

Message from the President of Saitama University to the 2019 Graduates

Due to the record warm winter, this year's cherry blossom bloom in Tokyo was the earliest since the statistics began in 1953. The cherry blossoms also on the campus of Saitama University shine in the brilliant sunlight, giving us the joy of spring. On this pleasant day, I would like to extend my sincere congratulations on your graduation. In addition, I express deep respect and congratulations to your families who have given support to you.

The numbers of graduates who earned doctoral, master's and professional degrees are 26, 558 and 23, respectively. 87 of them (14% of all graduates) are from 12 overseas countries, and 53 (9%) are re-educated people with their jobs. It is distinctive to be full of diverse students in "Saitama University All in One Campus at Metropolitan Area Saitama". Originally, I planned to speak directly to you at the graduation ceremony, but I cannot do so because of the ceremony cancelation due to the effects of the new coronavirus infection, which is rampant worldwide. Given that the graduation ceremony is a milestone in your life, it is very unfortunate not to have the graduation ceremony with the President address. I just wish that you shall be starting a new step with the peace of mind, and that the infections both in Japan and abroad will not spread further.

In fact, the graduation ceremony was canceled even in March 2011, considering the effects of the Great East Japan Earthquake of 3.11. As we have experienced the cancellation of graduation ceremony twice in the last ten years and we witnessed the intensification of natural disasters such as the heavy rain disaster last year, which had a great influence on us, we are obliged to realize that the fragility of human society has advanced and that the risks in human society have been diversifying.

Professor T. Kamisato of Chiba University has published an interesting essay on "Risk" and "Risk Society" (*Gakutou*, Maruzen, 2018). "Our lives have been suffering from various anxieties, before someone knows. Of course, in every era, there must have been anxiety. But the situation in which anxiety is so far in the foreground is not normal. Why has this happened?" Starting with this question, he introduces the ideas of Ulrich Beck, a leading German sociologist. "Two major changes will take place as modernization progresses. The first is that modernization, which was originally aimed at affluence, is becoming a threat to our lives. One example is the occurrence of environmental issues, and modernization leads to the personalization of decisions and consequently their responsibility. Another change is that of people. Generally, when material wealth is achieved to some extent, people become more afraid of losing rather than obtaining new things. Even if you have things, if you don't have time to use them or if you are not healthy, you cannot enjoy consumer life." Based on the Beck's argument, Prof. Kamisato explains that the simultaneous progress of these two changes will put risk at the top of the social agenda.

By referring to the risk view of another German sociologist, N. Luhmann, Prof. Kamisato also discusses as follows. "After all, risk always shows up when decisions are made in freedom. Furthermore, responsibility comes with it. Luhmann mentions that there is risk where there is control, and this ironically means that the wider the possibility of a decision, the riskier the world becomes. Risks come down to us, along with freedoms and responsibilities, as technology advances to make the outside world more manipulable, and as democracy expands to broaden the channels of citizen participation in politics."

So how do we deal with these risks? It's a tough question to answer, given the risks posed by the new coronavirus. However, I think the talk in the book, *Thought on City and Nature* (Shueisha, 2017), between the philosopher Dr. K. Washida and the anthropologist Dr. J. Yamagiwa, which discusses about the role of scientists and the Fukushima nuclear accident, gives us a hint. As an example of clinical philosophy, Dr. Washida first explains a sense of housework such as thinking about what to cook with remaining ingredients, washing dishes and looking after children while preparing meals. He then says, "It is important to have a wisdom of worrying about the whole and the others by watching around and by using available things well. Such intellect is now demanded. As academic disciplines have been segmentalized, the person who controls all the intellect has gone and this might have caused the nuclear accident to be enlarged." Meanwhile, Dr. Yamagiwa points out as an anthropologist, "Recently it is not necessary to gather even for a meal because people prefer to eat their favorite things anytime and anywhere they like, just as scientists stay in their favorite academic areas without turning their eyes on the outside world. Scientists dig deeply into their own themes to master their specialty and, during that time, there is no room to pay attention to other things." Then Dr. Washida follows, "Now scientist is not a wise man with intellect, but a person just with knowledge. He needs the intellect paying attention not only vertically but also horizontally. If the nuclear power plant accident is reconsidered on the basis of the previous housework idea, for example, it is necessary to foresee the budget, a future risk and cleanup. Isn't it the liberal arts of professionals to be able to pay attention to all these directions horizontally?"

I am sure that "liberal arts of professionals" is a very important perspective for you to deal with risk. It is essential to start paying attention to all the horizontal directions, and on top of that, the words by Prof. S. Kajitani of the University of Tokyo in his book, *What Thinking Means* (Gentosha, 2018), may be helpful. "We begin to think only by having a question. Even if we think in our head, it just floats and disappears, so we need to talk. What's more, our thinking would be deeper and richer if someone could respond our talking. Therefore, the dialogue is meaningful in the senses that the dialogue with others in different standpoints and perspectives naturally broadens and deepens our own way of thinking, and also that we become aware of what used to be our constraints and able to think about the possibilities of something different." Through dialogue, we may be able to develop knowledge in various horizontal directions.

The future society is a risk society with rapid and unpredictable changes. We must gather intellect of diverse experts both vertically and horizontally for the human wellbeing. Each and every one of you is expected to play a role as a member of this knowledge-intensive society. I do hope you to master liberal arts of professionals by continuing 'questioning', 'thinking' and 'dialoguing' based on your research at Saitama University, and to become a well-balanced intellectual professional in the future.

March 23, 2020

YAMAGUCHI Hiroki, Dr. Eng.
President, Saitama University