

Dean's Message at the Graduation Ceremony  
School of International Liberal Studies (SILS), Waseda University  
Saturday, 17 September 2022

Prof Taisaku Ikeshima  
LLB, LLM, DES, PhD

Congratulations on graduating from the School of International Liberal Studies (SILS) at Waseda University!

I would like to begin by acknowledging the extremely challenging situations you faced for more than two and half a year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. On behalf of the faculty, I sympathise with you in your extraordinary suffering owing to the various consequences caused by this unprecedented pandemic—particularly in the last five semesters of your studies at SILS.

You may have stayed home alone for a prolonged period over a few semesters, felt less satisfied with inconvenient lifestyle adjustments—such as attending classes online—and missed innumerable precious opportunities to enjoy your final moments of university life, especially those spent with your teachers and friends.

However, please understand that this is practically the first time in a century since the Spanish flu (1918-1920) that people have experienced an equally similar critical situation for human health beyond borders due to an extraordinarily wide and fast spread of the virus. 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 things may be.

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

Shigenobu Okuma, the founder of Waseda University, was always optimistic and curious about world affairs and spared no effort to train himself. He would often say, 'the world is, indeed, my university'<sup>1</sup>.

---

Graduation signifies that this event is the entrance of a new stage in your life and the

---

<sup>1</sup> 早稲田大学編『大隈重信演説談話集』（岩波文庫）（岩波書店、2016 年）40-42 頁。My translation.

beginning of your professional career. You must stand on your own feet, enjoy your freedom, and take full responsibility for your actions. You have to be nobody but yourself.

Therefore, I request you to lead your life in such a manner that, in retrospect, you find your SILS days as certainly some of the best moments in your whole life. You must be confident about what you have done at SILS, thanking everyone who supported you during your studies. You have already studied and trained extensively by completing our liberal arts programme with a spirit of diversity and flexibility.

Students often ask the question, ‘Teacher, what is the *use* of this (subject)?’ However, *usefulness* does not guarantee the essence of things. As history shows, what is useful (practical) at one time tends to become useless (impractical) eventually. Technology, whether biotechnology or nanotechnology, is a good example. Then, what about artificial intelligence (AI)? Do you think that it will threaten to replace us and take our jobs, or will we overcome the rise in any emerging technology? In essence, it is human beings that command and control the use of technology regardless of its nature, digital- or cyber-.

We, human beings, may occasionally be overly concerned about the unforeseeable future. It is understandable now, particularly because nothing is certain in the ‘post-corona’ era. We must have learned that no technology or medicine perfectly enables us to overcome a new challenge such as COVID-19. You should not be deceived by wrong or manipulated data or be misguided by disinformation, as you might have already experienced with the internet or SNS.

One may find that this uncertain and unforeseeable world is, and will be, the new normal. Science may not be an almighty tool for every need of human beings, though it incessantly develops. However, we all know that in the nature and the universe, we can historically learn from the significance of observations and reasonable inferences made by scientists such as Copernicus, Galilei, and Newton. Well, most of them may also have been philosophers or thinkers in the widest sense of the term.

What, then, is the use of the classics and history that we read in a daily life? Classics will remain with us as long as humankind exists. History may mirror our future and be with numerous treasures of lessons. That is the purpose of classics and history.

Whether in the East or the West, we will certainly continue to need Homer’s epics, the Four Books and Five Classics of Confucianism, Shakespeare’s dramas, and Descartes’ philosophy, among multiple others. I hope that you enjoyed some of these classics of literature, films, operas, and any other form of art during the stay-home period, and you will even benefit from any of these common heritage-like achievements and wisdom of humankind for good in your life whenever you may want to.

Moreover, you no longer have to differentiate between those who specialised in the fields of humanities and social sciences and those who majored in the fields of STEAM (science,

technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics). This dichotomous separation of academic fields, or the academic universe would be too narrow-sighted, naïve, and outdated to survive in a world full of uncertainties and complexities, although this tendency is quite common in Japan, particularly in choosing one's major at university.

You do not know when what you acquired at SILS will become useful. That is why I hope that what you learned here will bear fruit in the long run, no matter how many years it takes. Your learning at our school will certainly provide you the ability and will to make your own decisions and move forward using your own effort—even under an adversity like this pandemic. This is, in my opinion, the effect of receiving an education of liberal arts at an exceptional school like ours.

---

In earlier times, the life expectancy of human beings was about 50 years, while it can exceed 100 years in the current world. Given this, you have to consider that only less than a quarter of your life has passed. A much more significant period lies ahead of you.

Now, you can, and must, freely exercise your abilities in any way you choose. Your future will be based on what inspired you at SILS. You can be creative and make your own path, by putting forth your best effort. You are expected to make a meaningful contribution to society where a new normal prevails. What will your contribution be?

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 should even realize that such armed conflicts and the present pandemic will, possibly indefinitely, affect the world in many ways.

I urge you to look ahead confidently to the future, no matter how daunting it may be. What you have acquired at SILS and Waseda will nurture your survival with a sense of solidarity even amidst these 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. Together, let us proceed 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. On behalf of the faculty and Waseda University, I wish you all the best for a healthy and prosperous life.