

**SPEECH BY PROFESSOR TAN ENG CHYE  
PRESIDENT, NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE**

**NUS COMMENCEMENT 2019, MAIN CEREMONY  
THURSDAY, 11 JULY 2019, NUS UNIVERSITY CULTURAL CENTRE**

President of the Republic of Singapore and NUS Chancellor, Madam Halimah Yacob  
Minister for Education, Mr Ong Ye Kung  
NUS Pro-Chancellors  
NUS Chairman and Trustees  
Honorary Graduand, Mr Chua Thian Poh  
Graduates, Parents and Friends  
Ladies and Gentlemen

A very good morning, and the warmest of congratulations to the Class of 2019!

It is a wonderful privilege to join our graduating class, and families, friends and well-wishers, as we kick off this year's Commencement ceremonies.

As our newest graduates from the School of Design & Environment or SDE, you are the pathfinders of the future, and your actions and decisions in the years ahead will fundamentally shape the country, and world, that we live in. The journey that you take, and the choices that you make in the time ahead, will reverberate widely.

2019 is a special year. This year, Singapore is celebrating its bicentennial, against a backdrop of 700 years of rich history. The arrival of Sir Stamford Raffles and the British entourage on our island in 1819 was a transformative catalyst in the emergence of Singapore as a modern city and a sovereign state.

But beyond our good geographical location and good governance, Singapore's success attests to what is possible with human ingenuity, determination and commitment to hard work. Each generation took on the challenges of its time, carved out new opportunities, and expanded the horizons for those who followed. Despite many setbacks, we have advanced, a step at a time, always building on what has been achieved.

Endeavour and determination lie at the heart of the Singapore story.

For today's graduates, feelings of anxiety and uncertainty are understandable when you read about the disruption caused to jobs and careers by the 4th Industrial Revolution; global political tensions and uncertainties; and the impending but undetermined impact of climate change.

While we should not underestimate these challenges, we can – and must – resolutely chart a path forward.

We can develop ourselves fully both personally and professionally, and contribute actively and generously to the well-being of others. Individually and collectively, we hold the keys to our continued prosperity and well-being.

Carefully weigh your options, and take the next step forward with the determination to try your best. As the wise Chinese sage Lao Tzu once observed, "a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step".

This year, the School of Design & Environment began its 50th anniversary celebrations – in style – with the unveiling of SDE4, Singapore’s first new-build net-zero energy building. SDE4 is designed to consume only as much energy as it produces, and is a living laboratory for integrated sustainable development.

The School, along with its alumni and students, have long played an impactful role in the transformation of Singapore from fledgling nation to a vibrant first-world, global city-state – and one of the world’s most liveable cities. It is no surprise then, that the School is spearheading NUS’ efforts to be the first university in the world to register for the WELL portfolio, a globally prestigious and rigorous standard for buildings that promotes sustainable health and wellness.

As SDE graduates, you are well-equipped to continue the good work of those who graduated before you in initiatives such as Singapore’s Smart Nation drive. You can play a leading role in sustainable development and living, through designing and implementing full-cycle solutions that maximise the use of resources, while minimising the environmental footprint and impact.

And while many of you today may go on to design and plan breathtaking buildings, smart facilities and mega cities, I am equally heartened that your skills will also help underserved Singaporeans. In this year’s Division of Industrial Design Graduation Show for example, SDE graduates designed, among many novel projects, a blood glucose simulator that helps diabetic patients see how different combinations of food affect their blood glucose levels; and a shoulder gaming device, designed in collaboration with the Singapore National Stroke Association, for stroke rehabilitation.

I am tremendously proud of the work you have done individually and collectively, and hope that you will continue to give back to the community, even as you find your path in life.

This morning, NUS is proud to honour Mr Chua Thian Poh, a visionary business entrepreneur, philanthropist, and community leader who has made extensive and exceptional contributions across many sectors.

The Public Orator Associate Professor Kang Hway Chuan, Director of the University Scholars Programme, will shortly read the citation on Mr Chua, who is Founder of Ho Bee Group. It takes incredible determination, self-belief and hard work to build a successful business empire. To go beyond this, to give back to the community as a leader who steps up when the community is in need, is what, to me, truly distinguishes Mr Chua – and why we are here this morning.

Mr Chua began life with humble beginnings. The seventh child of a tongkang or bumboat builder, he left school at the age of 16 to work for his father, before starting out on his own.

He made his first million developing small-scale real estate projects with his friends at the age of 21 – the average age of our undergraduates. But the business failed, and he fell deeply into debt when the economic crisis struck. Mr Chua then moved to Indonesia in the 1970s to do import and export, but unfortunately lost millions after the 1978 devaluation of the rupiah.

The string of failures did not discourage Mr Chua. Undeterred by these setbacks, he returned to Singapore, and started the Ho Bee Group of companies. The Group went on to become a highly successful real estate development and investment company, spearheading leading-edge projects in Singapore, Australia, China, the United Kingdom and Europe.

Like our forefathers before, Mr Chua exemplifies the spirit of self-determination and resilience. He never lost sight of his vision and built from scratch a property portfolio of exceptional strength and quality.

Mr Chua has also served with great dedication as a community leader. Since 2007, he has been Chairman of Ren Ci Hospital, a healthcare institution that provides affordable medical care to the needy. For his many contributions, he was awarded the President's Award for Philanthropy (Individual) in 2012. In 2019, he was appointed as a member of the Council of Presidential Advisors, after serving as Alternate Member.

Mr Chua's philanthropic endeavours emphasise "learning by doing", which aims to create real-world impact by equipping community leaders with effective skills, as well as nurturing a sense of active citizenry. This ethos was the inspiration behind the groundbreaking Chua Thian Poh Community Leadership Programme, which seeks to blend rigorous research with deep community understanding.

Today, we are especially proud to celebrate Mr Chua Thian Poh's many achievements with the conferment of the Honorary Doctor of Letters.

In closing, I hope you, our NUS graduates, will be inspired by our Honorary Graduated. I hope you will continue to persevere in the face of adversity, and pursue your passions. More importantly, like Mr Chua, I hope that you will find time, despite your hectic schedules, to make meaningful contributions to improve our environment and community.

Once again, congratulations to the Class of 2019!