Convergence of US, Mexico and China: S. S. Chern Legacy Conference in CIMAT Mexico *November 17-19, 2005*

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I was asked by the organizers to say a few words at the end of this great conference organized by Centro de Investigacion en Matematicas, or CIMAT, Clay Institute and the University of Texas at Dallas, in honor of the deep contributions of one of the world's greatest mathematicians, S. S. Chern.

First, I must congratulate everyone in CIMAT, from the Director General to all the enthusiastic students. Your warm hospitality is palpable.

I am not a mathematician. During my professional career, I marveled and am deeply impressed that for a mathematician, a sphere is a coset space called SU(2)/U(1) and a plane is a coset space of H(4)/U(1). Such characterizations, and indeed their generalizations, have unlocked the doors for mathematicians to travel into the deepest areas of human thoughts. I know then that never a mathematician will I be.

However, I have always enjoyed listening to great mathematicians speak. In fact, I was privileged that I heard Chern talk on "What is Geometry" on May 23rd, 1989 in Philadelphia. I should mention that I also heard another great mathematician, Eugenio Calabi, not about mathematics, but him playing the violin! Actually, to me, that is not too regrettable. After all, for me, listening to a mathematics talk is like listening to an Italian opera: *Its beautiful and I don't understand a word of it.* Indeed, for the past two and a half days, I sat through a lot of operas, delivered by some of the best mathematicians Latin America has to offer the world!

Nevertheless, "armed" with that small and dangerous (and I am sure you would call insignificant) knowledge of mathematics, it has given me a profound belief as a university administrator that an institution of higher

learning must be accompanied by outstanding mathematics if it were to reach the highest level of intellectual achievement. It is for this reason that I am so enthusiastic about my university's collaboration with CIMAT, and to cosponsor this great conference in honor of a great mathematician and human being of the 20th century: S. S. Chern.

However, having heard the truly emotional discussion of Chern by his son-in-law Paul Chu, I realized that this conference is more than just mathematics. As you know, Paul is a great scientist, a distinguished professor of the University of Houston and the President of Hong Kong University of Science and Technology. He is also an individual who spans two continents: North America and Asia. In fact, while he was here two days ago, by now, he was already back in Hong Kong.

Ever since I came to Texas five years ago, I became intimately aware of the importance of Mexico. US and Mexico not only share two thousand miles of border, they are also economically and intellectually linked. What is happening at this conference is a manifestation, albeit small, of this linkage. I am convinced that the future of United States and Mexico will depend on how these two nations can co-exist in a mutually beneficial manner.

Chern, on the other hand, was a man deeply ingrained in China and the United States. From the many speakers of this conference, a majority came from Latin America, it is clear that Chern's influence in Latin America is just as deep.

Therefore, to conclude, please allow me to conjecture (using your language) that this conference is not just for mathematics, but a convergence, albeit still a microcosm, of China, US and Latin America. I hope that CIMAT and the University of Texas at Dallas, leveraging the spirit of Chern as a human being as our guiding light, can continue to play a role, however minor, in promoting this convergence for world peace for years to come.