

President's Address at the 2026 Saitama University Degree Awarding Ceremony

Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to extend my heartfelt congratulations to all of you on receiving your degrees today. I would also like to offer my sincere congratulations to your families and everyone who has supported you along the way.

Those who have earned bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees are gathered here today. Of course, each of these degrees carries a different meaning.

For many of you receiving bachelor's degrees, your graduation research project was your first experience engaging in fully fledged research. Under the guidance of your faculty advisor, you formulated a research question, conducted research, considered your findings, performed experiments and analyses, and synthesized your results. Through these experiences, you have reached a significant milestone in your university education. Many of you in the master's program have further deepened your expertise and gained experience presenting your research findings at academic conferences and receiving feedback from experts. And for those receiving doctoral degrees, you have formulated new research questions on your own, produced original findings, presented them to the academic community through academic papers and international conferences, received evaluation, and have now earned your degrees today.

On your journey to this point in your life, no doubt there were times when you didn't achieve the results you hoped for, when your ideas were rejected, or when your research lost direction. I would like to once again express my deep respect for the perseverance and effort that have brought you to this day.

Today, to celebrate this occasion with all of you, I'd like to share one thought that I've been pondering for many years. While it is certainly important to dive deeply into one's field of expertise, I believe it is equally important to look beyond the boundaries of that field.

During your time at university, each of you has studied your respective fields of specialization. In research, you formulate questions, develop hypotheses, and test them through experiments, observations, surveys, and arguments. While the methods of course vary by field, you have undoubtedly acquired a way of thinking unique to your respective academic disciplines. Those of you who have earned a doctoral degree can especially be said to have thoroughly mastered the methodology necessary to work as professionals in your fields. This is extremely important.

However, today I would like to go a step further. The more deeply you dive into your field of expertise, the more you must be careful of one thing: the risk of seeing the world solely through the lens of your own field and, furthermore, the risk of losing interest in anything outside of it altogether.

When I was young, I devoted myself to research in theoretical and computational physics. I studied nuclear theory and quantum chaos, and later tackled research in mathematical sciences, including numerical linear algebra. I think that in my youth, I believed that to conduct good research, all I needed to do was dive as deeply as possible into my own field of specialization. Of course, that is not wrong. Deepening one's expertise is essential for a researcher.

However, as I went on to gain various experiences and witnessed society changing rapidly, I came to feel strongly that this alone was not enough.

Consider the issues we face today: the global environment, energy, poverty, inequality, war, and population issues. And then there's the rapidly advancing field of generative AI. Regardless of which issue you look at, it cannot be resolved by a single field of expertise alone. Even generative AI, on its own, is not merely a matter of computer science or mathematics. It is connected to economics, law, education, ethics, culture, and even the fundamental question of "What does it mean to be human?"

Therefore, this is why I hope you will continue to deepen your expertise in your respective fields. At the same time, however, I hope you will never stop looking beyond the boundaries of your specializations. Just because you have graduated from university or graduate school does not mean your learning is over. Rather, starting today, a new era begins in which every one of you will design your own learning path.

What's important at that point isn't simply accumulating knowledge. Reading lots of books. Being knowledgeable. I don't think that alone is enough. What matters is connecting the knowledge and experiences you've gained within yourself. What do you value? What makes you question things? What about society do you want to change? Ultimately, what are you living for? It's important to have your own answers to these questions. People who have their own core values can connect newly acquired knowledge and experiences with the knowledge and experiences they've cultivated up to that point. Knowledge that was dots becomes a line, the line becomes a plane, and eventually, it forms a single network. I believe that this network is precisely what constitutes a person's individuality, which isn't simply about doing things differently from others. It's about connecting what you've learned, experienced, and thought about so far through your own values to create your own unique perspective on the world. I believe that is what becomes the individuality unique to that person.

In fact, the more firmly grounded a person is in their own principles, the better able they are to see their own views in a broader perspective. When they encounter a way of thinking different from their own, rather than rejecting it, they can ask themselves, "Why does this person think this way?" They can develop an interest in fields completely outside their area of expertise. They also gain the mental flexibility to consider that their own ideas might be wrong. In this way, they look beyond themselves, relearn, and continually reshape who they are. I would like you all to continue this cycle throughout

your lives.

