新加坡国立大学现任高级副校长陈祝全教授（48岁）将于下月1日，接替到访新加坡的现任阿卜杜拉国王科技大学副校长的施春华教授，成为国大新校长。

新加坡人对陈祝全这个名字并不陌生。他是2003年担任卫生部医药总监的。在2008年他被任为国大医学院院长，当时，他只有38岁，是国大医学院最年轻的院长。

陈祝全接受本报专访，畅谈他的治校理念，他的兴趣和他和他的家庭。

记者：陈祝全教授对学生常讲“鲶鱼”故事，鲶鱼在河海和之后“游入湖泊”（anadromous migration）的故事，使他成为著名的“鲶鱼校长”。陈教授你将持在任，请问你也将有一套独特的教育理论吗？

陈：陈祝全教授“鲶鱼”故事的理论，很有象征意义。小鲶鱼为了成长，从淡水小溪，勇敢地游入咸水大海洋。接受挑战。在大海洋成长后，再经历千辛万苦，从咸水回到淡水，成就家乡。这个故事形象地表达了我对学生的要求和指导。哪怕他们勇敢地走向世界，又要他们按自己的道路，构想蓝图。

从小教授我，我作为一个道理，就是“治校理念”。这个理念求实治校也很有意义。

什么是“鲶鱼理念”？“鲶鱼”教授都有画图相对应，形成不再落后的途径，因为画面已经很好，作画的人更多不再。

当国大校长陈祝全教授喜欢旅行，每到一处，他都以自己的画笔把美景特色记录下来。他说，速写培养了他的敏锐的观察力，也逼他思考所到地方有什么特色。图为他1993年于巴基斯坦的速写。
出生在大家庭  从小受到母亲良好教育

记者：陈教授，听说你来自一个大家庭，可以谈谈吗？

陈：是的。我们家很大，一共有九个兄弟姐妹，我有一个哥哥，五个姐姐，一个弟弟，一个妹妹，我排第七。我们家母亲给我影响最大。母亲来自一个富裕家庭，九岁随家人从中国到新加坡来，可是战后家道中落，她这个十指不沾阳春水的小姐，必须挑起管家的大梁，什么都做。她虽然没有受过太多教育，却能教我们数学，英文，还有做人之道，是个很有智慧的人。她指导我们做人要有诚信，正直勤奋，为人服务。她今年83岁了，人还很硬朗。

记者：你小学成绩一定很好，中学有考虑去英士书院吗？

陈：没有。我们家虽然不信教，可是母亲却很信教会学校的教育。我从圣弥额尔小学（St. Michael’s 现是圣约瑟书院附小）、圣约瑟书院到公教初级学院，都在天主教学校读书，这是母亲的坚持。从小到大都在天主教学校读书，我不能跟其他学校比较。不过，我很喜欢圣约瑟书院。我觉得这是一个全面培养学生的学校。学校各式各样的学生都有，有家境富裕的，有家境贫寒的；有学业成绩非常好的，有学业成绩不太好的。其他活动却很好的。在这样的环境中成长，让我认识社会是由不同层次的人组成。

记者：在学校，你是个很活跃的学生吗？

陈：小时候，母亲总要我勤奋读书，我似乎只爱读书。小三班主任在成绩单上写我的成绩很好，但应该多参加活动的评语。这几个字给非常重视教育的妈妈看了，立刻改变了她只要我勤奋读书的态度。记得我第一项课外活动是参加园林班，后来又打篮球，这之后就参加了许多活动。我在中学参加圣约翰救伤队，投入很多时间。我后来选择做医生，主要是我喜欢生物，对细胞、器官、人体运作感兴趣。中学参加救伤队活动那段日子，显然也培养了我救人的心。

小三老师给我的指示，的确改变了我的生命。现在的我，可以说是一个非常热爱活动的人。在家的园艺工作虽然都交给妻子（李如生医生，伊丽莎白医院麻醉科医生）处理，我们还是经常去潜水、远足、旅行。我还喜欢骑越野脚车，前几年曾经跌伤过，就停了。
走出国门探险学习

