

We have seen the old year out. We have welcomed in the New Year, 2023, Reiwa 5. It is the 83rd year of our school.

During this winter vacation, you have been busy doing many things, especially the twelfth graders, who are preparing for the Common Test for University Admissions. Even so, I hope you have had enough time to enjoy good food and to spend quality time with your families. We have been forced to accept so called new ways of living due to surges in COVID-19 infections. Be patient. Please concentrate on your studies a bit longer.

Everyone, I would like to talk about two things today at the starting point of the third trimester.

First, in an age of uncertainty, it is essential for everyone to keep on learning. I want you to be life-long learners. What you learn at school may be outdated within a decade or so. That's why recurrent education is regarded as being very important. I hope you will continue to learn, with high aims for making our society better through your own lives. The possibilities for you are infinite. You can choose any career you want. You may have great personal potential that you have not yet realized. Thus, I don't think it would be right for you to stop learning after graduating from high school or university. Learning will always offer sufficient satisfaction to your curiosity and may help you change your lives for the better—and our society for the better. I hope you will be able to have fun learning new things. You should accept the challenges of as many new things as you can. Don't shun them. I hope you will always enjoy changes. You may have many more chances to leave your marks and achievements in this age of uncertainty than might be possible in an age of an unchanging society. I do hope you will come to make important contributions to our society.

Second, and last, China seems to have given up on its zero COVID policy, abandoning strict restrictions and loosening the hold on its citizens. I saw on TV and on the Internet citizens in such big cities as Shanghai and Beijing demonstrating on the streets, shouting 'Freedom to go out!' 'Communist Party, step out!' 'Xi Jinping, resign!' That reminded me of the Tiananmen Square protests in 1989. At that time, I did hope that Deng Xiaoping would decide to make a historical shift towards democratization, a shift similar to that he had made towards transition to a market economy earlier in his political career. I know I should not hope too much, however; the Beijing government changed its zero COVID policy without ever saying that it had been wrong. President Xi may simply have been afraid that people's demonstrations would become big movements all across the nation. He

has looked careful and cautious since beginning his third term two months ago. It seems that citizens there can now go out to buy daily goods, eat out, and use subways and buses without having to show a negative test-result certificate. On the other hand, it also seems that many citizens and motorcycle delivery drivers in some big cities, such as Beijing and Shanghai, rushed out to drugstores to get antigen test kits. It looks like there is some confusion in citizens' daily lives. Last year, President Xi appeared to be quite confident about being able to persuade his people to believe him, but he now appears to be uncomfortable with a situation in which he has to get COVID infections under control and improve the nation's economy at the same time. He insists that such a thing is only a minor problem, but his political enemies might make use of it as a result of political errors made by him. I wonder where this Asian giant is headed and am afraid that some drastic political changes might occur in the near future. What do you think, everyone?

Today I have spoken about two things: first, that you should become life-long learners, and, second, that China is a very important neighbor who looks quite fragile just now.

One last thing, to the twelfth graders who are going to take the Common Test for University Admissions within a week. Believe in yourselves. I'm sure you will be able to make it. Don't be afraid to set high goals for yourselves. The possibilities for you are infinite. Aim high!

In closing my speech, as I have told you many times, I hope all of you are gentle and kind to one another, not ignoring your friends, and not speaking ill of them. Every student deserves respect. And as I have also told you many times, it takes only a moment to destroy a good relationship, but it takes very long time to become reconciled with one another. Help each other. Respect your friends. And work together toward achieving your dreams. There is always hope to be found in the hardships of life. Ad alta!

Thank you very much.

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