Professor Louis Chen Hsiao Yun
Tan Chin Tuan Centennial Professor

Unlike the probability equations he comes across on a daily basis, Professor Louis Chen’s distinguished career in the field of mathematics is anything but a chance occurrence. Since receiving his BSc from the University of Singapore in 1964 and graduating with an M.S. and PhD from Stanford University in 1971, he has spoken and taught around the world on his pet topic, probability theory. He joined NUS Department of Mathematics in 1972 and was its Head from July 1996 to June 2000.

Professor Chen is best known for his work on the Chen-Stein method of Poisson approximation, one of the most important areas of discrete probability today. The impact of this method is felt not just in molecular biology - it has also found applications and spawned literature in fields as diverse as computer science, statistical physics and the study of social networks. Its wide application is attributed to the fact that many important and interesting scientific problems, such as comparisons of DNA sequences, can be formulated in terms of occurrences of rare events.

His breakthrough efforts in this field have culminated in two firsts - he was the first Asian to be elected President of the Bernoulli Society for Mathematical Statistics and Probability (1997-99), and the first East Asian to be elected President of the Institute of Mathematical Statistics (2004-05).

Since July 2000, Professor Chen has been the Director of the Institute for Mathematical Sciences at NUS, which is modelled after such top institutes as the Mathematical Sciences Research Institute at Berkeley, USA, and the Isaac Newton Institute for Mathematical Sciences at Cambridge, UK.

His numerous awards and honours include his election as a Fellow of the Institute of Mathematical Statistics in 1989 and of the Academy of Sciences for the Developing World in 2000; the National Science and Technology Award in 1991; the Excellence for Singapore Award in 1997; a Public Administration Medal (Silver) in 2002; the Distinguished Science Alumni Award in 2004; and the title of Chevalier dans L’Ordre des Palmes Académiques conferred by the French Government in 2005.