记者：陈教授，听说您爱旅行，七大洲五大洋都跑遍了？

陈：是的，旅行是我每年必做的事情。在旅行中，我不仅能够开阔眼界，更能深入了解各地的文化和历史。

记者：那么您最难忘的旅行经历是什么呢？

陈：我最难忘的是那次去非洲的探险。在那里，我见到了许多未曾见过的动物和植物，还结识了许多当地的土著人。

记者：旅行对您来说意味着什么呢？

陈：旅行对我来说，就是一种探索和学习的方式。每一次旅行，都是一次新的发现和成长。

记者：您认为旅行对年轻人来说有多重要？

陈：对年轻人来说，旅行是成长过程中不可或缺的一部分。它可以让人看到世界的广阔，激发对未知的好奇心，培养解决问题的能力。

记者：但是，旅行也有一定的风险，您不担心吗？

陈：当然有，但是我认为，冒险和挑战是成长的重要部分。只要做好充分的准备，所有的风险都是可以控制的。

记者：那么，您认为旅行和学习是相辅相成的吗？

陈：是的，旅行和学习是相辅相成的。旅行可以提供学习的素材，学习则可以深化对旅行的体验。
Incoming NUS President Professor Tan Chorh Chuan: To run a university based on the principle of “guarding against the danger of complacency”

NUS Senior Deputy President Professor Tan Chorh Chuan (49 years old) will take over from Professor Shih Choon Fong as NUS President on 1 December. Prof Shih will become the Founding President of the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology in Saudi Arabia.

Prof Tan's name is not unfamiliar to Singaporeans. In 2003, as Director of Medical Services in the Ministry of Health, he was one of the SARS heroes who had led the country in successfully combating the epidemic. Singaporeans may also know Prof Tan as the youngest Dean of the School of Medicine at NUS, a position that he took on in 1997 when he was 38-years-old.

In this interview with Lianhe Zaobao (LHZB) just before taking office as NUS President, Prof Tan spoke on his approach towards running the university, his interests and his family.

*LHZB: Prof Shih often relates the story of how the Atlantic salmon brave the ocean currents and their anadromous migration. As a result, he is known as "President Salmon". As you take over the baton, do you also have your own unique theory on education?*

Prof Tan: Prof Shih's analogy of the migration of salmon is of great symbolic significance. The young salmon braves hardships as they swim from freshwater streams to the oceans. After maturing in the oceans, the salmon then encounters innumerable hardships once again as they swim from the oceans back to the streams, their original birthplace. This story is an allegory for the hopes and expectations that NUS has for its students. Not only do we want them to step boldly into the world, we also want them to remember the source of their blessings and their roots in their homeland.

I have enjoyed drawing from a young age. In the process, I have learnt a principle, which I call “guarding against the danger of complacency”. This principle is also applicable to running a university. What does it mean to “guard against the danger of complacency”? All artists encounter the situation where they find it difficult to make further improvements to their work as they perceive it to be near-perfect. Since the work is already close to perfection, the artists fear that making any more adjustments
may destroy the work. This is actually the most dangerous mindset to have. By not fine-tuning the work further, it will never achieve greater levels of excellence.

An artist who is continuously seeking improvements should always be bold and courageous. Each stroke should be forceful, so as to create something new and different. Even though a piece of work may look good, it can always be better. I have practised Chinese brush painting for a decade, and I strive to do better each time I paint. Otherwise, what is the point of painting 100 pieces and all of them are of the same quality?

The Dutch artist Vincent van Gogh was one of the greatest artists of the 19th century. Many consider him to be a genius and describe his every stroke as divine, but this is not true. I have seen his earlier works, and although they were good, they did not reflect his personal style. If he had stopped at that stage, the history of art would have been short of one giant. Based on his extensive study of earlier artists such as Rembrandt, Van Gogh acquired an impressionist's use of colour and boldly innovated which resulted in him having his own unique style. He created many pieces that were filled with life's passions and a humanitarian spirit. This was achieved only through a process of hard work and learning, making constant breakthroughs and seeking to surpass oneself.

**Only by making bold innovations can NUS be transformed from a good university to a great university**

When I take over as NUS President on 1 December, I will constantly remind myself of the principle of “guarding against the danger of complacency”. Under the leadership of Prof Lim Pin and Prof Shih, NUS has already become an excellent university. I will be like an artist when leading the NUS faculty members and students. Our task is to build on the portions of NUS that are already excellent - put in place by the past two presidents - while remaining bold and creative as we transform NUS from a good university into a great university.

Today, we face a highly competitive environment. It is not easy to balance limited resources with competing demands. In particular, the global economy has been hit by a financial crisis, with one piece of bad news after another. With the global economic downturn, prospects for the future are bleak. I can only hope that this storm will pass quickly.

