

We have seen the old year out. We have welcomed in the New Year, 2020, Reiwa 2. This year is an Olympic year. I know many of you look forward to watching exciting matches, thrilling races, and excellent performances. A couple of weeks ago, we were allowed to visit the New National Stadium. The event was broadcasted nationwide. I hope the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games will be successful.

During this winter vacation, you have been busy doing many things, especially the twelfth graders, who are preparing for the Center Examination. But you will have enough time for enjoying good food, or going to a shrine, a temple, or a church, or having a good time with your friends after you get through the examinations. Please concentrate on your studies for a bit more.

As usual, I went to Anamori-Inari Shrine, which is close to Haneda Airport, as I have done for almost four decades. I prayed that the twelfth graders might achieve their dreams. I prayed that other students would enjoy their school lives. And I also prayed that all of you may become lifelong learners. In an age of uncertainty, it is essential for everyone to keep on learning.

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

First, it has been more than seven months since the anti-government protests started in Hong Kong in June. At the end of November, Hong Kong's supporters of democracy scored a landslide of victories in district council elections. Carrie Lam, the Chief Executive of Hong Kong, said that she would listen humbly to the opinions of the public, but I am worried about how the leaders of mainland China are going to deal with this situation and with Hong Kong's citizens, most of whom were born and have been brought up in a democratic society. It is about twenty years since Hong Kong was returned to China in 1997. For 150 years they had been governed by the United Kingdom. During those 150 years, they had become accustomed to British ways in almost everything. The new Hong Kong is still young. People there are enthusiastic. They want greater democracy. China has promised that there will be "One Nation, Two Systems" until 2047. Will the Beijing government keep its promise or not? If not, what will happen? And, after 2047, what will happen? What about the people there? The demands of those people have changed into broader calls for expanded democracy and an investigation into allegations of police brutality. I'm afraid that Hong Kong might be buried under the single-party dictatorship of Beijing. What do you think, boys and girls? What should we do? Is there anything that we can do help them? Our government has been trying to smooth out an awkward

relationship with China since the biggest post-war anti-Japan demonstrations and riots, triggered in 2012 over concerns about the Senkaku Islands, damaged business and diplomatic relations between two nations. It seems that our government hesitates to press China on the movement in Hong Kong. By way of contrast, President Trump signed the “Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act,” which many analysts predict may give a negative effect on the relationship between the two big countries, and escalate the U.S.-China trade war. We should watch carefully as this situation develops further.

Second, and last, the Civil Code is to be amended by the end of the year 2022, and 18-year-olds already have the right to vote. On the fifth of July, just before the Tokyo Olympic Games, there will be a Metropolitan gubernatorial election. About one-third of you will have the right to vote by then. Go to the polls! It is your duty to be informed about politics. You will be young adults soon, and that means you will have to show individual responsibility. I don’t think you need any obtrusive school rules. I do hope you become highly responsible adults whose moderate behavior will be an excellent model for others. I do hope you will come to make important contributions to our society.

Today I talked about two things; first, that you should follow closely the situation as it develops in Hong Kong, and, second, that you should become highly responsible adults. 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 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.

Thank you very much.

800 words