

Southern Cross University
Occasional Address
2.30 pm 31 March Coffs Harbour
1133 words

Chancellor, Vice Chancellor, SCU staff, parents and friends, and of course, graduates. I add my congratulations for graduates, parents and friends to those of the Chancellor and Vice Chancellor.

After accepting this invitation, I felt compelled to do some research on "Occasional" speeches. The strong message is "be brief". Salvador Dali once said, "I will be so brief I have already finished," and he sat down. I will be reasonably brief, I promise, but not that brief.

I want to share some experiences with you. Some of you might even recognise them.

Picture this scene.

We are in a massive school auditorium in Shanghai. Several hundred scarlet uniformed year three children stand in lines reciting Chinese characters as the teacher points to a chart. "媽" - 'Ma' then "馬" - 'Ma' they cry in unison.

With professional composure, I ask "How many characters will they learn this year? The rather stern and focused teacher responds matter of factly with "At least 2000". I contemplate why we often have so much trouble teaching 26 letters to our kids without any of the complications of 4 tones, 36 sounds and combos of those that change the meaning.

My second example is that of chilli. A couple of decades ago, a grandmother began selling homemade chilli out of her kitchen in a small Chinese town.

The chilli, affectionately known as Lao Gan Ma (老干妈油辣椒), or "Grandma Chilli", found its way into local markets and later across provinces until it became widely known throughout China.

Today, Grandma Chilli is an international product much loved by expatriate Chinese and many more of us who have become "Chinese

poisoned” by the product. Folks, it will cost you about \$2.30 a jar in most Asian food shops.

I mention these stories because they are in my view highly relevant to new graduates, especially the younger ones.

First, in China, children and their education are perhaps the top priority of every family. Every conceivable resource is applied to make sure that little Xiao Wei can read, count, do sums, learn English, know and love Chinese history and culture, do Leggo, play music and understand the rest of the world.

Teachers are prized and teaching is relentlessly focussed on successful learning by students. The average 15 year old mathematics student in Shanghai for example is performing at a level 2 to 3 years above his or her counterpart in Australia, the USA or Europe.

As economic power shifts from West to East, high performance in education is following. These trends are double Game Changers: they raise the standard of living and encourage specialisation. They will shape our future lives as well as your careers.

But, beware of naysayers. For some, developments like these represent the end of life as we know it, the end of Australian enterprise. A break out of reactionary anti-Asian education politics would be a disaster for Australia. As somebody once said: Predicting rain doesn't count. Building arks does! *Building an education system of international standard is a national priority.*

Second, our little old chilli lady story occurs regularly in China and across the rest of the world. Grandma — the “Country Cousin” — didn't set out with a little red book on how to become the number one “chilli” in the world. Every step had to be figured out and she did it her way with the help of her family and friends and later, international collaborations.

The world is full of extraordinarily resilient, inventive, resourceful and innovative people. You find them by working enthusiastically to bridge the gaps in geography, language and lifestyle wherever you are. Bye the way, when you do find them, tell me how you did it!

Third, in the next generation, the global middle class will grow to around 1 billion. Most will be in Australia's neighbourhood. Our breakfasts may be different but *our humanity and lives are intertwined. We share many of the social, economic, urban and ecological issues facing the global community*¹.

This country, the rest of the Asian sphere and indeed the world, needs university-trained people who can find and use new knowledge in the various professions, in public affairs, in the arts and in everyday life. Look around at the number of international students here today. They represent a new brand of global citizen. *Global thinking and doing – to deal with global issues – is the trend.* Make arrangements to breakfast internationally soon and work it out for yourself.

Fourth, have you ever noticed how many overseas people that we Aussies meet speak English and how few of us don't have a second language? *Some of you might think about complementing your degree by learning another language. “媽”, “馬”. Oh my god, how do they do it?*

You know, a turtle has to stick its neck out to move. This could be a time in your life when you have to stick your neck out to meet some almost certain challenges. *Finding the courage to do things you are not ready to do is both scary and addictive.* That's called Life.

Fifth, *just in case some of you are thinking that you don't really know what you want to do with your life, don't feel guilty.* Lots of people I have known or read about didn't either. Some of the most interesting people my age that I know still don't...

In reality, you learn that many of the real worries in life are things you never thought about, those that confound you just after lunch on Friday.

Sixth, my mother used to tell me, “Just try hard dear and you will succeed”. You know, it's easy to fall for that easy talk about just “trying hard” and everything will be OK. Everyone has to “try hard”, just like those Year 3 kids learning Mandarin script and 4 tonal meaning systems under the teacher's gaze. You tried hard to be here today. The *real* secret code for life though is that *you have to do what is necessary to get where you want to go.*

¹ Marginson, S. (2012) Pressure's on for a bigger effort in Asia. *The Australian Higher Education*, 7th March, p. 32.

In this respect, SCU has served you well. Graduates from SCU can generate and apply knowledge, engage with the community and lead productive lives. Keep in mind that graduation day is the end of the beginning of your future life. On graduation, the clock goes back to zero. Make good use of the University motto, "*A new way to think*". *That's where your university education really pays off.*

Summing up, it is clear the future holds great opportunities. It also holds pitfalls. The challenge for all of you will be to avoid the pitfalls, seize the opportunities, and get back home by six o'clock².

Good luck to you all.

² Thanks to Woody Allen. http://www.skeptic.ca/Woody_Allen_Speech_to_Graduates.htm