

Address by the President of Okayama University at the 2019 Autumn Matriculation Ceremony

It is my great honor and pleasure to hold the 2019 Autumn Matriculation Ceremony of Okayama University together with the Academic and Executive Staff Members. Welcome all of you to Okayama University! On behalf of the University, I would like to extend our sincere congratulations to you. I would also like to congratulate your families, who have supported you to this point, and are present to join in this celebration today.

I'm extremely grateful to the 117 talented incoming students who have chosen Okayama University to pursue their academic interests. 66 are joining doctoral programs, 22 are joining master's programs, and 29 are joining the new global discovery program. The Global discovery program is a new course started 2 years ago that aims to nurture inspiring young leaders to take active roles on the global stage. Today, we welcome 92 global learners from 23 countries. However, not only to participants in the Global Discovery Program, but to all of you here today - We expect you will become global leaders and to obtain an entrepreneurial spirit, an innovative outlook, and be interdisciplinary collaborators during your studies at Okayama University.

All of you must be eager to take on new challenges in research and study at Okayama University. I assure you that you will have full support from the staff at the University. As I have said, we welcome you. In return, I ask you to develop a pride in Okayama University and to use this to push yourself forward during your time here.

Okayama University has a distinguished history. In 1870, almost 150 years ago, we took our initial step as Igakukan (Medical School) in the Okayama Domain. Igakukan was one of the first schools in Japan that adopted Dutch medical practices. Other areas of innovation were the Onchi school started in 1874 as the origin of the Faculty of Education, the 6th Higher School Japan in 1900 as the beginning of the faculty of Law, Letters, Economics and Science, and in 1914 the Ohara Agricultural Research Institute as the precursor of the Faculty of Agriculture. These schools and institutes were integrated in to New Okayama University in 1949. So we have been celebrating 70th anniversary of our university. The gift which our long developed history has given us is a diversity as an institution of higher education. This diversity can be seen in the scope of activities at Okayama University. In fact, we have 11 Faculties, 8 Graduate schools, 1 program, 3 Authorized Research Institutes, a University Hospital, Attached Schools, and 13,000 students in total. Please feel the history of Okayama University, not pushing down on you but supporting you as you learn, research, and discover.

Another reason to feel pride in Okayama University is to understand its academic achievements. The Founding philosophy of Okayama University is expressed as the “Creation of advanced knowledge and inheritance of precise knowledge.” In other words, to promote the stable and the sustainable advancement of human society, we need to keep on building new knowledge. Okayama University is committed to this mission and this commitment can be seen in the international recognition that Okayama University has gained.

I was appointed as President of Okayama University in April 2017, and one of my first priorities was to announce my “Makino Vision” as the operating

principle of the university. The details of the “Makino Vision” can be found in an essay titled “Going Beyond to Fruitful Academic Capital”. しなやかに超えていく 実りの学都へ I posted it on the university homepage and if you haven’t read it, I encourage you to do so.

In 2015, the United Nations set 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets to be achieved by 2030. For the realization of the academic capital, we have started to refer all our academic activities to Sustainable Development Goals. We have been developing a strategic framework and a systemic approach such as action guideline, awareness, mapping, strategy road map and then integrated report. We worked together with United Nations agencies, local commerce people, local governments. With these exceptional efforts in a university-wide level to advance the SDGs, Okayama University was awarded “SDG Partnership Award” in the first Japan SDGs Awards in 2017 from the Government of Japan.

Last July I was invited to United Nations in New York to give a talk on our whole institution’s approach toward achieving SDGs at High Level Political Forum.

I strongly believe that one of the most important factors to make successful actions on the global agenda is to collaborate with associates from abroad. Why not join our SDGs ambassador for the sustainable development challenges? I am so confident that YOU must be the right people to bring us current international winds.

A third reason to feel pride in Okayama is to recognize the depth of its history. Okayama was once the center of the culture and industry. You can easily understand this by visiting the ancient tumuli (KOFUN) of Kibi. The

known number of ancient tumuli built from the 4th to 5th century is approximately 12,000, the second most numerous in Japan. Okayama could support such massive undertakings because of its mild climate, good harvest of rice and salt, and production of iron. Moreover, Okayama was the cornerstone of sea traffic in the Inland Sea. Last year Momotaro legend around Kibi was recognized as Japan Heritage by Agency for Cultural Affairs, Government of Japan.

These advantages have been inherited today. We are surrounded by great nature, beautiful mountains in the north, Seto inland sea and the art-loving islands in the south. Bizen city, a historical place of Japanese education in the east, and the deep cultural and flourishing industry of Kurashiki in the west. The New York Times ranked Setochi 7th among 52 places where to go in 2019.

Today you are standing here at the new gate of your academic life. Step ahead and Challenge yourself to achieve to your new theme. We are here to support you!

To conclude, let me once again express my heartiest congratulations to everyone on your matriculation, today.

Thank you!

Hirofumi Makino, President,
Okayama University National University Corporation,
October 1st, 2019