

Connecting China

Louis Chen, National University of Singapore, writes:



The Institute of Mathematical Statistics currently has about 4,300 members, of whom only 36.9% are from outside the United States. The Asia Pacific region, which constitutes about 32% of the world population of 6.6 billion, and is the fastest growing economic region in the world, makes up 7.7% of the IMS membership.

China, which has a population of about 1.3 billion and is the main engine driving the economy of the Asia Pacific, makes up no more than 1.8% of the IMS membership. These figures show that IMS membership in the Asia Pacific region, and, in particular, China, is grossly under-represented. As a leading international society, IMS has to make efforts to broaden its membership base to include more members from countries other than the United States. The creation of the biennial IMS meeting series in Asia and the Pacific Rim is a step in the right direction. It will promote membership and allow IMS to better serve the statisticians and probabilists in the region.

While on the Asia-Pacific subject, one cannot but pay special attention to China. China has transformed itself from being one of the poorest countries in the world in the 1970s, into the world's third-largest economy in this new millennium. It has the potential to become a country with a GDP equal to that of the United States, and with a technology equal to what can be regarded as that

of a superpower within thirty to forty years. It produces five times as many engineers and scientists as America. A vast number of Chinese students are studying overseas, in particular, in the United States. While many of them remain overseas after graduation, more and more are returning to China and thereby contributing to the development of the country.

Within China itself, higher education has undergone unprecedented reform, with vast resources invested into the development of the top universities. I was in China for the first time in 1989 and I have noticed that the salaries of university professors have since then risen by thirty to forty times. According to the National Natural Science Foundation of China, its annual financial allocation rose from 1.97 billion yuan in 2002 to 3.62 billion yuan in 2006 [100 yuan is roughly US\$15, or €9]. Based on the statistics released by the Chinese Ministry of Science and Technology, the annual R&D expenditure rose from 89.57 billion yuan in 2000 to 245.00 billion yuan in 2005.

Given China's huge population, its development is unmatched by any other country. It is a country which IMS cannot ignore in its efforts to reach out to more statisticians and probabilists outside the United States. Any successful effort by IMS to connect with China will not only benefit the potentially large statistical community in China, but also IMS itself. The joint meeting of IMS and the Chinese Society of Probability and Statistics in Beijing in 2005 was a good starting point. That meeting attracted more than 400 participants. IMS China, to be launched in Hangzhou in June this year to enable statisticians and probabilists in mainland China to overcome practical obstacles in joining IMS and participating in its activities, is the next logical step. Its coming launch augurs well for the statistical community in China and I wish it great success.



Left: In Guangzhou (formerly known as Canton) is the Flower Pagoda, part of the Buddhist Temple of the Six Banyan Trees. According to Wikitravel, it is one of the most popular attractions in Guangzhou. The temple dates back to the sixth century, while the pagoda predates it by about 300 years.

Right: the traditional board game, Wéiqí (also known as Go), originated in ancient China, centuries before its earliest known references in 5th century BC writing.

