

WASEDA UNIVERSITY: REMARKS AT THE HONORARY
DEGREE CEREMONY

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I would like to begin by putting on record how deeply honoured I feel because of the kindness of Waseda University in allowing me to join this distinguished academic institution in such a wonderful way. Unlike the students of Waseda who have had to work hard for their degrees, I have been given my degree without having to attend any classes and without any examination to take. What can be more thrilling than getting a degree from this world-famous university without having to pass any examination?

Waseda has been a major centre of education and enlightenment for a long time, and the visionary expectations of the founders of this great university is being powerfully fulfilled. Nothing is more important in the troubled world in which we live today than the role of enlightenment. There have been, in recent years, severe attacks on the perspective of knowledge and science. Even countries that have done a great deal for the advancement of science, such as the United States if America, seem to be strongly influenced these days by voices that denigrate knowledge and the pursuit of science. Well-established scientific findings, for example, the threats that the global environment, are being systematically denied by people with huge political power. Even in day-to-day communication, the place of hard news has very often been challenged, with the championing of fake information. There is an urgent need today for standing up for enlightenment and for vigorous pursuit of knowledge.

It is also important to recognise that enlightenment is a global commitment – not just a local virtue. Even though in Western discussions it is often assumed that a distinctively reason-based approach to solving problems is a

special contribution of European Enlightenment, reliance on reasoning has been invoked in different parts of the world over a long time in human history. For example more than 2500 years ago, Gautama Buddha relied on reasoning, rather than on blind faith, throughout his life. This applies also to his experimentations, early in his life, with various ways of resolving his existential dilemma, including his investigation of the effects of fasting and other deprivations on his own body (Buddha concluded that we could not enhance the soul simply by depriving the body).

Enlightenment, in Buddha's perspective, is not a matter only of individual pursuit, but also one of communicative interaction. A particularly important effect of this focus on learning and communication was through its impact on the development of printing. It is not adequately recognised in the global history of the world that all the earliest attempts at generating techniques of printing were undertaken by Buddhist engineers, with the explicit intention of making it easier for people to read books that conveyed the thoughts and ideas of leading thinkers of the time. All the enterprises in developing early printing, in the ninth century – in Japan, in China, and in Korea - were undertaken by Buddhist innovators, with a commitment to expanding public communication.

As it happens, the first printed book in the world was the Chinese translation, done in 402 AD, by Kumarajiva (who was half Indian and half Turkmen), of a Sanskrit treatise, "the Diamond Sutra," which was printed in China four centuries later, in 868 AD. The motivation behind this innovative departure was described in the dedication included in the book: "reverently made for universal free distribution." It is interesting that printing and publishing began as a move for free distribution of knowledge, with a deep commitment to broadening public reasoning. That commitment is a huge tribute to the importance attached to communication and to the joint quest for learning in the ancient world in Asia.

The pursuit of enlightenment has, in fact, been a global phenomenon. Waseda is an inheritor of this global heritage – drawing on Asian traditions as well as on the fruits of the European Enlightenment. The cultivation of wisdom remains extraordinarily important in the precarious world in which we live today. I am very proud of being able to claim that I am now a part of the academic community of the great Waseda University. I end by thanking the University, and also thanking you all who are here, for coming and joining me in this ceremony today.