

Emeritus Professor Frederick Chong

The degree of Doctor of Science (*honoris causa*) was conferred posthumously upon Emeritus Professor Frederick Chong and accepted by his nephew Mr Trevor Lum at the Science ceremony held on 4 June 1999.

Professor Chong had been looking forward to receiving an honorary degree of Doctor of Science from his own University. But on 14 May, he was killed in a tragic car accident.



Four of Professor Chong's many nieces and nephews were able to attend the ceremony - from left, Iris Yee, Rene Gockchew, Trevor Lum who accepted the honorary degree and Shirley Ma, with Professor John Mack (centre rear), a friend of Professor Chong, *photo, Tracey Schramm, 'The University of Sydney News' 10 June 1999, University of Sydney Archives.*

Citation

Chancellor

To-day we honour Emeritus Professor Frederick Chong Master of Arts *Cambridge University*, Doctor of Philosophy *Iowa State University* and Master of Science *Sydney University*.

Professor Chong graduated Bachelor of Science in Mathematics from this University in 1935 with first class honours and the University Medal. His University studies had been funded by scholarships, the Barker I & II, the Homer Exhibition and the Norbert Quirk prize, all awarded to the outstanding mathematician of his year. On graduation he completed a Master of Science degree, at that time a research degree, and in 1937 as the recipient of the postgraduate Barker scholarship, went to St John's College Cambridge. Later, he was to write about the importance of his time at Cambridge and about how greatly he was influenced by the great Cambridge mathematicians of the inter war period, scholars such as Eddington, Dirac, Hall, Todd, Newman and Burkill.

In 1940, Chong was appointed Assistant Lecturer in Mathematics at Sydney University's New England College, later to become the University of New England. He was promoted to Lecturer in 1941 and was chairman of the Science Departments in 1945 and '46. From 1947 to 1956, he lectured at Sydney University in the Department of Mathematics, as Lecturer until 1949 and then Senior Lecturer. From 1956, he held the Chair of Mathematics at Auckland University New Zealand. In 1966, he became the Foundation Professor of Mathematics at Macquarie University and was the first head of the School of Mathematics and Physics (as it was then constituted). Chong went to Iowa State University in 1950, where he completed in record time a thesis on boundary value problems.

The culmination of his career was Macquarie where he made a major contribution to its distinctive academic program. The motto of Macquarie is from Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* "And Gladly teche". For Freddy Chong this was most fitting. He delighted in teaching, in students and in teachers.

From Chong, one learnt about the beauty and power of mathematics. To him, it was axiomatic that good teaching flowed from a deep understanding and joy in one's subject. For he subscribed to the view of the clerk of Chaucer's tales "for gladly wolde he lerne and gladly teche". His lectures were lucid and witty, informed by a keen understanding of how people learn mathematics. They were pitched at a level suitable to his audience - not too simple and not so difficult that only the most able could understand.

His influence on school education was considerable. A generation of students in this State learnt algebraic geometry from Chong's adaptation of Maxwell's text. Secondary school teachers discovered the depth of their subject through Chong's special master's program for high school teachers. Many a primary school teacher joined his flight over the landscape of mathematics through a very unusual course at Macquarie "A View of Mathematics".

He contributed actively to the Mathematical Association (New South Wales) of which he was President in 1953/54. For many years he contributed to Mathematics in the schools both through curriculum development and as an official examiner for public examinations in New South. His contributions to mathematics were acknowledged by invitations to speak at three important occasions for mathematics in this country - the inaugural meeting of the Australian Mathematical Society in 1956, the first seminar on Mathematics Education conducted by the Australian Mathematical Society in 1962, and at the inaugural conference of Australian Association of Mathematics Teachers in 1966.

Chong was an Australian, the son of Chinese immigrants. It is believed that he was the first Australian born Chinese to hold a chair at an Australian University. He was proud of his Chinese origins but equally proud of his parents' adopted country that gave him the opportunity to enjoy mathematics and to prosper as its servant.

Chancellor, Professor Chong planned to be here to-day. It gave him particular pleasure that his own University had agreed to award him a doctorate of science honoris causa. Unfortunately three weeks ago on May 14 he died from complications resulting from a car crash, an accident in which he was the innocent victim. To receive this award on behalf of Professor Chong's family, I have much pleasure in presenting to you Mr Trevor Lum, Professor Chong's nephew.