This is why we should never be complacent. We cannot continue to do the same things, and we must always strive to innovate and change, to surpass ourselves and make bold advances.
LHZB: Doesn’t this mean that things will be more difficult?

Prof Tan: It all depends on one's attitude. If one sees this as a challenge and an opportunity to become a pioneer in one’s area of research, then one will forge ahead aggressively and not feel tired. If one's research can create new models for a new era, isn't this worth being excited about? Don't you think that it would be tiring just to keep doing the same thing?

Born into a big family and brought up well by mother

LHZB: I understand that you come from a big family. Would you like to tell us about it?

Prof Tan: Yes. I have nine siblings - one elder brother, five elder sisters, one younger brother and one younger sister. I am the seventh child in the family. My mother has a great influence on me. She came from a well-to-do family, and at the age of nine, she left China for Singapore with her family. However, after the war, her family went into hard times. For someone who never had to do any menial labour, she had to take charge of the household and learn to do everything. She is extremely intelligent, and even though she had not received much formal education, she was able to teach us Mathematics and English, as well as character principles. She taught us to be honest, to have integrity, and to be ready to serve others. She is 83 years old this year and is still in good health.

LHZB: You must have excelled in primary school. Did you consider going to Raffles Institution for your secondary education?

Prof Tan: No. Although we are not Catholics, my mother had great faith in the education provided by mission schools. I studied at St Michael's Primary School (now St Joseph's Institution Junior), St Joseph's Institution and Catholic Junior College. These were at the insistence of my mother. As I have only attended mission schools, I cannot compare them with other schools. However, I greatly enjoyed my experience at St Joseph's Institution. I feel it is a school that develops students holistically. My classmates came from all walks of life, from the wealthy to the poor, from those who excelled academically to those who did not perform as well but were good in other areas. Growing up in an environment like this has helped me to understand the diversity of our society.

LHZB: Were you a very active student in school?

Prof Tan: Since young, my mother had wanted me to study hard. Books seemed to be my only companions. My Primary Three form teacher wrote in my report card that my results were good, but I should participate in more school activities. To my mother, who had always taken education very seriously, these words immediately transformed her attitude of only wanting me to focus on studies. I remembered that
my first extra-curricular activities were gardening and basketball. Subsequently, I took part in many other activities. During my secondary school days, I devoted a lot of my time to the activities of the St. John Ambulance Brigade. Later on, I chose to become a doctor as I enjoyed biology and was very interested in cells, organs and how the body functions. The St John Ambulance Brigade had also cultivated in me the desire to save others.

The words of my Primary Three teacher truly changed my life. Today, I am someone who is very active. Although the gardening at home is taken care of by my wife (Dr Evelyn Lee, a Consultant Anaesthetist at Mount Elizabeth Hospital), we still go diving, hiking and travelling regularly. I also love mountain-biking but had to stop after sustaining injuries a few years ago.

Venturing overseas with a spirit of adventure and enquiry

LHZB: I heard that you love travelling. Have you travelled to all seven continents and over five oceans?

Prof Tan: I do love travelling. Every year, I will take a few weeks to travel with my wife to see the world. We do not make systematic plans about where to go. It is all very impromptu. We have been to Asia, America, Europe, Australia and Africa. Last year, we went to Peru in South America for a month.

In 1988, when I just completed my specialist training, I decided to travel the world. I had originally wanted to visit Greece, but unexpectedly, after flipping through a book at the bookstore, I changed my mind and backpacked through China for six weeks instead. I started from Guangzhou and flew to Urumuqi in Xinjiang, then to the Sino-Russian border, Yining, Dunhuang, Lanzhou, Xi’an and Beijing. From Beijing, I took a train and travelled south to Guangzhou and stayed there for a few days before coming back. I did many sketches en route and felt that it was a very fruitful trip.

LHZB: Could you tell us what a typical day was like during trip to China?