However, there is one problem here. The moment we go outside our specialties, we are no longer experts. Personally, I can speak as an expert on physics and mathematical sciences. However, in terms of education, economics, society, culture, the arts, and international issues, I am not an expert in those fields. I am, so to speak, an amateur. But should I always stay silent? I think there are times when that is not the case.

There was a man who was born in Palestine and worked as a literary scholar and critic in the United States whose name was Edward Wadie Said. In his collection of lectures, *Representations of the Intellectual*, Said argues, in essence, that an intellectual is an outsider, an amateur, and a wordsmith who seeks to speak the truth to power. I believe this term “amateur” is very important.

As experts, we should speak responsibly about our fields of expertise. At the same time, however, we should also think about issues outside our areas of expertise and, when necessary, speak out as citizens and as human beings. Of course, respect for experts is essential. We must not pretend to know what we do not know, but if we say, “I’m not an expert,” and leave it entirely to experts to think about important social issues, then no genuine dialogue can emerge across different fields. Sometimes, as an amateur, we need the courage to challenge experts.

In fact, Said himself lived such a life: He was a literary scholar, but he was also an accomplished pianist and music critic. In 1999, Said founded the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra together with the Jewish musician Daniel Barenboim. This name derives from the poetry collection “West-Eastern Divan” by the great German writer Goethe, who was deeply moved by the works of the Persian poet Hafez and saw in them the possibility of an encounter between the East and the West, despite their differences in era and culture, based on mutual respect. Said and Barenboim chose this name for their orchestra.

The West-Eastern Divan Orchestra brings together young musicians from Israel, Arab countries, and elsewhere to make music together. This does not mean erasing differences in political views, ethnicity, or religion. Rather, they create a single piece of music while embracing those differences. They listen to each other’s sounds, play their own, and then listen again. Through this process of repetition, they work together to create something that they couldn’t create by themselves. I believe this is very important for us as we consider the future of society.

Unfortunately, various divisions around the world are deepening today. The conflict between Israel and Palestine is one such example. Some might think that in the face of major conflicts over politics, religion, ethnicity, and national identity, what a single orchestra can achieve is insignificant. However, I do not share that view. When young people from different backgrounds meet as individuals, rather than viewing one another through the lens of nationality, ethnicity, or religion, they engage with one

another, spend time together, and create something as one, and they build a miniature model of a society that overcomes division.

Come to think of it, isn't university also a place like that? It's a place where people with different fields of study come together. It's a place where people from different countries and cultures meet. It's a place where you engage in discussions with people who hold different values, you express your own thoughts, listen to others' perspectives, and sometimes revise your own views. I'm sure you've all accumulated such experiences during your time at university. To all of you receiving your degrees today, I sincerely hope you will put those experiences to good use in society moving forward.

As professionals, strive for depth. But at the same time, as human beings, cultivate breadth. In your own fields, take responsibility as professionals. Beyond those fields, have the courage to be amateurs. Do not be ashamed of what you do not know; instead, ask questions. Do not fear differing opinions; instead, engage in dialogue. And please spend your entire lives connecting diverse knowledge and experiences based on your own values, cultivating a network of knowledge that is uniquely your own.

The degree you have received today certifies that you have reached a certain milestone. At the same time, however, it is also a new starting point. The paths you will take from here on will differ for each of you. Some of you will become researchers. Others will work in the private sector, serve in public office, pursue careers in education, or perhaps take entirely different paths. Whichever path you choose, cherish your field of expertise while also keeping your eyes open to the world beyond it. And ask yourselves from time to time: What do I value? Why do I study? Why do I work? The answers to these questions are not set in stone once decided. As you continue to learn, meet new people, and gain experience, your answers will inevitably evolve. The intellectual networks within each of you will also be in a state of constant flux. In that sense, we are all "works in progress" throughout our lives. And I believe that is perfectly fine. What matters is that we continue to ask questions.

I expect every one of you, as well-rounded professionals and, when necessary, as courageous amateurs, to engage in dialogue with people different from yourselves and to address the various challenges facing society. I sincerely hope that your lives ahead will be rich and fruitful, and with these words, I conclude my remarks.

Once again, congratulations to you all.

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