

The president's congratulatory message for the fiscal 2020 entrance ceremony

Congratulations to all of you who are entering the Faculty of Foreign Languages and the Graduate School of Language Sciences at Kanda University of International Studies today. In addition, I would like to extend my best wishes to your families as well.

Last September, a 16-year-old Swedish high school student and environmental activist Greta Thunberg, was speaking at the United Nations Climate Action Summit. She used the strong expression “How dare you” to tell the world's leaders about greenhouse gas emissions. She rebuked them for not addressing the problem and for betraying the younger generation. This is a criticism from young people like you to our adult generation who hesitate to fight global warming. I took it as a very intense, important message. You are from her generation. How did you feel about her message?

I was so impressed by the founding spirit of Kanda University of International Studies, “Languages are the foundation to link the world in peace” and I became the president of the university. This spirit means building world peace by effectively using languages, thinking seriously, accumulating knowledge, and understanding and empathizing with others. From now on you will learn languages deeply. In doing so, please spend your college life considering the reasons for what you are studying.

While discovering and respecting the differences between oneself and others, you should learn how to live in a global society and what to do to protect the global environment and create a peaceful world. Like Greta Thunberg, use your own brain to think thoroughly and express your ideas in your own words.

The important entrance ceremony this year had to be canceled due to the novel coronavirus infection. You and everyone around you have had a shocking experience because of this. But let's not only be sad about it. Let's try to use this experience as an opportunity to think seriously about the situation.

This unpredictable era is nothing new. As long as human beings live in nature, they have to deal with pathogens and natural disasters. Contrary to our own wishes, it can happen that we ourselves, our family or our

friends can encounter accidents, disasters and wars. There are many things in the world that we can control and many that we cannot control. There are numerous things beyond human intellect. There are still so many mysteries we do not understand about ourselves and the whole of creation. If we consider the current infectious disease, it's very difficult to control it. But we shouldn't just leave it to the experts to solve. We should consider deeply what we can do together. For example, we can investigate the characteristics of bacteria, viruses, molds and parasites that cause infectious diseases and how human beings have dealt with them. Something you could do is read and compare how newspapers in different countries have reported on this issue. Investigate the different government policies enacted, summarize your ideas, exchange opinions with your friends, and think together about why the entrance ceremony was canceled.

Concerning this infectious disease issue, there were reports that the pronouncements of public organizations were not always accurate or that some government authorities intentionally hid facts about it. With the flood of information in society today, we need the ability to distinguish what is true from what is false. However, in reality, we cannot deny that our knowledge, perspectives, and ideas are biased. Day after day we are being tossed about by wrong information. Before we realize it, we can end up mindlessly voicing those ideas as if they were our own. Eliminating the influence of others and removing prejudice and preconceptions is not easy. In order to determine the truth, it is very important not to be bound by stereotypes and not to accept others' words uncritically.

The future society "Society 5.0" advocated by the Japanese government will arrive soon. At that time we can expect a more convenient and comfortable life through the use of artificial intelligence (AI) and robots. However, there are times when I am afraid that humans may be controlled by AI. The reason is that by the use of social media, AI may be able to manipulate public opinion and guide people's thoughts. If that happens, AI could become a dictator like Hitler or Stalin, and the future of mankind will meet a tragic end.

However, there are ways to keep my pessimistic observations from materializing. The way to do that is if each one of us acquires the ability

to think critically. For that purpose, it is important to cultivate a broad range of knowledge, to think logically about things, and to hone our sensibilities. If you make it a habit to think clearly and try to determine the truth, you can become a critical thinker. Critical thinking frees us from prejudice and preconceptions, and turns the possibility of domination by AI into a mere fiction.

Once again, consider why you entered this university or graduate school, the reasons for studying, and the value of learning languages. Please make good use of your time to think carefully.

I would like you all to sometimes repeat aloud the words that summarize the spirit of our school, “Languages are the foundation to link the world in peace.” I think that the meaning of learning foreign languages and the meaning of critical thinking will gradually overlap. Don't be afraid to share your thoughts in foreign languages and discuss ideas and opinions with others to create a better world.

Kanda University of International Studies is a place to learn how to think seriously every day, to train yourself in communicating your ideas, and to cultivate the ability to discern the truth and to think critically.

I would like to conclude my remarks by once more extending my best wishes to all of you who are entering Kanda University of International Studies today and to your families. Congratulations!

Takahisa Miyauchi
President
Kanda University of International Studies