

Dean's Message at the Graduation Ceremony of
the School of International Liberal Studies (SILS), Waseda University

26 March 2021

Prof Taisaku Ikeshima
Dean, SILS, Waseda University

Congratulations upon your graduation from the School of International Liberal Studies (SILS) at Waseda University! I sincerely congratulate all of you.

At the outset, I have to acknowledge that you must have had a very hard time for more than a year due to the COVID-19, and, on behalf of the faculty, I sympathise with you in your extraordinary suffering from the various consequences caused by the extraordinary spread of this unprecedented pandemic throughout this academic year at SILS.

Please understand, however, that this is practically the first time in a century since the so-called Spanish flu of 1918-1920. Under these circumstances, simultaneously, you must have learned how to cope with this 'once-in-a-lifetime' situation and a 'new normal' no matter how stressful they may be.

I hope that this experience must have strengthened your resilience and will variously widen your future perspective particularly when you encounter another hard time to overcome. Please do not forget to turn your misfortune into a blessing. And this positive attitude is what you have largely acquired at SILS, as you will see in the future.

Let us gather courage to take the next step! You may be lonely, but you are not isolated. We are not alone in this world, and we need to cooperate and survive with your '*sentiment de solidarité*'.

The following is a famous passage in 'Meditation Book XVII' (1624) written by the English poet John Donne (1572–1631). How do you interpret it?

No man is an island,
entire of itself;
every man is a piece of the continent,
a part of the main;
if a clod be washed away by the sea,
Europe is the less,
as well as if a promontory were,
as well as if a manor of thy friend's
or of thine own were;
any man's death diminishes me,
because I am involved in mankind,

and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls;
it tolls for thee.
(‘Meditation XVII’, *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*, 1624)

This part is renowned for the motif and title of a celebrated book, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940), written by the Nobel Prize-winning U.S. writer E.M. Hemingway (1899–1961), later adapted into a film. Moreover, the first few lines of this passage are cited in a must-read in the field of international relations—*What is History?* (1st Ed., (1961); 2nd Ed., Penguin Books (1990), p. 31), written by the British historian E.H. Carr (1892–1982).

Even today, this esoteric poem makes us think deeply about the relationship between the individual and the whole, and the relationship between the individual and society. I would like you to re-read this poem, written nearly 400 years ago, and to use it as mental nourishment for your future.

You are expected to make a meaningful contribution to society where a new normal prevails, or even with COVID-19. We cannot go back to where we were before this pandemic. Please confidently look ahead to the future, no matter how daunting it may be.

Confucius (about 551 BC–479 BC) is said to have preached that, as the true value of human beings is tested in adversity, they should learn how to turn it into prosperity.

「子曰、不仁者不可以久處約、不可以長處樂、仁者安仁、知者利仁」
(『論語』卷第二 里仁第四 二)

Amazingly, this precept, taught more than 2,000 years ago, is still relevant. Let us go forward together to turn the present critical moment into a future opportunity!

Finally, I would like to celebrate this occasion by congratulating all of you and your families. On behalf of the faculty and Waseda University, I wish you all the best for a healthy and prosperous life.