

6,850 students and 2,150 students. These are the numbers of the students who graduated from Hyogo Prefectural Ashiya-Minami SHS and our high school, Kenritsu Kokusai-koko-Hyogo prefectural International High School, over the past 43 years. Today, Kokusai celebrates an incredible milestone in the making - the 20th anniversary.

First and foremost, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Mr. Kenji Yamada, State Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Yan Giho, the Consul General of Korea, Ms. Mai Ito, the mayor of Ashiya, and other guests for their great support and contribution to our school. Kokusai inherited Ashiya Minami's international education goals, creating the very first accredited high school in Hyogo to offer a unique, internationally-focused program in 2003. Ever since, our school has helped to foster globally-minded high school students by cooperating with Ashiya International Secondary School.

From its inception until now, Kokusai has raised students who are now active in a variety of professions both in and beyond Japan. As you have just watched in the message movie from our alumni, our students have begun successful careers in, but not limited to, the International Monetary Fund, the United Nations, the Japan International Cooperation Agency, and foreign embassies and enterprises. We could do so through many unique curriculum and educational programs, such as the SGH-Super Global High School initiative. Now, by using the experience as an SGH, we have established connections with the University of Hyogo. Also, we have had many excellent international exchange programs. Our students mutually visited and welcomed overseas students from our sister schools, such as Humboldt-Schule in Germany, since 1998, encouraging students to be more globalized.

In the face of our progress, however, we are still under the shadow of a formidable foe; the COVID-19 pandemic. These three years have created one of the most challenging times facing our modern world. The pandemic shattered many social support systems, and our service, the educational institution, was not immune to the effects. We have suffered. Now, we are slowly moving into a phase of new education in which students can learn alongside the pandemic, with both face-to-face and online learning. To quote the famous Charles Darwin: "It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent. It is the one most adaptable to change". By remaining flexible and resilient to the inevitable challenges that come our way, we are confident that this will be the key to confront the post-corona era.

Speaking of that quote, one of the alumni visited me recently and said, “That Charles Darwin quote you repeatedly gave us inspired me. Humans have had to go through a lot of difficulties, such as the pandemic, world conflict, and natural disasters. When I was still at Kokusai, we had to eat silently, we couldn’t speak in English lessons, we couldn’t participate in school events or club activities properly, and we had to give up our much-anticipated overseas senior trip. We needed to adapt to these unprecedented changes more than any other alumni had experienced. But I never succumbed to the situation. I tried my best in every aspect of my school life, and I enjoyed it. We weren’t “pitiful, poor students”. I saw the bright future in front of me, and thought about how I could work actively to change the world.”

Our alumni and current students hold various backgrounds and have been in different situations. However, one thing that they all share is the same passionate spirit as Kokusai students, who challenge new experiences, have courage, and follow our principles of “Wisdom” and “Creativity”. This means that our students learn how to be themselves while being flexible to the ever-changing world. As Dr. Stephen R Covey says, **“The key to the ability to change is a changeless sense of who you are, what you are about, and what you value.”**

As a school, we teachers and students are so determined to be truly ourselves and to be flexible to the outside changes while respecting integrity and diligence. We strongly believe that there is something inherent in sophisticated human character. We are so determined to proceed with raising globally-minded individuals that hold a broad perspective and a mastery of service, which I believe will lead us to deeper global understanding and the further consolidation of world peace in the future.

Again, thank you very much to all that have come today to celebrate the 20th anniversary of Kokusai High School. Twenty years is no small achievement, and I am looking forward to seeing how our school continues to grow and foster bright, young minds until our next celebration. Until then, we hope that you will continue to support our mission and help our students realize their potentials as global citizens. Thank you very much.