

Autumn 2016 Graduation Ceremony

President's Address

Let me begin by offering my sincerest congratulations as President of Osaka University to those undergraduate and graduate students who will receive their degrees today. I'm sure you are all beaming with excitement to be sitting here at this graduation ceremony. I would like to praise each and every one of you on your daily studies and untiring efforts, as well as your strong appetite for learning, which led you to this day.

I would like to especially congratulate the international students among you; leaving your home country to acquire a degree in Japan, in a different language, a different culture, a different lifestyle, and a different environment, is no small feat. I respect both your mental strength to achieve such a feat, and your ability to harmonize with a culture different from your own.

Osaka University has been the lovable home ground for my efforts in education and research for nearly 30 years. I am both delighted and honored to have this opportunity to speak with you all. Today, I would like to speak with you about diversity.

This year, the Summer Olympic and Paralympic Games were held in Rio de Janeiro, and I'm sure many of you felt all sorts of emotions while cheering on athletes from your home country. But did you know that a "Refugee Olympic Team" was formed this year for the first time in history? Prior to this year's games, participation of only those athletes who "represented their country or region" was acknowledged. This meant that those who were separated from their homes and forced to live in a different country against their will due to civil war and political unrest were not allowed to participate. So for this year's Games, the International Olympic Committee took special

measures to allow 10 refugee athletes to compete in the Olympic Games.

This can also be thought of as a manifestation of the importance of diversity at a national level. The host country of Brazil, as well as other countries like Germany, are actively providing relief for and accepting refugees. But this is not simply support from a human perspective; it seems to suggest that these nations have overcome the obstacles of state, nation, and race, signifying the germination of a sense of solidarity.

In addition to the Olympics, the Paralympic Games were also held, which saw the participation of over 4,300 athletes from over 160 countries and regions. These athletes challenged their own limits, perfecting both body and technique, which evokes a different set of emotions in people when cheering for the athletes in the Paralympic Games than when watching the Olympic Games.

I saw an article in the Yomiuri newspaper the other day about the Paralympics that left a deep impression on me, so I would like to share it with you just as it appeared in the newspaper. "The opening ceremony of the Paralympics raised one subject: there is disability in all of us. The largest of these is the obstacle in our minds that tells us that 'I can't.'" The article continued, "The true obstacles that we face are our minds, which place us within our limits, as well as the obstacles of society. On reflection, it surely rings a bell. Have you continued making excuses to not take action because you were afraid of facing reality or couldn't bear loneliness?" That's all I wanted to share from this article.

In reality, most of the athletes with disabilities feel that "no matter who you are, you will be faced with illness and age. In that way, there's not a big difference between us and individuals without disabilities. So there's 'nothing we can't do.'"

When I heard this, I learned something extremely important about how we think about diversity. When it comes to diversity, we tend to find significance that lies in individuals without disabilities unilaterally thinking about individuals with disabilities, but this is a big mistake. In actuality, the significance of diversity lies in a compassion shared between individuals in different positions.

When I spoke earlier about the “Refugee Olympic Team,” I mentioned that there has been a strengthening of a global sense of solidarity that crosses borders of state, nation, and race, all things that were once seen as obstacles. If you look at this from a different angle, as the establishment of security by governance of the state becomes more difficult, how we can breed this sense of solidarity while respecting the race and culture shouldered by each individual has become an important issue, and as a result, our actions to ensure safety and security are becoming more and more important.

So it is extremely important that we create a society or community that respects diversity; in other words, one that respects the individuality of each person and allows all people to make the most of their own unique worth.

It's required of us to increase a sense of mutual solidarity in this process to solve the multitude of complex and advanced problems in humanity, society, and nature that have arisen in recent years.

The university is considered to be a representative of the community that will realize this action. It goes without saying that the university is a global space with people from all places and backgrounds. In this space, the university must be an open place in which diversity is respected and each member of the community transcends position and individual interest to

combine their strength and create new mutual value to carve a path for the future.

To this end, Osaka University has promoted education with the goal of personnel development that stresses the acquisition of high level expertise with “refinement,” precise societal judgement based on extensive insight, “international-mindedness,” the ability to discuss with other from different cultural backgrounds, and “creativity,” the quality of having a free imagination and interdisciplinary conceptual ability.

Since I’ve started at my position as president of the university, it has been my goal to realize an education and research environment that contains a diversity which allows men and women to work together and allows individuals with disabilities to actively participate in a variety of projects.

In addition, moving forward, I want to promote diversity from an international standpoint more powerfully than ever before. As you may already know, the Minoh Campus is set to move to the station front at Minoo-Semba Station (tentative name), a new station on the planned extension of the Kita-Osaka Kyuko Line. I want to make this new Minoh Campus a leader of its kind, a highly-globalized space where different cultures can interact and different languages can converse in order to strengthen diversity.

Today, I indicated the importance of diversity from the viewpoint of gender, disability, and international viewpoints such as those surrounding issues involving refugees, while also speaking about the role that the university should fill in its position as a pioneer.

In a rapidly globalizing society, the importance of diversity in all facets of our daily lives is increasing every day. I’d like for those

of you who are about to enter into society to reaffirm the significance of diversity and further increase your interest in it.

Finally, to those of you about to graduate from Osaka University, I hope that you will use the experience and knowledge that you have accumulated to ascertain the true essence and true value of things in order to achieve success both in your home country and all over the world.

I'd also like to express my deepest appreciation for the parents and family members who supported your studies and research on the long road to this day. I hope that you will reflect once again on how many family members, friends, and research partners have supported you on your path to graduation. I pray that you will remember to hold a sense of gratitude for these individuals, and that each and every one of you will live healthy and happy lives free of regret. So once again, congratulations.

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President, Osaka University