

Welcome Speech

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Dear Friends and Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Good Morning! Welcome to China and welcome to Nankai University!

First of all, I would like to thank the speakers and participants of this conference on paths, permutations and trees, which I believe will be an important event for research on this exciting subject and for the future development of the Center for Combinatorics at Nankai University.

President Zixin Hou of Nankai University, a mathematician working on Lie groups, asked me to forward his best regards to all of you. He cannot come to this morning's opening ceremony, but he will be joining us this evening at the banquet.

As all of us would agree, combinatorics has become a major undertaking of contemporary mathematics. As I can remember, the late Chinese mathematician L. K. Hua once independently discovered some concepts of combinatorics in his pioneering work on geometry of matrices. Nevertheless, combinatorics is still a young subject full with vigor to grow and full with mysteries to uncover. For the situation in China, I have to say that the subject of combinatorics is even younger, which needs more sources of nurture and support. The good news is that this leaves an ample room of opportunities for combinatorics and for combinatorialists.

Let us make some justifications about what I just claimed. Of course, only this conference is not evident enough, although it is indeed a good sign. Five years ago, with the support of President Zixin Hou, the Center for Combinatorics was founded at Nankai University, with the initial value of just two people. However, I do think that that was a timely and profound decision of the University. Professor Bill Chen is the director and I am the Chairman of the Academic Committee. As you can see, the situation is quite different today. We will work even harder for another 5 years, and 5 years after another.

Not only is combinatorics a subject with recognition and support of the

University, its importance has been realized and recognized by the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Science and Technology of China, and the Tianjin Municipal Government. I would take this opportunity to bring to your attention that the former vice premier Li Lanqing of China and the former minister of education who is currently a member of the State Commission, Madam Chen Zhili, once visited the Center for Combinatorics and remarked on the importance of this subject. Above all, President Hu Jintao of China, once pointed out that combinatorics is not only a branch of the traditional mathematics, but also an interdisciplinary subject, and an applied subject with many applications, and the needs of combinatorics in China should be unquestionable.

After the Center for Combinatorics was founded, the Ministry of Education set up the Key Laboratory of Pure Mathematics and Combinatorics at Nankai University. There are only three such laboratories in mathematics sponsored by the Ministry. Just in this month, the Tianjin Municipal Government has announced its sponsorship of the Center for Combinatorics as a key laboratory of the city. It turned out to be the only one in mathematics. As we say in Chinese, this gives us a broad platform for a brighter future.

Besides the political support we have gotten, we have to thank President Hou Zixin of Nankai University for his vision of making combinatorics a special subject for development. Professor S. S. Chern also supported the Center and commented that the operations of the Center was quite successful. The late Professor Gian-Carlo Rota, the advisor of Bill Chen, gave Bill great support and explicitly suggested that we need to have a Center for Combinatorics. It was sad that he could not come to see the Center that he really cared about, although he promised to come. At least, he knew that we already got started and we are well on the way to success. Maybe he is still praying for us.

Professor Alain Lascoux, as he would identify himself as a Chinese professor from France, has been supporting the Center in many ways. He comes frequently to Nankai. I would remark that he made his first trip to China in the early 70's, but I guess that he would not even dream at that time that he could come to China for the sake of combinatorics. I heard some people remarking that Professor Lascoux has become very Chinese, even more so than some native Chinese. On the campus of Nankai University, Professor Alain Lascoux is known to almost everyone. It is worth mentioning that he was awarded the highest honor of the Tianjin Municipal City for foreigners who made significant contributions to the city. Less than 40 people received the award last year. As a bonus, Professor Lascoux is now a permanent resident of China, and he was given a multiple entry visa to China for 3 years, this is probably something that you may not have heard about.

Professor Jiang Zeng who is also present at the conference, is also a Professor of Nankai. Contrary to Professor Lascoux, Professor Zeng described him as a French

professor from China, from the Center for Combinatorics at Nankai. Shortly after his arrival, he had written several papers with students.

I should not forget mentioning that Professor Richard Stanley has been a vital source of support behind the scene. He came to Nankai before, and is coming again. He kindly permitted the use of his book in any form, and donated the original copy to the Center.

I very much hope that we will have more colleagues coming to the Center for Combinatorics, and we will try our best to create a friendly and efficient environment. With your support and joining force, I believe that the boundaries of our center will be stretched beyond the continents, beyond nations, and beyond languages, our friendship will be enhanced and condensed, and our distances will be shortened, or eliminated.

We understand that in order to carry out high quality research and to train good students, it is important to stay in an international environment and to keep up active relations and collaborations with colleagues outside China. This is indeed the main objective of this conference.

I look forward to your future support of the research and teaching programs of the Center for Combinatorics, I look forward to your coming back to China in the foreseeable future. In fact, the Chinese seem to have a more accurate way of saying “see you again ” (后会有期)

In conclusion, I wish a great success of the conference, and wish you greater success in combinatorics, and a pleasant stay in China.

Thank you