

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

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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 must acknowledge the very difficult time you must have gone through for more than two years due to the COVID-19 pandemic. On behalf of the faculty, I sympathise with you in your suffering from the various consequences caused by the extraordinary spread of this unprecedented pandemic.

Remember, this is the first time in a century – since the Spanish flu of 1918–1920 – that the world has faced such a situation. Under these ‘once-in-a-lifetime’ circumstances, you must have learned how to cope with the ‘new normal’ situation, no matter how stressful it may be.

This experience must have strengthened your resilience, and will widen your future perspective in various ways, particularly when you encounter new challenges to overcome. Please do not forget to turn your misfortunes into a blessing. It is this positive attitude that you have acquired at SILS, as you will see in the future.

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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 a ‘*sentiment de solidarité*’ (sense of solidarity). Solitude can be the mother of independence. Independence supports freedom.

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 as 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), and later adapted into a film. Moreover, the first few lines of this passage are cited as 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 need to be independent for your freedom. Freedom, however, incurs social responsibility. How to balance one’s freedom and social commitments? This has been a difficult question through history.

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You are expected to make a meaningful contribution in a society where a new normal prevails, even as COVID-19 endures. We cannot go back to where we were before this pandemic. The current war in Ukraine has also signalled to us that we are, and will be, in an uncertain world for a while. We are very aware that such armed conflicts and the present pandemic critically affect the whole world in many ways. It is ironic that borders still matter, though our world has become globalised and borderless.

I urge you to look ahead confidently to the future, no matter how daunting it may be. Don’t be afraid of it. What you have acquired at SILS and Waseda will nurture your survival with a sense of solidarity even amidst these volatilities and uncertainties, and help you overcome any difficulties that may arise in unforeseeable circumstances.

「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)

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. It is amazing that this precept, taught more than 2,000 years ago, is still relevant. Let us go forward together to turn the present challenge into an opportunity for the future!

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