

September 26, 2026

Congratulatory Address by Hikomitsu Noji

Dear new students, and your families, Welcome to Waseda! Welcome to Japan! Congratulations on your admission. I am truly happy to see students from all over the world joining us today.

I graduated from Waseda's School of Science and Engineering in 1982, and joined Yokohama Rubber Co. Ltd. right after graduation. My first job was designing rally and racing tire construction, traveling to circuits around the world and working with many different people. Later, I worked in factories, in Virginia (USA), Shinshiro and Mishima (Japan), and Clark (Philippines), leading productivity improvement and cost-reduction activities on the ground. Eventually, I became president of overseas factories, working hard to turn around loss-making companies and make them profitable while collaborating with people from very different cultures.

At the age of 52, just after the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011, I was suddenly asked to become President of Yokohama Rubber. I served from 2011 to 2017, achieving record sales and record operating profit, and expanding our business portfolio through active M&A. My successor president was also a Waseda graduate—so I felt confident passing the baton.

Today, I would like to share three messages from my experience. I hope they will help you during your time at Waseda.

1. A single encounter can change your life

When I was a first-year student, a senior from the School of Commerce invited me to go for a drive. His car was the TOYOTA TE27 rally car. He took me deep into the mountains, onto a dirt road—and suddenly started full rally drifting. I honestly thought, “If we fall off the cliff, I will die!” But at the same time, it was incredibly exciting.

After that day, I secretly modified my father's car and practiced rally techniques: heel-and-toe, counter-steer, spin turns. I even had some serious

accidents—rolling the car sideways and crashing into a bridge rail. But I kept learning.

Normally, with my research on engine combustion and exhaust gas control, I should have joined an automobile manufacturer such as Toyota, Nissan, Honda. But Yokohama Rubber's motorsport activities looked so cool, and I thought, "If I join them, I can buy tires cheaply." So I joined with that simple motivation.

If I had not met that senior, I would not have joined Yokohama Rubber. And I would not have become president. One encounter changed my entire life.

At Waseda, you will meet people from many countries and backgrounds. Treasure these encounters—they may shape your future in ways you cannot imagine.

And one more thing: I also met my wife at Waseda. She was one year younger, in the School of Literature. So Waseda decided my job, my partner, and even my son's path—he also graduated from Waseda's School of Science and Engineering. In a way, my entire family was shaped by Waseda.

2. 700,000 Waseda alumni are waiting for you around the world

Waseda has **700,000 alumni worldwide**. In the future, you may move to a new country for work or with your family. You will need information: safe areas, rent prices, schools, daily life. In such moments, visit the local *Tomonkai*—the Waseda alumni association. There are **1,400 Tomonkai groups across the globe**.

When I lived alone in the Philippines, I knocked on the door of the Manila Tomonkai. I was nervous and knew nothing about the city, but they welcomed me warmly. The same happened in Mumbai, India. They held Christmas parties, New Year gatherings, Golf tournaments, Softball games—people from different companies, of different ages, and nationalities all enjoying together simply because of the Waseda connection. It truly felt like a "home of the heart."="what we call "Kokoro no Furusato" in Japanese.

You can also create your own student Tomonkai with friends from your home country. These friendships will last a lifetime.

Let me share a story from an Indian alumnus I met in Mumbai. He graduated from Waseda's Chemical Engineering Department and spoke excellent Japanese.

He told me two things that surprised him in Japan:

First: Japan is extremely strict about time. Meetings start exactly on time. Local trains run exactly on schedule. Shinkansen runs at 300 km/h, every three minutes, perfectly on time. He said, "This is crazy!" We Japanese rarely think about it, but it is truly amazing.

Second: He said Japan's religious culture is "very strange." Born → Shinto shrine visit, Christmas party & big celebration Wedding → Christian style, Funeral → Buddhist temple. He asked, "Isn't this strange? I was shocked—because he was right. You may feel Japan has a very flexible and tolerant religious culture.

3. People with real, analog experience can judge digital results

At Waseda, please study hard, join clubs, explore Japan, and take action by yourself. Sometimes things will not go well—but that is how you discover new ideas.

Japan has unique customs and traditions. You may feel confused at first. Don't reject them—try to understand them. Japan has developed its unique culture over more than 2,000 years of history. There is always a reason behind each custom.

Today, AI can answer almost anything. But don't rely only on digital tools. Use your five senses. Go to real places, see real things, smell, listen, touch, taste. This is important in research, business, and life.

Analog experience is something only humans can build. It allows you to judge whether digital results—AI results—are truly correct. Let AI handle tasks that do not require human judgement. But **you** must check the results and use your Analog Experience to decide whether they are right or wrong.

Closing

Once again, congratulations on your admission. I hope your four years at Waseda enrich your life and help you grow into people who contribute to the world. I look forward to seeing your future.

Thank you very much.