

# Address to New Monbukagakusho (MEXT) Scholars

Good day—and to our hosts, Konnichiwa, Minna san.

First, congratulations. Being selected as a Monbukagakusho scholar is both an honor and a responsibility. I stand here as someone who once sat where you are: a Saitama University scholar who finished a Master of Engineering in Civil and Environmental Engineering in 2002 through an ADB scholarship, and a PhD in Biological and Environmental Science in 2007. Those years in Japan—five in total—shaped how I work, how I live, and how I serve when I returned to the Philippines.

Let me share three anchors that made those years meaningful: curiosity, discipline, and community.

## Curiosity.

Japan invited me to try new things—inside and outside the lab. I discovered that even the simplest experiences could teach me something: the efficiency of a tiny apartment that somehow had a place for everything; the comfort of the *konbini* at 2 a.m.; the joy of thrift shops and flea markets where a few coins buy a story; the calm of parks; *hanami* under stubbornly beautiful cherry blossoms; weekend festivals that turn streets into classrooms of culture; and trips across prefectures that remind you how diverse one country can be.

Even the *shokudō*—the university cafeteria—was part of the lesson. The food was delicious and affordable, and it taught me that good systems make everyday life easier. That ease let me focus on work.

Curiosity also meant stepping into the language. My program was in English, but I enrolled in two semesters of beginner Japanese. Believe me, it was more than vocabulary—it was access: to conversations with lab technicians, to signs in a train station, to small kindnesses in a

grocery line, and to friendships that lasted long after graduation. Take the language classes. They will multiply your opportunities.

### **Discipline.**

Japan sharpened my respect for time. I had always worked hard, but in Japan I learned to plan precisely and arrive early. Trains don't wait; experiments don't forgive unclear protocols; opportunities don't linger. I carried that discipline home and it continues to serve me every day.

You will find that the research environment is generous. Most materials you need will be available. That is a gift—but also a challenge. Your job is to turn resources into breakthroughs. Write clear questions. Keep a meticulous lab notebook. Learn your instruments like a craftsman learns their tools. Ask your *sensei* and *senpai* for feedback, then test ideas yourself. If an experiment fails—and many will—write down why, and try again tomorrow. Progress is the quiet sum of faithful days.

When the work feels heavy, take a breath. My lab mates and I had our own medicine: simple dinners and the occasional karaoke night. We weren't trying to be pop stars; we were reminding ourselves to be human. Rest is not the opposite of work—it is the partner of excellence.

### **Community.**

Some of my closest friends came from those years—Japanese classmates and international students from every continent. We bonded over late-night problem sets, awkward jokes in mixed languages, and the shared relief of results that finally made sense. Keep those connections. Your network after graduation will become a living library—people who open doors, share data, and send courage when you need it.

Invest intentionally in that community. Show up for seminars, volunteer at events, help a first-year student find the right building on a rainy day. Take a photo together at *hanami*; schedule a study group; send updates after you move on. A simple “How are you?” can become a research collaboration five years later.

## **Practical advice for the road ahead:**

- Take it one day at a time. Small, consistent advances beat heroic, unsustainable sprints.
- Read widely—papers, patents, methods—and then read beyond your field. Innovation often happens at the edges.
- Do your experiments diligently, even when you're alone in the lab. The skills and confidence you earn in those hours are priceless.
- Plan your week. Block time for writing, lab work, analysis, exercise, and rest. Protect your sleep.
- Learn Japanese, even at a basic level; it pays back every single day.
- Enjoy Japan. Explore. Eat well. Walk often. Let beauty recalibrate you.

If you ask what I gained beyond the diplomas, I would say this: Japan taught me to honor time, to design my days, and to do ordinary things with extraordinary care. Those habits traveled home with me and continue to shape how I work and lead.

I often wish I could go back to study or do research again—not because I missed something, but because I loved it that much. Five years in Japan were not just a chapter; they were a compass.

To all of you: carry the flag of your family, your university, and our country with quiet pride. Be bridges—between cultures, between disciplines, between ideas and impact. The Monbukagakusho scholarship gives you a platform; you will supply the purpose.

Study well. Be kind. Be on time. Build something that lasts.

Arigatō gozaimasu, and mabuhay.