

Address by the President of Okayama University at the 2020 Autumn Matriculation Ceremony

It is my great honor and pleasure to hold the 2020 Autumn Matriculation Ceremony of Okayama University together with members of the academic and executive staff. Welcome, everyone, to Okayama University! On behalf of the university, I would like to extend our sincere congratulations to you. Although your families and friends are unable to attend due to COVID-19, we are very happy to see that you are here and in good spirits today.

I am extremely grateful to the 109 talented incoming students who have chosen Okayama University to pursue their academic interests. Sixty-two are joining doctoral programs, 21 are joining master's programs, and 26 are joining the Global Discovery Program. Today, we welcome 80 global learners from 19 countries.

We at Okayama University stand ready to support you in your ambitious pursuit of research and study. We hope that you will have a rewarding study abroad experience as a result.

According to archeological findings, Okayama was once a center of culture and economic activity in Japan, as you will come to understand when you have the opportunity to visit the ancient burial mounds (kofun) in the Kibi area. Okayama is also a land blessed with abundant nature surrounded by beautiful mountains to the north; the Seto Inland Sea with its art-loving islands to the south; the city of Bizen, the historic site of Japanese education, to the east; and Kurashiki, with its deep culture and thriving industry, to the west. No wonder The New York Times ranked Setouchi as 7th on its list of 52 places to visit in 2019.

Since 2017, Okayama University has been working toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) proposed by the United Nations in order to preserve the history and traditions of this region and to pass on a sustainable Okayama to future generations.

Last year, I was invited to the United Nations in New York to speak at the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development about how Okayama University has integrated the SDGs into our institutional vision and strategic development plan and how we are incorporating the SDGs into society through our educational and research enterprises.

The first step in this process is back-casting, in which we proactively envision definite goals for the future that will guide our mission and practices. In the second step, called outside-in, we implement strategic management initiatives driven by the social issues and needs of the society around us. The third step involves Okayama University taking the initiative to engage in open innovation with multiple stakeholders. The final step is social implementation in which we develop the academic outcomes derived from our human intellectual activities in order to furnish solutions for societal issues. These four steps, coupled with resilient partnerships rooted in diversity and inclusiveness, will enable us to face difficult challenges such as COVID-19.

We have upgraded our original Makino Vision to Okayama University Vision 2.0 to promote global engagement with more varied stakeholders in order to pursue the well-being of the Setouchi region. As a student studying at a research university promoting the SDGs,

we hope that you will learn many new things with your friends and colleagues that will enable you to produce and deliver innovative discoveries, skills, and applications to the world. With that purpose in mind, please enjoy the opportunities to experience the history and culture of the Okayama region as well as its rich natural environment.

Today you are standing at a new gateway in your academic career. Step ahead and challenge yourself to forge a new path. 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,

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