White Coat – by Alan Xie

I’ve never been really big on ceremonies. Throughout high school I didn’t care whether it was my birthday or not, and didn’t want gifts either because I felt I had other pressing things to do with school. During my high school commencement, I liked to think sardonically, “Finally, I have accomplished the bare minimum of most of the working population.” There was a similar sentiment in finishing undergrad as well. I didn’t think, “What an honor or privilege it is to have a degree from a prestigious liberal arts college”, but rather, “Now I have to find a job.”

I feel a bit different with the White Coat ceremony, but it's complicated. Although I don’t carry the responsibilities of people’s lives presently, the White Coat does represent something I’ve been working tirelessly for the past 5 to 6 years. Yes, at some point in my life, I decided for myself to say, “This is meaningful to me. This is what I will devote my life to. Of all the things I could do, this is what I have chosen.” I’m grateful that I’ve made it this far, and recognize that thousands of others would sacrifice much to be in this position. But at the same time, it’s merely an abstract symbol of something that cannot be attained merely by changing your wardrobe, but rather something that must be internalized within. I am not on call; I don’t have people’s private information stored in my thoughts; I am not burdened with diagnosing complex conditions of extremely sick patients. I am a student still trying to become someone who can do those things. In that sense, I guess I am not quite as excited as other people to receive the White Coat because I feel there is still a great disconnect from receiving a White Coat and attaining the qualities it represents. It's not just, "Are you a doctor yet?" But rather, "Are you a good doctor?" To me, the White Coat I’m receiving tomorrow is an accomplishment I’ve worked hard to achieve, but the true achievement lies in the journey still ahead of me.