

Chern Centennial

CONFERENCE

Sunday, October 30 to
Friday, November 4, 2011

Taking the Long View: The Life of Shiing-Shen Chern

George Paul Csicsery has produced and directed a new biographical film that highlights the remarkable achievements of the eminent mathematician Shiing-Shen Chern, who was a co-founder of MSRI and the Institute's first director. The documentary *Taking the Long View* has incorporated "an abundance of stills, archival footage, and stories" told in interviews with friends, family, and many prominent colleagues who wanted to share their insights to create a vivid portrait of Chern "as a gesture of giving back to him some of what he gave them," said Csicsery. Fortunately, Csicsery had filmed a discussion with S.-S. Chern at MSRI back in 2000, at the prescient request of David Eisenbud, then director of the Institute, and that footage has been used for the first time in the film. Csicsery noted that people he interviewed across the country—in Berkeley, at MIT, in New York and Princeton—all stressed "two things about Chern beyond his considerable mathematical achievements. He was a devotee of Chinese classical culture and had deep-seated patriotic feelings for China." The relationship between Chern and his native China was profoundly reciprocated according to Csicsery, who remarked "The reverence with which Chern is regarded in China today... helped me cast him as a traditional Chinese sage in the modern world."

Shiing-Shen Chern is one of the fathers of modern differential geometry; he introduced the now-ubiquitous Chern classes, among other important contributions. He also helped renew research mathematics in China during the 1980s and arranged for talented Chinese scholars to study in the United States

For more information, please visit

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and Europe, as well as for mathematicians from the West to present their work in China. *Taking the Long View* reflects upon Chern's accomplishments, relationships, and charismatic personality, a presence of true "gravitas" that allowed him to build bridges between China and the West.

Taking the Long View (2010), a 16-minute video, is the first of two documentaries about Chern that have been commissioned by MSRI. The film premiered at the International Congress of Mathematics (ICM) held in Hyderabad, India, on August 20, 2010, as part of the inaugural presentation of the first Chern Medal. A second, longer biographical film will debut at Chern's 100th birthday celebration conference in Berkeley and Tianjin in October 2011.

Taking the Long View is available for downloading at http://videodl.msri.org/13814/chern_video.mov. The film was made with support from the Simons Foundation. For more information about the film and its making, please go to www.takingthelongviewfilm.com.