

Waseda University Graduate School of Political Science

A Word to Those Who Have Completed Their Master's Programs or Doctoral Studies in Academic Year 2019

I would like to sincerely congratulate all who have completed their master's programs or who have obtained their doctoral degrees. I would also like to express my heartfelt gratitude to all the parents, family members, and friends who have supported them in their academic pursuits.

Unfortunately, we had to abandon the holding of a degree-conferral ceremony because of the novel coronavirus pandemic. As a result, we have lost an opportunity to gather together and toast in celebration. I find this profoundly disappointing.

We have had the same experience before. It was nine years ago, when East Japan was struck by the great earthquake of March 11. Back then, we were able to hand over degrees directly, but the graduation and post-graduate degree conferral ceremonies and the events celebrating those achievements were canceled. As I am today, I was the dean of the graduate school at the time. I could never have foreseen that I would be facing the same circumstances again. It is unbearably regretful.

However, whether or not there is a graduation ceremony, and whether or not there is a degree-conferral ceremony, by no means alters what all of you have achieved academically. Although I am sure that the virus has dampened everyone's spirits, I believe that you all feel joy at having attained your accomplishments. Surely many of you are filled with excitement at the feeling that before you stand broad paths and boundless skies.

I remember the pride that filled my heart with such inklings when I received my degree decades ago. I had studied so hard to be conferred with my degree even if it killed me. As the plane taking me from my studies in the UK back to Japan took off, I suddenly felt as though my life was about to have been a waste. "My future before me is so bright. What a thing to die now. Don't crash, you bloody plane," I thought.

Looking back now, I can see that half the joy I felt upon receiving my degree was actually the joy of having overcome the struggles, anxiety, and hardships that I had experienced up to that point. Are all of you not the same? You've decided on your topic and have leapt into your research, but you cannot see where your landing point is. Perhaps you will lose momentum and tumble down

somewhere. Perhaps you will crash into an invisible wall and shatter to bits. Perhaps what you are doing is of no significance whatsoever. I doubt there is a single person among you who has never felt like that.

No matter how many times you felt like you would get knocked down, and no matter how many times you actually were, you stood back up, saying to yourselves, "I can still go on. I can still fight." That is how you have arrived here. I would like you always to remember yourselves at such times. I want you to believe in that person who overcame so many obstacles as you go on living. I will never stop hoping that you do so.

What all of you have obtained is not merely a degree. To put it in the bluntest terms, a degree is nothing but a scrap of paper. That you have received a master's or doctoral degree means that you now bear the responsibilities that come with those honors. What are those responsibilities? I believe that one of the most crucial of those responsibilities is the duty to think deeply and precisely about what you yourself think is important.

The political world faced, and is facing, crises—both nine years ago and today. The deterioration of politics has now become noticeable not just in Japan but around the world. In the midst of crisis, this has become clearer and clearer. There are various factors contributing to this deterioration, but I believe that one crucial element lies in the political world's lack of ability and disposition to think critically for oneself about what is important when one acts. And this lacking in the world of politics is also a mirror image of a lacking in society that resides in all of us. To put this societal lacking in starker terms, I would say that there is rampant anti-intellectualism.

To think for yourself, to investigate—and to express one's thoughts in words. Through these actions, one realizes the complexities and absurdities of the world's problems, unties the tangles of their strings, and approaches what lies at the core of the issues. This is precisely what all of you have attempted during your studies. As a result, you have all mastered the ability to resist this tide of anti-intellectualism. One who has gained an ability is tasked with a commensurate responsibility. That is to say, all of you have taken on the responsibility to resist anti-intellectualism. I am pained to have to say such awful words right as you have received your degrees and should finally be able to take a moment to catch your breaths. However, your new intellectual struggle begins today

All of you setting forth from Waseda now bearing master's and doctoral

degrees: Please do not forget the taste of the grit in your mouths from your struggles studying at this institution. Never forget yourselves overcoming the trials you have overcome. And bear in mind the abilities you have gained in the intellectual arena of the Graduate School of Political Science as you enter your new battle against anti-intellectualism in the global community. You will certainly at times be tormented by a sense of powerlessness. Nevertheless, you have all certainly overcome this hurdle at least once here at Waseda.

Finally, I would like to express my sense of celebration for you setting foot into this brave world in boundlessly enthusiastic terms.

**Our greatest congratulations!**

March 25, 2020

Takahiko Tanaka

Dean of the Graduate School of Political Science