

Visions and Roles of KAIST

KAIST Embassy Day (June 23, 2017)

Your Excellencies, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

It is indeed my great pleasure and privilege to welcome you to this Embassy Day. As the new president of KAIST, I am very honored to host this special gathering for the first time.

Let me first express my sincere appreciation to all the distinguished guests representing 61 countries, including 31 ambassadors, who are here with us today despite your very tight schedules.

KAIST has made very good relationships with 275 partner institutions from 61 countries around the world. I would like to thank you for your continuous support toward KAIST.

KAIST is the first and top science and technology university in Korea. Today, it is being truly recognized as a world-class university. The presence of this leading group of diplomats reflects how KAIST's reputation has blossomed.

At this gathering, we would like to share the past, present, and the future of KAIST with you and promote a closer relationship between you and KAIST moving forward.

Korea was one of the poorest countries in the world just half a century ago. Our per capita GDP at that time was around 200 USD.

Now, Korea ranks 13th in the world in terms of GDP and ranks eighth in the world for trade volume. Korea also emerged as one of the seven most innovative countries, according to the IMD report.

Not only our economic growth, but also our scientific growth led to its astonishing progress. For instance, about 40 years ago, not a single SCI paper was published by Korean scientists. Now, more than 50,000 articles have been published, helping Korea rank 12th in the world in terms of high-level publications. For patent registrations, Korea ranks fourth in the world.

Korea is a very dynamic country. We achieved industrialization, informatization, democratization, and globalization in such a short period, less than half a century, and this is frequently referred to as the miracle on the Han River.

Now, the question is what brought about such phenomenal change. My answer is that there are three driving factors. Those are Visionary leaders, Innovative plans, and Passionate people, which I call 'VIP' driving forces. The success of KAIST is one of the best examples achieved by the 'VIP' driving forces.

First, through the vision of the Late President 정희 박, KAIST was established in 1971 under a special law. It was time for Korea to try to transform from an agricultural country to an industrialized country. KAIST was tasked with a mission to foster highly talented manpower in science and technology and conduct basic and applied research, both of which were desperately needed for the nation's economic development.

Then, to achieve this mission, an innovative plan for the first research-oriented university in Korea was prepared, mainly under the leadership of Dr. 근모 정. He is the man who made KAIST happen. He proposed an idea to establish an innovative university in Korea to Dr. John Hannah, director of US AID. The proposal was accepted and Korean government received funding in the form of a six million dollar loan from US AID. The six million dollar loan became the seed money for the KAIST of today.

Finally, KAIST recruited passionate faculty and students. In those days, elite students went abroad for advanced studies and didn't come back to Korea. Brain drain was a serious problem. So an innovative plan was made to retain elite students in Korea.

KAIST provided a special benefit package for its students including a full scholarship, free room and board, an allowance, and waiving their military obligation. KAIST also recruited the best faculty from home and abroad offering salaries three times higher than other Korean universities.

KAIST has fulfilled its mission passionately and faithfully, thus far producing over 58,000 graduates including 11,700 doctoral degree holders. KAIST graduates are now working at universities, research institutes, industries, and government. They have played a pivotal role in the nation's industrialization and information revolution.

KAIST now is preparing for another quantum leap. As the first alumnus president, I have a mission to prepare the platform for this quantum leap.

There is a famous saying that making innovation in a university is harder than moving cemeteries. As such, I am under enormous pressure because expectations are high from not only the KAIST community but also Korean society. However, I can tell you that it is a very honorable and valuable pressure to have.

For this mission, in my inaugural address, I proposed a new vision of KAIST, which is to become a “Global Value-Creative World-Leading University.”

By this, I mean that KAIST should foster global leaders capable of creating knowledge with a global impact, and produce world-leading research achievements for advancing science and technology to benefit the world.

To realize this vision, I am going to pursue innovations in five areas. These are innovation for education, convergence research, technology commercialization, future strategies, and globalization.

Innovation for the globalization of our campus is a ‘must’ for KAIST to become a world-leading university. Globalization cannot be realized without the participation and contributions of our foreign faculty and researchers as well as our foreign students.

Currently, 179 foreign faculty and researchers from over 31 countries, representing 8.7% of the total faculty, are working at KAIST. Also, 710 foreign students from 86 countries, representing about 8% of the total students, are now studying at KAIST. We will actively recruit more foreign professors and students to KAIST in the coming years to achieve a truly global campus.

Making an English-Korean bilingual campus is the most important step toward the globalization of KAIST. We will hire more administrative staff members who can speak both Korean and English fluently so that foreign faculty and students are not frustrated while working and living here.

KAIST was born out of the international efforts to make the world better. Such an international collaboration combined with visionary leaders, innovative ideas, and passionate and talented people made the significant difference here. Since then, the history of Korea's science and technology is the history of KAIST, and KAIST has served as the center of the innovation for academic rigor and cutting-edge research.

The best ideas come from the diversity. Brain drain no longer exists in this complex global era. Brain just follows the best path to where they can reach their potential. Fortunately, KAIST now gains tremendous strength by being a magnet for talents from around the world.

Now, we are ready to make another big difference, partnering with global talents all around the world. That is the one of our ways giving back to the world what we gained from the global community. I hope many of outstanding young talents from your countries will join us at KAIST to make the world better, and be a part of new chapter of KAIST history.

Let me close my speech by welcoming all of you once again and wishing you a wonderful and valuable time with us.

Thank you very much.

Sung-Chul Shin
President, KAIST