

**President's Address at  
Osaka University and Graduate School  
Autumn 2022 Graduation Ceremony**

On behalf of Osaka University, it is my great pleasure to sincerely congratulate all those undergraduate and graduate students who are taking the next step from Osaka University today.

I would also like to express my heartfelt respect and gratitude to the families who supported the students in their studies and research on the long road to graduation.

In particular, I would like to commend the international students for their extraordinary effort and cross-cultural skills, which have enabled them to overcome differences in language, culture and way of life, and continue their studies in Japan away from their homes amid these difficult circumstances.

Your days at Osaka University have been significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. I am sure some of you were forced to change your initial research plan or had difficulty even entering Japan. Most lectures were given online, and, for many of you, campus life has probably not been what you had envisioned.

Despite these challenges, you have continued your studies in your respective fields, and now you stand at the frontier of science. Today, you are finally awarded your degree. Your achievements made through dedicated efforts during this difficult time will surely be a crucial asset in your life.

This summer, with traditional festivals resuming for the first time in three years in various parts of Japan, it may seem as if we are back to pre-pandemic days. However, we have not yet overcome this invisible threat; COVID-19 remains rampant. We must not forget that it is thanks to the dedication of medical professionals and other essential workers that we can begin to recover from the pandemic.

COVID-19 spread rapidly around the world due to modern transportation means such as airplanes that enable us to travel long distances quickly. Sophisticated telecommunications networks have enabled us to keep track of the ever-changing state of infections, causing fears about the unseen threat looming over us. The sense of fear brought by the pandemic has been an entirely new experience for us.

Professor MIURA Asako, graduate student YAMAGATA Mei of Osaka University Graduate School of Human Sciences, and their group have conducted research on the public's interest and fear of the pandemic as well as their feelings toward infected people. The group carried out regular fixed-point observations to see how the fear felt by the public changed from the early stages of the pandemic and obtained interesting results. According to their research, in Japan, public interest in and fear of COVID-19 increased rapidly when the first State of Emergency Declaration was issued in April 2020. The figures show that the interest and fear remained high even after the vaccinations started and the waves of infection ended. Recently, those figures are finally beginning to decline slowly.

This research offers important insights. First, overcoming a sense of fear requires time. Second, the more people are afraid of being infected, the more likely they are to exclude infected persons and be hateful toward foreigners. We have empirical knowledge that crises such as disasters and war can increase anxiety and fear, spread rumors, and incite the public to riot, and that such situations cannot be easily corrected. Professor MIURA and her group are working to verify this knowledge based on scientific evidence.

How can we break the negative cycle caused by fear and solve the innumerable issues affecting the entire world in the post-COVID-19 era?

I think there are four key factors that may guide us in the right direction. These factors are also our Educational Objectives.

The first factor is advanced specialized knowledge and outstanding academic expertise.

When we face the unknown, we feel anxious and fearful. If the public is led to believe information that seems to be true but is actually false, the results can be devastating. Someone who aims to centralize power in their hands may intentionally spread false information to control the public. Therefore, it is necessary to be able to analyze information based on advanced specialized knowledge.

Scientific procedures and approaches can be universally applied to any issue, even if it is not within your field. At Osaka University, you have already acquired the ability to evaluate any issue logically and critically to distinguish between true and false information.

The second factor is broad-based knowledge and critical thinking.

Amongst the flood of information in society, you have developed the ability to identify what is scientifically accurate to add to your accumulated knowledge. You must feed this knowledge back into society. By society, I do not mean a virtual community. The community in which we live is real. We have a physical body, and we are breathing. If something happens to you, it is your neighbors in the real world who will help you.

Our community consists of people of different ages, from various regions and countries, and with diverse ways of life and thinking. This is natural, because a community is a gathering of people who happen to be there. Broad-based knowledge and critical thinking are valuable assets for your community, as they enable you to think from multifaceted and comprehensive perspectives, and to form cohesive and respectful relationships with others. But, keeping accurate knowledge to yourself will not make you or others happy. I encourage you to share your wisdom extensively with your community by using the broad-based knowledge and critical thinking you have acquired at Osaka University.

The third factor is an international mindset.

During the pandemic, different governments took contrasting strategies to cope with the crisis. Some countries effectively used digital technology to minimize infection, while others offered generous support to artists who lost work opportunities due to restrictions on activity. Some countries imposed lockdowns and enacted laws to penalize those in violation, while others chose not to impose any specific measures and to

allow people to gain immunity naturally.

Although the entire world was threatened by the virus—a common crisis, strategies to combat the pandemic differed greatly by country and region. This difference is largely because of the influence of political leaders and those in power, but, more importantly, it is also due to the local, historical, religious, and cultural factors of each country and region. We must seek solutions to global issues based on this understanding.

The world is facing many issues that must be overcome, particularly climate change and energy problems. These global issues are now widely recognized, but perceptions of them and the sense of urgency vary at the individual, national, and regional levels. This makes it difficult to unite efforts to find solutions.

The pandemic has shown just how difficult it is for the entire world to act in unison, and that there are differences in understanding and perception of what is right. It has also forced us to seriously consider how we can build a consensus, now more than ever. I hope you will strive to build consensus across different cultures, leveraging the international mindset you have acquired through your studies at Osaka University.

The last and fourth factor is design prowess.

By design prowess, I mean the ability to create dialogue and design social systems. In other words, it is the ability to discover issues that need to be addressed and devise solutions, or to work in collaboration with people in various fields to create new values.

There is a Japanese word *osekkai*, which originally means “meddling.” In Osaka, the word is also used to mean “considerate” or “caring.” We must be *osekkai* when cooperating with members of our community. You can be *osekkai* just by greeting your neighbor and saying “Hi, it’s finally autumn” or picking up trash left on the road and disposing of it. By doing so, you are always helping someone, and the people you helped will surely want to connect with you to cooperate. Being *osekkai* helps ease tension between you and others in a friendly manner. I hope that having studied in Osaka, you will be *osekkai* and design social systems.

I encourage you to actively go into town instead of confining yourself to your laboratory or office, and become perceptive of the people around you – the way they laugh, stand with their heads down, or walk at varying speeds. And if you see someone trip over something, hold out your hand to help them stand up. I sincerely hope you will become the kind of person who can take such action instinctively, and thus help strengthen community bonds and share science-based knowledge widely with community members.

In today’s world, missiles are being fired almost every day in some regions while military tensions are growing in others. We are made to realize that pandemics and wars are not just relics of history. Unfortunately, this is the reality of the society in which we live.

At the Okinawa Memorial Service for All War Dead held in June 2022, a poem\* read by a seven-year-old girl attracted nationwide attention.

(.....)

Because I fear war,  
I want to grasp peace.  
I will keep it in my pocket always,  
Not to drop it  
Not to lose it  
Not to forget it.  
Now that I know fear, I understand peace.

We and our ancestors have experienced anxiety and fear in the past. We and our descendants will face crises and challenges in the future. Through your studies at Osaka University, you have developed the ability to address and overcome all these threats. With this ability, you will be at the forefront of developing solutions to various issues from now on.

Peace is not the opposite of war or fear; it is a universal concept. Please use your ability to the fullest to help create a society in which everyone can live happily and in peace.

I heartily wish for each of you to enjoy a bright and beautiful future.

Once again, congratulations on your graduation today.

September 22, 2022

NISHIO Shojiro

President of Osaka University

\*Excerpt from “Now that I know fear, I understand peace,” a peace poem written by Miss TOKUMOTO Honona, a seven-year-old second grader at Okinawa Municipal Yamauchi Elementary School (English translation by Osaka University)