

2020 Commencement Address

(August 28, 2020)

Dear graduates!

Congratulations on your graduation!

I am proud of you, as both an alumnus and a senior scientist.

Today, we are honored by the presence of Dr. Woo Sik Kim, Chairman of the Board of Trustees, and Dr. KunMo Chung, the former Minister of Science and Technology in spite of the hot weather.

On behalf of all of us at KAIST, I congratulate Dr. Younghoon David Kim, Chairman and CEO of Daesung Group, on accepting his honorary doctorate.

I'd like to express my deepest respect and gratitude to the parents who have trusted KAIST and supported these graduating students.

Graduates are the most fruitful achievements that a university can produce. I also thank our faculty and staff who made our graduates' honor possible today.

KAIST has significantly scaled down today's ceremony to ensure the health and safety of the attendees amid concerns over the latest wave of COVID-19. Out of the 2,846 total graduates for February and August, only a few are attending today's ceremony.

The majority of today's graduates are joining us via YouTube. The first-ever blended commencement ceremony in the history of KAIST will be remembered for many years to come.

We thank you for your participation and we greatly appreciate your understanding during these unusual circumstances.

With the advent of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, the sudden outbreak of COVID-19 has brought about many changes. There has been a rapid transition from a Contact Society to a Non-contact Society, an Off-Line Economy to an Online Economy, and from Globalism to Protectionism.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the impact of the COVID-19 crisis will remain for several decades. I have to agree with Thomas Friedman's observation on COVID-19 calling this the new historical divide. He said, "There is the world B.C.—Before Corona—and the world A.C.—After Corona."

In this age of greatest transformations, no one stays a winner or loser forever. It is time to reflect again on the words of the biologist Charles Darwin, who stated that the species that survives is "the one that is the most adaptable to change."

I believe we can transform this crisis into an opportunity by practicing the C³ values.

The first C is for Challenging.

Humanity is experiencing major changes driven by science and technology in the age of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, characterized by hyper-connectivity, superintelligence, and hyper-convergence. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated such changes, which are occurring at a pace that was not thought possible before. In these ever-changing times, scientists and engineers should be courageous enough to deal with new challenges. Instead of following behind others as a fast follower, we should take the initiative and walk down new paths as a first mover.

The second C stands for Creating.

Korea's science and technology and its industries are no longer at the stage of simply emulating others. Science and technology without global competitiveness loses value, even within the country. The age of the Fourth Industrial Revolution is one where the winner takes all. In the case of DRAM semiconductors, two Korean companies account for 74% of the global market share. Taiwan's TSMC dominates more than half of the foundry market, while China's DJI accounts for 74% of the drone market. Your goal in research should be "B.F.O.," which means to produce the world's best, first, or only. That is, you should be constantly creating and experimenting with new and innovative ideas.

The last C is for Caring.

While "Challenging" and "Creating" serve as fuel, "Caring" is what sets the basis for mutual, all-inclusive growth. Unfortunately, many CEOs have said that KAIST graduates excel in their work, but tend to be less satisfactory in teamwork. To become respected leaders in a hyper-connected, horizontal society, it is important to exhibit consideration for others. For this reason, KAIST emphasizes a Caring spirit in its education, so as to foster experts who are capable of C³.

You are the future and hope of Korea. This is not my opinion alone, but a consensus reached among those who are concerned about the nation's future.

Soo-Young Lee, Chairman of Kwangwon Industry, donated the huge sum of KRW 67.6 billion to KAIST, money that she earned over her lifetime. When we combine her two previous donations, the total amounts to KRW 76.6 billion.

At the news conference, one reporter asked a question that was on everyone's mind.

“What made you donate such a huge sum to KAIST even though it's not your alma mater?”

Her answer was brief but clear.

“Science and technology must develop further for Korea to be stronger, and contribute to the advancement of humanity. From my past observations, I felt certain that KAIST would play that role.”

Chairman Lee and many others have high expectations of KAIST. Who are the ones to fulfill such expectations?

Of course, it's you. I hope you will remember your duty to practice the C³ spirit of Challenging, Creating, and Caring at your new workplace or in graduate school, in order to live up to the expectations of society.

The pandemic is undoubtedly a global crisis, but it can be transformed into a new opportunity for Korea. As Winston Churchill said, “Never let a good crisis go to waste.”

Korea's exemplary first response to COVID-19 has enhanced its global status and boosted the self-esteem of its citizens. Thanks to the success of K-Disease Control, Korea has had the opportunity to promote K-Bio and make its presence felt in the global healthcare market, previously dominated by the United States and Europe.

K-Bio has caused a butterfly effect in other fields as well. Bioneer, a company founded by one of our graduates, supplied KRW 5 billion worth of COVID-19 diagnostic kits to Qatar. The Qatar government followed up by ordering 103 LNG ships worth KRW 23.6 trillion to Korean companies. This is an example of how K-Bio can have a positive impact on the national economy.

KAIST does not have a medical college or general hospital, but its world-leading scientists and engineers are playing a role in K-Bio and the COVID-19 response. Recently, KAIST proposed a new deal for science and technology in response to COVID-19, and secured a supplementary budget from the government.

The new deal, initiated by KAIST, is expected to produce solutions based on science and technology, and drive innovation in the biomedical and manufacturing industries. By creating new antivirus industries, KAIST will pave the way for Korea to join the ranks of top countries in medicine and healthcare, and ultimately contribute to protecting the health of humanity.

Dearest graduates,

As your senior, professor, and president, I am so extremely pleased to hear about our graduates who have contributed to the development of Korea and humanity. As you pursue your dreams on the global stage, change the world as a “Global Shaper,” drive innovation as a “Global Innovator,” and push the world forward as a “Global Mover.”

People can change their nationality, but know that academic degrees are for life. If you experience any difficulties in your next journey, do not hesitate to reach out to your alma mater for help. KAIST will always be there for you, just as a mother cherishes her child.

Once again, I extend my sincere congratulations and give you my deepest blessings on your future endeavors. Thank you.

August 28, 2020

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Shin', written in a cursive style.

Sung-Chul Shin
President of KAIST