

<2016. 5. 19. Last copy>

125th AIT Commencement Address

- Prominent Alumnus Speaker: Dr. Woo, Tong-Ki
(Governor of Education in Daegu city, Korea)
- Date : 19th May 2016.
- Venue: AIT Conference Hall

“Dreams beyond dreams”

The attainment of my dreams becomes the cornerstone for other’s dreams, and finally becomes the foundation to serve all of Asia’s hope

To fulfill this vision, it is suggested to establish an “Asia Pacific Education Community” strengthening the human network of AIT Alumni.

(Greeting)

Honorable Dr. Worsak Kanok-Nukulchai, respected peers and guests!

Firstly, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the president of AIT, who has so graciously invited me to join in this monumental moment, and to the members of the AIT Board of Trustees, Diplomatic Corps of Bangkok, faculty members, parents and to all those in attendance.

It is a great honor to be able to address you, my peers, as a representative alumnus of this splendid school.

Above all, I heartily congratulate the graduating students for your great accomplishment and untiring efforts!

33 years ago, I was also seated right here, full of excitement, but with a younger face than now.

I have many beautiful memories from my 20 months at AIT. But there were also some difficulties and challenging experiences for me. One of my most distinctive memories are the intimate friendships that I was able to forge with students from various countries, through which I was able to obtain a new awareness of Asia.

(Introduction)

My dearest junior alumni!

Out of all of the fond memories from my time at AIT, there are some people who stand out as particularly special and unforgettable. They are Dr. Iwami Toshikasu; my initial advisor and the current mayor of Himeji(姫路) city in Japan, Professor Kaji Hideki at the faculty of the Human Settlements Development, coming from

Tsukuba University in Japan, Professor Karl E. Weber, my final advisor and the former dean of the Human Settlements Development Faculty and lastly Professor Alastair North, the former president of AIT.

When I was in the final year of my masters, I ran into some financial difficulty, and the future of my studies was quite unsure. With the help of these four venerable individuals, I was able to complete my thesis and win a full scholarship from the Ministry of Education in Japan, and subsequently was able to enroll in the doctorate program at one of the most famous universities in Japan, Tsukuba University. I am so thankful to be given this special opportunity to express my most heartfelt gratitude to these professors.

With hard work and perseverance, I was able to finish my doctorate and become a professor at Youngnam University, my alma mater. Youngnam University is considered one of the best private universities in Korea, with 1,000 professors and about 35,000 students in attendance every year.

During the 15 years of my professorship, I had various help from the AIT community. In 2005, I was selected as the president of the university. After serving at the university, I had a deep calling to further dedicate myself to education; In 2010 I was elected as the governor of education of Daegu Metropolitan City, 2.5 million population, in Korea, for 2 terms.

Looking back on my journey, I don't think I would have been able to overcome the many challenges in my life, nor would I have been able to fulfill my hope and dreams, without the experiences I had at AIT. Being a part of the AIT community has shown me the

power of the Asian network, beyond country and nation borders. The experiences at AIT engraved in me important values.

It has taught me to have an open mind when encountering the world and to make sure to keep the community spirit in my mind. These values encourage me to actively encounter and solve all challenges I may face, even to this day.

Distinguished professors and students!

"Asia," as we know it, cannot be characterized into one single bloc due to the distinctive cultural and historical features of each country. Many people say that Asia can be categorized into a single entity in terms of religion or philosophy, such as Confucianism or Buddhism. But I think that any one of the religions or ideologies is not enough to comprehend the diverse and abundant identities of this collection of Asian countries. We cannot discount the long histories, varied cultures, distinct characteristics, and diversity due to geographical differences that exist in Asia.

What is interesting to note though, is that each country in Asia overcame its own conflicts through the value of community and strong ties to family. As a result, each country was able to maintain its own distinctive culture and traditions while also preserving the overarching idea of "community".

It gives me doubt that the normative and rational governing style of the E.U. or the U.S.A. may not work in Asia. Instead, Asia is establishing its own system: a strong chain of solidarity, with the value of community, open-mindedness, and embracement of diversity at its core.

Today, alumni of AIT serve in significant political, social, and economical roles in over 90 countries. In addition, AIT currently hosts scholars from over 60 different countries. AIT truly is the center of a great international community!

