

ACCEPTANCE REMARKS BY THE MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND INNOVATION, DR BLADE NZIMANDE ON THE OCCASION OF THE CONDERRAL OF HONORARY PROFESSORSHIP BY THE BEIJING JIAOTONG UNIVERSITY

Beijing: 4 November 2023

Professor YU Zujun, President of Beijing Jiaotong University
Professor YAN Xuedong, Vice President of Beijing Jiaotong University
Professor YAO Enjian, Dean of the College of International Education
Professor SONG Fei, Director of the Office of International Affairs
Professor WANG Hongwei, Vice Dean of the Colleague of Science, Technology and Research
Professor GUO Ming, Vice Dean of the Office of the Humanities and Social Sciences
Esteemed guests, ladies and gentlemen

I am deeply honoured to be with you this afternoon and am most grateful for this singular honour bestowed upon me, by such a prestigious institution such as the Beijing Jiaotong University.

Professor Yu, dear colleagues, it is with the greatest humility, and cognizant of the significance of the award, and with gratitude for China's friendship and support throughout my career, that I am privileged to accept the Honorary Professorship.

It is a award, which I regard as further evidence of the enduring friendship between South Africa and China, a strategic partnership, in which the Beijing Jiaotong University, could play an even more important role. A role, I am determined to help facilitate.

I am visiting China at the invitation of my counterpart, Minister YIN Hejun, with whom I had most fruitful discussions yesterday on the strengthening of our bilateral cooperation in science, technology and innovation.

Tomorrow, I will be travelling to Chongqing, where at the invitation of Minister YIN, I will be privileged to participate in the first Belt and Road Minister Conference on Science and Technology.

Over recent years, the Belt and Road partnership has made important contributions to support development in Asia and Africa through intensified cooperation with China, notably through infrastructure investments.

I am convinced that President Xi's vision for an increased focus on science and technology in the Belt and Road partnership, will create new and strategic opportunities for institutions such as Beijing Jiaotong University to make even more important contributions.

I therefore would like to encourage and look forward to see Beijing Jiaotong University playing a more active and increased role in the different programmes for South Africa – China cooperation, such as our Joint Research Programme, the Joint Research Centres initiative and the Young Scientists Exchange programme.

Certainly, it would be wonderful to see increased scientific exchanges and the mobility of researchers between Beijing Jiaotong University and universities in South Africa.

This will be invaluable for South Africa, as Beijing Jiaotong University is a globally renowned centre of excellence in rail transport and innovation, and as we enter a critical phase of redeveloping the South African railway system, cooperation with Beijing Jiaotong can play a crucial role to reinforce our capacities.

Developing on the foundations of the Beijing Railway Management Institute, Beijing Jiaotong University has achieved remarkable progress over the past decades, with a long list of former students and scholars affiliated to the University, who have achieved impressive achievements in advancing China's progress.

I am therefore humbled, that through the honour you are affording by bestowing an honorary professorship, I am becoming part of this community. I pledge my very best efforts to support the University's future progress, following in the footsteps of pioneers such as LIU Han, founder of China's first radio station, YING Shangcai, inventor of China's first high-power steam engine, and ZHENG Zhenduo, famous writer and literary critic and historian, to name but a few of the famous former Jiaotong students.

In South Africa we are seeking to emulate China's example of harnessing science, technology and innovation as an instrument for growth and development, decisively defeating poverty and eliminating inequality.

Beijing Jiaotong University is a model of excellence in collaboration and innovation, as demonstrated by how you are successfully combining your capacities in transport systems, information and communication technologies, as well as the economics and management sciences, to support China's progress in the development of one of the world's leading rail networks for both passenger and freight transport.

This is an inspiring example for South Africa and one we are keen to learn from.

In South Africa, I am not only responsible for the science and innovation portfolio, but also that of higher education and training.

I am eager to learn Beijing Jiaotong University's success in combining advanced scientific research and post-graduate programmes, undergraduate studies as well as vocational training in an holistic manner.

You have named me an Honorary Professor, but I should say, I am also privileged, Professor YU, to become your student.

I would like to conclude with that old and very wise Chinese proverb, which I know is also very important for all associated with Beijing Jiaotong University, that is: "whilst we are drinking the water, we should be thinking of its source".

Prof YU, dear friends and colleagues, I commit that whilst drinking from the source of knowledge at your university, I will be thinking of its source, and do my best to contribute to its well-being and growth.

Thank you again for this very special award, for the trust and confidence you have shown me. I am deeply honoured.