

# Hsien-Chung Wang

*April 18, 1918 — June 25, 1978*

Hsien-chung Wang had been a professor of mathematics at Cornell since 1966. He was a scholar with a high international reputation and a colleague of outstanding integrity, modesty, and helpfulness. The University suffered a sad loss through his death.

He was born in Peking. His family, from Shantung Province, had produced distinguished scholars for several generations. After a school career that included achievements in the high jump and basketball along with high academic performance, he became a student of mathematics at Tsing Hua University. He was enrolled there when the university made its dramatic move from Peking to western China. After completing his undergraduate work in mathematics, he won a national scholarship that enabled him to do graduate work in Great Britain. The competition for these scholarships was fierce, and only students of exceptional merit could obtain them. He received the Doctor of Philosophy degree from Manchester University in 1948 and then came to the United States.

His first appointment was to the position of lecturer at Louisiana State University. Despite a heavy teaching load, H.C. remained active and successful in research. His achievement was recognized by a visiting membership of the Institute of Advanced Study at Princeton in 1951-52. He was highly esteemed by the faculty of the institute and was invited back in 1954-55, 1961-62, and 1965. His work became widely known and appreciated in the early 1950s. He held positions at the Alabama Polytechnic Institute, the University of Washington, Columbia University, and Northwestern University. In 1966 he accepted a professorship at Cornell and was one of the most respected and distinguished members of the Cornell faculty until his sudden death from leukemia.

He was an excellent and devoted teacher. Students frequently asked to be switched to the section of a course taught by him. He was a source of inspiration, especially to his graduate students, in whom he took a deep interest.

H. C. Wang's scientific work dealt with differential geometry, Lie groups, and discrete subgroups of such groups. He was an internationally known authority in his field, and his work was widely used by others. His eminence as a scholar led to an invitation to address the International Congress of Mathematicians in Edinburgh in 1958 and to the award of a Guggenheim fellowship in 1960. He was a participant in several international scientific conferences both in the United States and abroad.

No one who came into contact with H.C. could fail to be impressed by his generosity and his modesty. In the best sense he was a gentleman, always ready and anxious to help others, never asking the least thing for himself. If one did him the slightest favor, he showed gratitude for it ever after; if one asked anything from him, he acted instantly and seemed to think nothing of it. He had wide interests outside mathematics, in literature, the Classics, Chinese history, and the games of chess, bridge, and go. He was a private person. His love of his family was intense. One of his great joys during the last years was that he could visit his four brothers and his sister in China after a separation of more than twenty years.

He is survived by his wife, Lucy, and their three daughters, Angela, Louise, and Clara.

*Alex Z. Rosenberg, Oscar S. Rothaus, Wolfgang H. Fuchs*