However, living amongst such diversity can cause conflicts in our lives. AIT students are not immune to this problem. It is quite possible for some of you; disagreements based on differences remain in your heart, even as you are graduating today. Nonetheless, I strongly believe, that the reason you are able to be here at this graduating ceremony is because the great value of community and commitment to family are in your heart.

Esteemed AIT alumni!

In the early 20th century, the fear of polio gripped the western world. Even up until as recently as 1950, there were about 50,000 confirmed cases of polio per year in America, with no real cure or vaccine in sight. The National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis was created in America in order to fight this much feared disease, and this is where Dr. Jonas Edward Salk began his most important research in finding a vaccine for polio. He started his long journey in 1952, experimenting with injecting the virus into the kidney cells of monkeys. He finally met success 3 years later, with the creation of the first viable polio vaccine.

During those 3 years, Dr. Salk's experiments failed over 200 times. A reporter asked him, "How did it feel to fail 200 times trying to invent a vaccine for polio?" To which Dr. Salk replied, "I never failed 200 times at anything in my life. My family taught me never to use that word. I simply discovered 200 ways how to not make a vaccine for polio."

The potential personal gains for Dr. Salk were immeasurable. However, instead of patenting his vaccine manufacturing method, he made it open to the public, free of charge. Many viewed this as foolish. But, Dr. Salk's calm, and now famous response was, "There is no patent. Could you patent the sun?" To him, giving the gift of life to all of the children of the world, without fear of catching that crippling, life-altering disease, was more precious than any amount of money. To me, his actions were more powerful than the sun

To my outstanding fellow alumni!

Soon you will be heading back home, celebrating your accomplishments, basking in the memories of your time at AIT. But, very soon after that, you will come face to face with the harsh reality of the situation surrounding your families, your neighbors, and your home town.

This harsh reality is omnipresent the world over in the forms of starvation, fear of war, the polarization of wealth, alienation, marginalization, and isolation. This reality will try to undermine your passion and your fresh outlook on the world. This reality was, for Dr. Salk, the challenge of facing failure over 200 times. How will you overcome this reality?

I strongly believe that your time here at AIT has instilled the strength, and fostered the abilities necessary to accept and overcome the challenges of this harsh reality. Over your two years studying here, you have already overcome many moments of conflict and distress and attained an abundance of knowledge with open-mindedness and grace. Through your strong sense of solidarity for the community, you have built lasting relationships with people from many different backgrounds.

Now, you have the knowledge and experience to overcome the countless failures that await you, just as they awaited Dr. Salk. You have friends who you can turn to in times of need. You also have the great heritage of the Asian community to help you fulfill your dreams.

Many people are waiting for you. They are waiting on your dreams to be fulfilled. They are stuck in the cycle of repeated failure, with no help in sight. They wish your dreams, when accomplished, to become the sun that will shine upon their lives.

I would like you to consider the concept of 'dreams beyond dreams'. They are dreams born from the numerous failures and despair of the past. They weigh more than any one person's dream; they are dreams that we must work together to fulfill for the future. Anyone can dream a dream with their eyes closed. Dreams dreamt with your eyes wide open; they are 'dreams beyond dreams' and represent hope for all.

To the graduating class of AIT!

'Dreams beyond dreams' can only be accomplished through solidarity, not by individuals. Therefore, they require concrete strategies, power of execution, and taking on huge responsibilities. In addition, they should be created with a grand-scale purpose in mind, such as the peaceful development of Asia and beyond. As an educator, I dare to say that such dreams can only be fulfilled through the great tool of education.

Therefore, I would like to take this opportunity to suggest a new dream, to establish an Asia Pacific Education Community with AIT serving as the center. I make this suggestion with the wish that us alumni of AIT will come together, share our knowledge, propose

solutions, and willingly help each other when needed. I also propose that through this community, the Asia-Pacific countries will come to realize and implement the values of open-mindedness and inclusion. It is my wish that, as part of this community, we will all make a meaningful contribution to the peace and prosperity of humanity!

(Conclusion)

Honorable President Worsak Kanok-Nukulchai(워르삭 카녹-누쿨차이), all the community members of AIT and my dearest junior alumni!

Now it's your time. It's time for all of your hard work to come to fruition. It's also time to face many new challenges with the same passion that you have already shown. I firmly believe that the people of this AIT community will lay the foundation for the masses to achieve their dreams.

Again, I'd like to offer my deepest congratulations on your graduation.

Thank you.