

## President's Speech for the Graduation of September 2024

September 15, 2024

Aiji Tanaka, President  
Waseda University

Dear graduates and distinguished guests,

On behalf of Waseda University, it is my great pleasure to congratulate you upon your graduation. We also extend congratulations to your family, relatives, and friends. I am sure that this is a moment you have been waiting for while studying here at Waseda.

We considered inviting family members in addition to graduating students to this graduation, but we were concerned that it would be dangerously congested on the road in front of Waseda Arena. Consequently, we have been inviting only the actual graduating students to this Arena for the last several years. We hope you will understand our decision.

At the same time, we would like you to know that we are all proud of you, who have completed your study at Waseda, accomplished your own goals, and are graduating today.

I know that all of you, this year's graduating students, must have many special thoughts, because most of you entered Waseda University in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic in September 2020. It was our great regret that we could not hold the graduation for graduating students that year.

You had to take almost all your classes online throughout the academic year of 2020-2021. Although we gradually increased the number of face-to-face classes from April 2021 on, you were still not able to enjoy a normal campus life for about three years. For example, we could not allow you to hold students' parties up until April 2023. It was the case not only for undergraduate students but also for graduate students and students of the

Art and Architecture School.

Thanks to your patience and self-control, however, no cluster infections occurred in class. I really appreciate your cooperation and self-discipline.

In this way, your campus life was very negatively affected by COVID-19. Some of you might feel that you lost the most important part of your student life at Waseda, which should have been very fruitful. Please do not think that your experiences of this coronavirus pandemic had only negative impacts, but rather that your difficult experiences with the pandemic have allowed you to develop as a human being. You will be stronger and more resilient than other generations of Waseda alumni, precisely because—in contrast to other generations—your generation has experienced a devastating pandemic while young and studying.

I used the word “resilient” just now. This is rooted in two ideal goals of education at Waseda that I espoused when I became the president in November 2018. One is to foster “intellectual resilience,” and the other is to foster “flexible sensitivity.”

What, then, does “intellectual resilience” mean? Most of the problems human beings are facing today do not have one correct answer. Think, for example, about the COVID-19 pandemic, global warming, the growing gap between the poor and the rich, and wars or armed conflicts that continue to kill so many people all over the world, you name it. No one has a single “right” answer to solve any of these problems.

After you graduate from Waseda and start working in the real world, you will face many new problems to which no one really has a correct answer or optimal solution, although the scale or the impact of those problems may be smaller than those of the coronavirus pandemic or violations of human rights due to armed conflicts mentioned above. I hope that you will tackle those new unknown problems and find your own solutions to them. The tough-mindedness that impels you to think through a problem to arrive at your own solution is what I call “intellectual resilience.”

At Waseda, you have learned how to use your own brain and think thoroughly. In order to do this, it is important to learn from the scholarship of thinkers who have come before us. Ever since the invention of a writing system over 5,000 years ago, human beings have recorded and compiled the essence of their experiences in the form of scholarship. Respect scholarship. Scholarship does not provide answers to unknown new problems, but it records how human beings confronted unknown problems in their own day. By learning about these human efforts, you have gained relevant knowledge at Waseda with which to address new problems yet to arise.

Another important ideal is to foster “flexible sensitivity.” This ideal encourages our students to accept, understand, and respect people of different nationalities, ethnicities, languages, religions, creeds, genders, and sexual orientations. At Waseda University, where very diverse groups of students are studying and spending time together, you have acquired the power of empathy to understand how people different from you feel and think. Particularly during the coronavirus pandemic period, we also learned that this pandemic more negatively impacts some people who are in weaker positions because of their nationality, ethnicity, and income level. Therefore, you have developed your power of empathy, or “flexible sensitivity,” even better due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

How do you feel about armed conflicts or war, violations of human rights, and extreme political divisions? Why do people have to confront each other so aggressively? If all people could consider things from the perspectives of other people who are in different circumstances, then the world of human beings would be much more peaceful. Therefore, it is important for you to foster “flexible sensitivity.”

In addition, I added a third ideal goal in 2022. That is “responsive reasoning.” This encourages us to listen to other people who have different opinions from ourselves, and to engage in deliberations with other people in order to enhance each other’s intellectual abilities. I wish you, who have studied at Waseda University, to have confidence in your intelligence, and at the same time, to pay due respect to the intelligence of others.

I sincerely hope that you will cherish the importance of “intellectual resilience,” “flexible sensitivity,” and “responsive reasoning,” and utilize these ideals in your future life. If you keep these ideal goals in your mind and work in your own society or the world at large, then the world will be more peaceful.

Waseda University is at present striving to foster and educate global leaders who will contribute to humankind across the globe. However, at Waseda when we envisage a global leader, it is not necessarily a person who is working for an international organization such as the United Nations or an international corporation. No matter how small a village or town in which a person lives, and no matter how small an NPO or corporation a person works for, they are regarded at Waseda as a global leader if they always think of humankind across the globe. I trust that you will all be global leaders in this sense.

I have two final things to tell you. Since most of you did not experience an entrance ceremony when you were freshmen, and have not had a normal student life, we would like you to keep on creating good memories of Waseda. To facilitate this, we have decided to invite you to Waseda’s Homecoming Day in five years. Up until now, we have been inviting alumni to attend Homecoming Day only 15 years after their graduation. However, we shortened this interval to five years. You will be invited to Homecoming Day in October 2028.

In order for us to keep you up to date with many events including Homecoming Day, I would like to ask you to set up an automatic transfer of the emails you receive via “My Waseda” to your own private email address, such as Gmail. That way you can receive information and notifications from Waseda regardless of where you live or which organization you belong to.

I have one last piece of advice I would like to give to you, our graduates. That is, do not be swayed by trends, but rather, find your interest or passion and pursue it. Trends die out in five years or so, and even if you follow a trend, if it is not something that stirs your curiosity, you will only be able to exert 80 to 90% of your potential. Devoting yourself to something you find

meaningful will allow you to put in your 120%. It is abundantly clear that an effort made at 120% will have a more successful outcome than an effort made at 80%. I used to share these words with my zemi students every year, but ever since becoming the president of the university, I have bestowed these words upon all Waseda graduates.

Please have confidence in what you have learned at Waseda, because you have survived the difficult academic environment brought on by the coronavirus pandemic. You can go out into the world and live well with this confidence.

Even after you graduate, please come visit your alma mater. We are looking forward to welcoming back you, who will be evermore brilliantly shining, to an evermore brilliantly shining Waseda.

Congratulations on your graduation!