Prof Tan: At that time, I was travelling alone and all the arrangements were ad-hoc. My trip to Yining was also by chance. I remembered that on that day at Urumuqi, I had intended to go to Kashgar. Kashgar is a city along the Silk Road that one has to pass through before entering Central Asia. I was at a coffee shop chatting with a Chinese who advised me not to go to Kashgar but to visit the beautiful Yining instead. We conversed in Teochew as he was from Chaozhou. At that time, we could only use foreign exchange certificates and renminbi in China. I left for Yining after he helped me purchase the air ticket to get there. Yining is a place with many ethnic minorities. After that, I travelled on a bus for three days and three nights to return to Urumuqi. The beautiful and magnificent scenery along the way left a lasting impression on me. The bus would stop for the night and passengers would then be
put up in a tiny guesthouse where everyone would rush for food. It was an unforgettable experience.

*LHZB: This shows that you are someone who is bold and courageous. Are you someone who dares to face challenges and risks?*

Prof Tan: Back then, I never thought that it was dangerous. I just felt like giving it a try, since someone had mentioned it. Now, looking back, it was good training. In an unfamiliar place, I had to find my way around, look for my own food, lodging and transportation. I also had to find the sights I wanted to explore and protect myself at the same time. I never knew what was going to happen the next minute. When you travel in this way, you learn more about yourself and become more aware of your strengths and weaknesses. It was an eye-opening experience for me. After getting used to living in a stable and comfortable environment, it is only when something unexpected happens that one realises what one can and cannot achieve. Only then does one realise how strong or how fragile one really is.

*LHZB: That is exactly what former Education Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam was concerned about. He has always been concerned that our top students, with their stellar academic scores, would lack awareness of their own shortcomings.*

Prof Tan: Yes. During my travels, I often trusted people whom I should not have trusted, and had to re-examine the decisions I had made every night. I always thought that I was smart and could solve any problem that I faced. One actually needs to be immersed in a particular situation in order to find out one's ability to cope.

Therefore, I strongly encourage students to venture overseas to see the world. However, I also realised that many students go in groups and take it easy. In the end, they return without learning much. I feel that this has nothing to do with whether one goes overseas or not. The important thing is whether an individual is willing to explore and learn, whether one regularly examines oneself and reflects on what has happened. The process of reflecting on decisions we make helps us better understand ourselves. From an education standpoint, experiential learning is just as important as learning the theories.

In addition, I enjoy drawing. Each time when I travel to a place, I capture the unique scenery through sketches. Whenever I sketch, I have to capture very quickly the unique characteristics of each place. This has honed my powers of observation and allowed my trips to go beyond scratching the surface and vague impressions. Sketching allows me to observe a place closely, and forces me to think about what makes a place attractive, so that I can capture its uniqueness. Drawing helps me to relax. Of course, it has also taught me creativity, as each sketch has to be different.
LHZB: When the SARS epidemic broke out, did you also “sketch” it and immediately look for its special features so as to address the problem?

Prof Tan: Perhaps. My habit of sketching has taught me to look at things from many angles. It has shown me that life is full of joy. Now, as NUS President, my professional training allows me to understand the viewpoints of my colleagues from the sciences, while my interest in drawing and travel and my experiences in arts and culture provide me with a common language to interact with my colleagues in the Arts and Social Sciences. So, I encourage all students to try different things. They do not have to be artists, but coming into contact with arts and culture will allow them to look at things from a different angle.

LHZB: Do you always take long trips?

Prof Tan: Yes. For example, we were in Peru for a month last year. One gains a deeper understanding of a place if one is there for a longer period of time. I sometimes make short trips too, for example, to dive and to hike. There was a fantastic exhibition at the National Palace Museum in Taiwan last year. My wife and I flew over just to view the exhibition and we spent a few days there. When I go travelling, I always go with a willingness to learn about the local culture, history, art and civilisation, regardless of whether the place is rich or poor, developed or backward. I travelled to Africa and realised that African art has impacted many places in the world. Even Picasso’s paintings were influenced by African prints.

Travellers should set out with an open mind, and not make criticisms based on preconceived notions. Besides, travelling is not just about sightseeing. It is about being able to reflect along the way. It is not just about getting to a destination and taking a photograph to show that you have been there. That is not main objective of travelling.

LHZB: Many less developed countries have their own "advanced" ways of getting things done. It is good to observe and learn from one another.

Prof Tan: Yes, that is why NUS believes in global education. We send many students overseas, and we have many students from all over the world on our campus too. We live in an era where the world is much more interconnected, so we need to create a multicultural environment for our students.

We are planning to set up an entity called the NUS Global-Asia Institute, which will gather many researchers from related fields to carry out large-scale research on major Asian countries. A task force comprising faculty members has been formed to help set up this institute.