

## Keio Academy of New York Commencement Address

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Congratulations to all of you on the occasion of your graduation from the Keio Academy of New York. I also extend my heartfelt congratulations to the family members of graduates on behalf of Keio Gijuku.

All of you left campus in the spring of 2020 due to the increased prevalence of COVID-19 infections. Subsequently, you continued your studies remotely, and were no longer able to live at the dormitories alongside your fellow students or participate in clubs or other activities. This situation lasted for more than a year. Then, even after you had returned to campus, you were obliged to remain vigilant against the spread of infections.

After overcoming all of these hardships, you are now ready to graduate. This is why today's graduation ceremony gives me such joy. I also wish to express my sincere respect for the efforts of all parents and guardians who have supported their children throughout this time. I am furthermore deeply grateful for the work of all faculty and staff members of the Academy who have worked tirelessly to uphold educational activities since the beginning of the pandemic.

Around two years ago all social activities came to an abrupt halt due to the spread of COVID-19, completely changing the face of society. Since then, we have constantly had to question what kind of society we should be striving for. Even more recently, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has drastically changed the geopolitical realities of our world.

To all of you who will graduate in the midst of these circumstances, I would like to convey to you that the Keio Academy of New York was created precisely in anticipation that an era such as our own would arrive.

Tadao Ishikawa, the President of Keio Gijuku at the time of the Academy's establishment, indicated that the era to come would be one of increasing complexity, fluidity, and uncertainty due to factors including progressive globalization and developments in IT. He repeatedly asserted that, in the face of such an era, it was imperative that Keio Gijuku foster self-motivated individuals capable of identifying and solving problems. Thus, the Keio Academy of New York was created with the stated aim of nurturing such individuals.

With the ongoing impact of the pandemic, the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and resultant changes in our world, we now well and truly find ourselves in *complex, fluid, and uncertain times*. Added to this, this era can be characterized as one in which there is a complicated comingling of divergent values and interests, and as one subject to violent and often discontinuous upheaval and change.

The arrival of such an era means that each of you, as leaders of society, must tackle the challenges you see before you to create a better world. It is my belief that life at the Keio Academy of New York will be a precious asset to all of you who go on to find yourselves in this position. My reasons for thinking this are as follows.

Firstly, all of you who have studied at the Academy have developed your own unique take on the nature and nuances of all aspects of American life, and are well-versed in the charms and fascinations of American history and culture. Moreover, not only have you been able to immerse yourselves in that culture, but have also had the opportunity to compare and contrast it with others owing to the bilingual and bicultural environment of the Academy. This is not something which would have been possible at an ordinary American school.

Secondly, you have been able to consider Japan and its characteristics from a perspective different to that available to those studying at senior high schools in Japan.

Thirdly, you have been exposed to the ideas of Yukichi Fukuzawa and the culture of Keio Gijyuku throughout your day-to-day life here.

Yukichi Fukuzawa traveled to the West on three occasions to experience Western Civilization in the flesh, at a time when feudalism still prevailed in Japan. He also extensively read original texts in science and technology, as well as histories of civilization and thought.

Based on the deep insight thus gained, he came to believe that it did not suffice to merely import Western technologies and social systems, but that the “people” who constitute society themselves must undergo change. This stemmed from his belief that Japan must become a society made up of individuals imbued with a scientific mindset coupled with a willful independence, and that this would be a society in which each person respected the dignity of others.

Yukichi Fukuzawa did not devote himself unvaryingly to the West. In the Autobiography of Yukichi Fukuzawa he reflects that he has lived “two lives in a single body.” He goes on to say that he had been witness to two different eras and two different cultures, and that he was thus a person whose thinking was informed by multifaceted perspectives.

Keio Academy of New York can also be thought of as precisely the kind of place where such multifaceted perspectives on the world play out. Each of you should now be deeply conversant with the two cultures of Japan and the United States, which should lend itself to a natural tendency to compare and contrast both cultures, and identify and deepen your perspectives on and understandings of each. Slowly but surely, you have become capable of thinking in a multifaceted way like Yukichi Fukuzawa.

I believe this is where the value and significance of studying at the Academy, a tri-cultural environment where Japan, America, and Keio come together, can be located.

As I mentioned earlier, society is set to become increasingly complex, and defined by a complicated comingling of interests and values. Moreover, it will rapidly change. You may find yourselves facing a variety of difficult situations. However, it can also be said that now is precisely the era in which all of you who have studied at the Keio Academy of New York, whose creation was premised on an awareness that such times would come, are set to thrive.

This is why all of us, the faculty and staff of Keio University, are so happy to join in celebrating your graduation today. We also anticipate and look forward to your future endeavors and successes.

Congratulations once again on your graduation.