

## S'porean elected as head of top US maths institute.

By Chang Ai-Lien.

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He's first in East Asia elected as its president; his role seen as a boost for Singapore's reputation in mathematics

SINGAPOREAN mathematician **Louis Chen** has been elected head of one of the world's top mathematical organisations, a rare honour someone outside the United States.

The 62-year-old is the first person in East Asia and the only ethnic Chinese chosen to head the California-based Institute of Mathematical Statistics (IMS) in its 68-year history.

He is currently director of the National University of Singapore's (NUS) Institute for Mathematical Sciences.

The IMS was formed in 1935 to help develop and spread the theories and applications of statistics and probability.

It has more than 3,000 individual members and about 600 institutional and corporate ones.

Members include those doing research in statistics and probability, and most are professors in universities.

Professor Chen is well known as the father of the Chen-Stein method, a technique and theory used widely in the study of molecular biology and one taught on university courses.

One of the members of the nominating committee, Professor Vijay Nair of the University of Michigan said: 'Prof Chen was the clear favourite. It is a huge honour for Singapore.'

Stanford University's Professor Amir Dembo added that Prof Chen's research efforts lay on the boundary between probability and statistics.

'He is also widely regarded as having very good people and organisational skills. In these respects, he was an ideal candidate for the position.'

Professor Cheng Ching-Shui of the University of California at Berkeley said: 'He has broad international research links, is an excellent organiser, has a sound judgment, has quality of leadership, and has considerable administrative experience.'

Prof Chen, also a former president of the Europe-based Bernoulli Society whose aim is the advancement of the sciences of probability and mathematical statistics, said that as president of the IMS, he would like to look at scientific problems that need advanced ideas and techniques in both probability and statistics, and play a greater role in promoting both fields in less-developed countries.

Prof Nair explained that statistics and probability have been going through a major revolution in recent years, stimulated in part by the increase in computing power and the huge amounts of data being collected for research in areas such as bioinformatics.

'As president of the institute, Prof Chen will be involved in developing collaborations with peer professional groups in other sciences, promoting common research agendas, and so on,' he said.

Professor Paul Embrechts, of the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology's mathematics department, told The Straits Times: 'If you look at the list of past IMS presidents, you will find a list of the world's finest researchers in probability and statistics.'

'Prof Chen belongs to this list: He is a world renowned researcher in applied probability theory.'

Said Prof Chen: 'Being elected president of the institute is a very rare honour for me. What makes me especially proud is that I'm a homegrown Singaporean who did his degree at NUS and who has worked there for 30 years.'

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