to face the challenges during your student life but also support you throughout your lifetime.

Now, what might these life-supporting guidelines be? Broadly speaking, it could be books, words from predecessors, friends, or even arts that soothe the soul; it varies greatly. Nurturing a rich knowledge base, even outside of your specialty, can help strengthen your core. While cherishing these is important, what I fervently want to convey to you students today is something more concrete.

It is the desire for you to encounter "people," specifically to meet someone who could be deemed as a "mentor" in life. In retrospect, you might find that a particular encounter defined your path and served as

a long-term pillar in your life. Encounters with people can sometimes be pivotal moments that significantly influence your life. This is not about "luck." It is a fortunate circumstance that only visits those who live each day with a strong intention to seek such encounters. Throughout the various phases of your life at the graduate school, I hope you maintain a strong will to seek such encounters.

Let me share a bit of my fortunate experience.

I have a mentor who I remember with reverence and gratitude to this day, a person named Dr. Ito Zen, a renowned physician in gastroenterological surgery and a leading researcher. Meeting him was indeed an encounter with a mentor in life for me, clearly defining my subsequent research and life direction. Not only did I receive excellent guidance in my specialized field, but Dr. Ito also showed us, the members of his laboratory, the essence of being a researcher/scientist and the way to live as a person.

For scientists, how we perceive the "facts before us" is a fundamental attitude, even before the content of the research. During the research process, one can easily be swayed by prejudice or convenient speculation, misjudging the "facts," a pitfall terrifying for researchers. I was no exception. However, meeting Dr. Ito introduced me to the teaching that "facts are facts. Recognizing them correctly is what science is all about." This teaching, to "first and foremost see the facts clearly," has supported my research career, serving as a vital guideline to return to when I hit unseen walls. Furthermore, it taught me the importance of verifying facts with an open heart before making judgments in various aspects of life. In fact, this teaching was passed down from Dr. Ito's mentor, Dr. Keizo Ishihara, showing that excellent teachings are passed down like a baton. I hope that this baton has now been passed to you all.

Please find a person who can be a mentor in life, not just in the realm of academic research, here at Saitama University. The faculty and staff members who interact with students daily are all committed to engaging with the students they are responsible for, with genuine concern. I always believe that merely having state-of-the-art experimental equipment, facilities, abundant materials, and accumulated prior research is not enough to create a sufficient research environment for you students. At Saitama University, there are "people" waiting to shine a light on your path. I sincerely hope that you seize the opportunities to meet them here and that they become a lifelong pillar for you.

In conclusion, I wish you all the best in spending a healthy and fruitful next two or three years, achieving numerous accomplishments not only in research and studies but also in a wide range of activities.

Congratulations on your enrollment today.

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