

Yifei Chen

2025 Convocation Address

Master of Science in Social and Economic Policy

Ryan Family Auditorium

Good afternoon to our wonderful faculty and staff, our supportive families and friends, and my incredible fellow graduates.

First of all, I am truly honored and grateful for the opportunity to stand here today and speak on behalf of the Class of 2025. This moment means more to me than I can fully put into words.

Seventeen months ago, we began this journey together, traveling from Hong Kong to the United States with excitement, uncertainty, and big dreams. I never imagined that the journey from a hilltop campus in Hong Kong to the lakeshore of Evanston would change me so much.

At Chinese University of Hong Kong, we first learned what it meant to build a community — not only in classrooms or lectures, but in the little moments of living together. We got to know each other on hilltops overlooking the ocean, during late-night study sessions, and through spontaneous adventures that turned into some of our best memories. Some of us traveled together to Taiwan, others explored Thailand. We played, laughed, got lost in new cities, and somehow found ourselves, and each other, along the way.

Coming to Northwestern opened a new chapter of discovery. Along this journey, I met so many friends who shared the same curiosity, the same drive, and the same desire to try new things. We exercised together, spent afternoons in the Henry Crown Sports Pavilion, and even learned tennis on Northwestern's bright purple courts, something I never imagined myself doing before.

One of my favorite memories was traveling to Cincinnati with friends to watch the Masters tennis tournament. Sitting in the stadium, cheering for players we had only seen on TV, I remember thinking: How did we end up here, in this moment, in this

city, witnessing something we once thought was so far away? These experiences — big and small — were things I never expected to have. But they shaped me, taught me joy, and broadened my sense of what is possible.

CUHK gave us beautiful views of the sea, and Northwestern welcomed us with the endless blue of Lake Michigan. Two very different places, yet both carrying pieces of who we became. When I think about this journey, it's not just a geographical move; it's a shift in perspective, a widening of the world, and a deepening of the friendships that carried us across continents.

Since then, we have gained not only knowledge, but also friendships, broader perspectives, and memories that belong only to us. As a graduate assistant, I had the special privilege of seeing this journey from another angle — capturing so many of your moments along the way: from our summer travel diaries, Bulls game nights, and inspiring guest lectures, to the quiet, everyday victories that often go unnoticed.

And when I began preparing our graduation memory video, I went back through countless photos from our days at CUHK all the way to our time here at Northwestern. Only then did it truly hit me how many beautiful memories we have created together — how far we've come, and how much we've grown, side by side. Watching all of this unfold, from every perspective, has been nothing short of extraordinary.

For me, these 17 months have been among the happiest and most unforgettable times of my life. They reminded me that education is not only about what we learn, but also about who we become — and who we become together.

Today, we celebrate how far we've come. But we also know this is not the end. Graduation and the future can feel exciting and scary at the same time. Still, I truly believe this: **the best is yet to come**. We have already walked such a long road to get here, and that strength will carry us even further.

To the Class of 2025: may our futures be bright, bold, and full of possibility. Congratulations — and I'll see you in the future.

Thank you.

