

## President's Speech for the Commencement of September 2023

September 16, 2023  
Aiji Tanaka, President  
Waseda University

I would like to extend a warm welcome to today's commencement ceremony to all graduates and distinguished visitors.

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

I know that all of you, the graduating students in September 2023, must have a wide variety of thoughts and feelings, because you have suffered from the COVID-19 virus pandemic over the last three years. We were forced to move all classes online in the spring semester of 2020 and, to our great regret, we could not provide you with a normal student life for about three years. However, we believe that our decisions were right in order to protect your health and to prevent the spread of COVID-19 infections among our students. I hope that you have been enjoying the return to a relatively normal student life this past year.

As a consequence of our decisions, Waseda University received a high evaluation for our handling of the coronavirus pandemic from other university presidents. This high appraisal of Waseda was attributed to our policy regarding COVID-19. At a very early stage, we recognized the coronavirus was spreading as a pandemic and applied the Mini-Max Regret (Minimizing Maximum Regret) theory to our handling of this pandemic. What does this mean? When we face a crisis, we have to anticipate the worst situation, and try to minimize possible worst damage. Conversely, when the situation is normal or very good, we can try to maximize maximum merit. We verified that our theory was correct by preventing the spread of the coronavirus on our campus. Thus, Waseda students, faculty and staff have

experienced an important philosophy of crisis management via the COVID-19 pandemic.

During the coronavirus pandemic period, you have learned that you can study via online lectures or seminars, and that this kind of online communication can be effective. Methodologies of learning or job hunting have changed considerably, and you will utilize these new methodologies in your future life. At the same time, during the period we were forced to use online communication only, we recognized how important our face-to-face communication is to develop good personal relationships. Thus, we have learned many valuable lessons from the coronavirus pandemic. We should move forward with these lessons in our minds.

This is rooted in two ideals 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 correct answers. Think, for example, about the COVID-19 pandemic, global warming, climate change, or the invasion of a small country by a superpower with nuclear weapons-- you name it. No one has a single “right” answer to solve any of these problems. After you graduate from Waseda and when you start working in the real world, you will face many new problems to which no one 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. I am hoping that you will tackle those new unknown problems and that you will find your own solutions to them. The tough-mindedness that impels you to think through a problem to arrive at a 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.” The founder of Waseda University, Okuma Shigenobu, emphasized three ideals. He advocated “independence of scholarship,” “practical application of scholarship,” and “fostering of good citizens,” by which he meant “Do not think of your own interest, your family’s interest, or the interests of one country or nation, but seek to help humankind.” This ideal leads to the concept of “flexible sensitivity” by which we encourage our students to accept, understand, and pay respect to people of different nationalities, ethnicities, languages, religions, creeds, gender, and sexual orientation. During the period of the coronavirus pandemic, we have learned that this pandemic is particularly negatively impacting some people who are in weak positions because of their nationality, ethnicity, and income level. We hope that your experiences have helped you to understand how different backgrounds matter. This understanding develops your power of empathy, or “flexible sensitivity.”

Be confident of what you have learned at Waseda and contribute to your own society as well as to humanity across the globe. We all offer you our full support in whatever you choose to do in the future, regardless of whether you will work in society or conduct further research at graduate school.

Finally, I have one last piece of advice I would like to pass along. Please pursue your interests and devote yourself to whatever pursuits for which you feel a passion. Do not be swayed by trends. Trends die out in five years or so, and even if you follow a trend, you will only be able to exert 80 to 90% of your potential if it is not something about which you are passionate. Devoting yourself to a meaningful pursuit will allow you to put in 120%. Without a doubt, an effort made at 120% will bear greater success than an 80% effort. I used to share these words with my graduating seminar students every year on graduation day, but now as president, I pass them along to you as well. They are the best advice I can offer you.

Even after you graduate, please come back to visit your alma mater. Our

doors are always open to you. We look forward to seeing you again as you become ever-more impressive; and for our part, we strive to make Waseda University an ever-more shining alma mater of which you can be proud.

Congratulations on your graduation, our newest alumni!