

**SPEECH BY MR ADRIAN AU KAH THANG,  
GRADUATE OF NUS SCHOOL OF DESIGN AND ENVIRONMENT & VALEDICTORIAN**

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

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Honorary Graduate, Dr Chua Thian Poh  
Parents  
Fellow Graduates  
Ladies and Gentlemen

A very warm welcome.

It is indeed a great honour and privilege to be addressing the class of 2019 today, as we celebrate the finale of our university academic journey. It is a surreal experience to be standing here, and to deliver a five minutes speech that concludes an arduous five years of architecture school. This journey is certainly one filled with highs and lows, and is by no means smooth sailing. Regardless, here we are today.

**Foundation (Year 1): Courage and Optimism**

Today's ceremony marks a significant milestone in our education. While we celebrate the fruits of our labour and recollect the endearing memories of student life, I urge us all to continue to embrace the world ahead with the same courage and optimism, as we have when we first entered university.

In Year 1, we begin as aspiring architecture students. Naïve, but motivated and curious, we immersed ourselves in the field of architecture discourse and rigorous drawing and model making exercises. I am certain that many of us here continue to hold fond memories of hand drafting and model making, which we so often lament, with some irony as the 'good old days'. I was fortunate to be in a studio surrounded by like-minded peers. Talented, creative and inspiring individuals, who made the studio truly a place to call home. Whilst the 'foundation' year has brought a sense of uncertainty, we embraced the unknown and took a leap of faith into the world of architecture for the very first time. Likewise, as we move towards life outside of school, continue to be courageous and optimistic in the face of new challenges and uncertainties ahead of us.

**Exploration (Year 2, 3): Rigour, Open-mindedness**

Exploration forms the key theme in Years 2 and 3. Liberated from the limitations of the drawing boards we moved towards various virtual and physical media to best express our craft and ideas. We felt empowered at times, but also powerless, in the face of an overwhelming range of problems and solutions. A predicament that often appears throughout the course of a project. Nonetheless, we could always count on our studio mates, peers and tutors to offer their insight and advice. Allowing us to learn and grow in a positive environment. Some of us also had the opportunity to broaden our horizons through exchange programs in foreign universities. Experiencing first hand, different design studios, working cultures, social and climatic considerations amongst other issues. In this phase of education, we kept an open mind, learnt through countless mistakes and setbacks while overcoming challenges we once presumed as

the impossible. Our receptiveness and dedication to pursue a deeper understanding of the field enabled us to mature and improve rapidly. In your future endeavours, I implore you to continue being open-minded. While doing so, do not be afraid to make mistakes, face adversity and take risks. But ultimately remain rigorous and steadfast in pursuing your craft and ideas. Persist in learning to our fullest potential, even beyond the university.

### **Specialisation (Year 4, 5): Focus on Progress, Overcoming Perfection**

In the Masters programme, Years 4 and 5, we pursued our individual specialisations and interests. Investigating themes associated with emergent issues, conceptual discourse, sustainability and environmental design amongst other final thesis topics. In this last two years, we ventured bravely into unexplored territories, examining and challenging conventions, while also pushing the boundaries of architecture. Many of us worked towards refining our craft, searching for an ideal perfection that is possibly synonymous with being an architect. The perfect designs, solutions, drawings, concepts, the list goes on.

In my final point today, I would like to emphasise the importance of 'overcoming perfection'. While perfection may be the end goal for many of us, it will not exist at all without taking the first step and working through repeated attempts and failures. It will be futile to allow an obsession for perfection to become a stumbling block for progress. Conversely, we should learn to embrace the imperfect while using the lessons learnt as a stepping stone to reach greater heights. Focus on progress every single day. It could be starting a project, completing a presentation, resolving that plan, sketching ideas... but never stop for fear that it would be imperfect. Only by constantly moving forward, uninhibited by liabilities and self-doubt, can we finish more tasks and better improve ourselves.

### **Conclusion**

Lastly, I would like to once again congratulate all of you, Class of 2019, for your accomplishments and brilliant final projects. You have all worked incredibly hard, putting a great deal of time and resources. Surviving intense criticism, studio meetings, countless design revisions, endless workdays and personal sacrifices.

Nevertheless, our success today belongs not entirely to us, but to our family, partners and friends, for their unwavering support and encouragement. To our tutors and professors, for their dedication and mentorship in nurturing the future generation of designers. And to the school and administration, who worked behind the scenes, making sure we could focus on our work. And with that, ladies and gentlemen, I proudly present to you, the NUS SDE Graduating Class of 2019.