



# AIT

## **An AIT Prominent Alumnus Address delivered at the 121<sup>st</sup> Graduation Ceremony at Asian Institute of Technology**

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Thank you.

Prof. Worsak Kanok-Nukulchai, President,  
Prof. Sivanappan Kumar, Vice-president for Academic Affairs,  
Prof. Voratas Kachitvichyanukul, Dean of School of  
Engineering and Technology,

Parents, Distinguished Guests, graduants, Ladies and  
Gentlemen:

I am greatly honored to be with you today for the  
graduation ceremony.

I am not prominent though I am called here today as a  
prominent alumnus. I'm just one very ordinary member of  
thousands of AIT alumni who work as hard as I do to  
contribute to our society in one way or another. I am very  
proud to be one of them.

**Dear graduants,** you have done a good job and proved  
what you were capable of and what you can offer to this

world. Your hard work and dedication won your seats here today. My deepest congratulation to you all.

A graduation ceremony is a special moment of life; a time of reflection and celebration and a time of turning a new chapter and opening a door to a new world with much complexity, where challenges and opportunities are intertwined, success and failures often mixed. As a senior to most of you, I am going to take this opportunity to share with you some of my stories, in hope that you will learn something from them, in facing this often chaotic world to keep an open-mind, positive attitude, and courage to challenge the odds and impossible in time of difficulty. If you feel boring, it's good time to take a nap.

I was born in a remote rural area in Northwest China. My hometown was a small green oasis located in between two big deserts. I spent my first 15 years of my life there, chasing cattle, herding sheep, sleeping on the back of camels, weeding small family vegetable garden and harvesting ripe wheat. Life was peaceful and hard as well, but as a child I did not feel much. The only proof of this hardship was that I had no memory of brushing my teeth or properly taking bath even for one time during 15 years of my childhood. My father however argued that I definitely did once. That was when I was three days old in a traditional ceremony for new-born.

I finished my elementary and secondary education in 9 years. I did most of my school homework and reading under kerosene lamps. We did not have a stable electricity supply. By the age of 16, I passed national examination and proudly became a university freshman. I was 1.55 m tall and 42.5 kg in weight, and to modern standard I was severely undernourished due to lack of nutritionally balanced food. But I felt nothing wrong. Many years later, when I was on duty travels in remote area in Sub Sahara region in Africa, or under the tropical sun in rural area of Cambodia, I often

recalled my early time in my home town. "Hard" seems never to be a frequent word in my dictionary.

When I entered university in early 1980s, China was experiencing tremendous change. Opening up to outside world brought in fresh air on campus. First time I knew the world was big, diverse and full of new things. I decided that one day I should go out to see the world through my own eyes. That was my simple dream.

In 1991, two guests came to visit my home city, Dr Tang and Ms Santivippa, if my memory serves, representing AIT to interview applicants who wanted to enter AIT to study. I was lucky to be granted an interview, but I suddenly realized that I was barely able to speak fluently even one complete English sentence, although I had passed four rounds of paper based English tests before their arrival. Anticipating the difficulty of the interview, I begged one of my friends who was good at English to write down some possible questions with detailed answers and I memorized them all. I vividly remember that after greeting each other in the interview, Dr Tang obviously noticed that my legs was shaking, and said to me in a soothing tone: "Take it easy, and tell me something about your university". My legs immediately stopped shaking. That was something written down on the first four pages of my notes. I immediately recited all without even a long breath. That was almost a 5 minutes speech. I actually had no idea what came out from my mouth, but one thing crystal clear to me was that if I stopped talking and allowed Dr Tang to ask, I would get lost. I wasn't sure at all whether I would be able to understand his question, if I gave him a chance to ask. After my long speech, Dr Tang looked into my eyes for a few seconds, and muttered: "Interesting, you can go now, good luck". That was how I accomplished a task that seemed at the time impossible. Because of Dr Tang, I started my 15-year honeymoon with AIT.

Entering AIT was a turning point for me in my life. In 15 years, I got my master and PhD degree, participated in several international research projects, trained nearly 800 aquaculture professionals worldwide, found my wife and had my two lovely kids. This truly international environment with multiple cultures transformed me and showed me true meaning of tolerance, respect, and collaboration. It also equipped me with most necessary knowledge and skill that I need for my career in this globalization and information age.

I am now working in an intergovernmental organization. We closely work with 19 member governments in Asia-Pacific region and collaborate with international organizations and development agencies to pursue solutions for some challenges facing today's world, such as poverty, food security, environmental issues, and impacts of climate change on rural communities. We provide policy advices to governments and help to develop sustainable guidelines for seafood production. We also try to facilitate trade process of some aquaculture products between producing and importing countries, reduce trade barriers and bring fairness in benefit sharing in supply value chains. Needless to say work is not always smooth. The biggest challenges are always associated with gaps between idealisms and realities, protectionism, disrespect of differences, non-compromise and sometimes prejudices.

Enough said about my personal life and self-introduction, I think I should return to my main purpose here. I am going to share with you some thoughts about career and life. I hope that they are useful in some way at some points in your life.

1. Always be positive, no matter how difficult the situation is. We should understand that the world is full of problems, and the world is full of solutions too.

2. Difficulties and hardships are not necessarily bad. They may be just part of your growing process which make you stronger and prepare you for future challenges.
3. Accept differences and ready to embrace new ideas with respect and tolerance.
4. Learn to compromise in facing conflicts. We should understand that there are always conflicts everywhere any time and sometime compromise is the only way to reach a resolution.
5. Learn to be patient. A problem today may not be a problem tomorrow.
6. Build your own professional network and expand your connectivity.

On a nice morning in December 2011, I had the final examination for my PhD degree. It was bad time to AIT after the big flood. When I arrived at AIT that morning only to see ruined buildings, scattered debris and litters, and the ill-equipped seminar room where I was supposed to defend my thesis research, my heart was in great pain. Nevertheless, the examination went well and I passed it unconditionally.

Today after three years, we have made great achievements in reconstruction of our campus after the flood. We should always keep a thankful mind to our professors and supporting staff, for it was they who accompanied you to go through some hard time in last a couple of years after the big flood with their sacrifice and hard work.

I would also like to remind everyone present here today that Asia Institute of Technology is a great center of educational and academic excellence. I have no doubt that this institution is on the right track to build on its excellent reputation as a truly tested center of knowledge in Asia and world.

On that very afternoon of my defense, my brother called me from China, he said: " I need you to come back home as

soon as possible, Mama passed away". She had been suffering from lung cancer for five years. She knew I was doing something important, and had watched over me from her death bed until I was finally done. She showed me what true love means. Thank you, our parents. It is you who make us what we are.

Dear graduants, let me again salute your success and I wish you the best on your journey of life.

Honorable President and Vice President, thank you for giving me this opportunity.