

Highlights

Far Away from Data-Land

Statistica Sinica has published discussion papers since its inception, but organizing a presentation and discussion at a meeting is part of its recent efforts to reach a wider readership. The first such discussion meeting was held on June 26, 2007, in conjunction with the Taipei International Statistical Symposium and International Chinese Statistical Association Conference. The discussion paper author, Professor Mendel (Mendy) Fyngenson, and four invited discussants, Professors Cheng-Der Fuh, Chao A. Hsiung, Peter McCullagh, and Steve Portnoy provided a lively exchange at the meeting, which also inspired questions and debate from the audience. In addition, we are pleased to publish contributed discussions that were collected via an open call for discussion on the journal website. Of course, all contributed discussions were reviewed for suitability. We would like to take this opportunity to thank all of those who provided intellectual support for this discussion forum, resulting in the inspirational collection we proudly present in this issue. We are also grateful to Professor Xuming He for soliciting Mendy's paper, coordinating a thorough review process, and writing the insightful editorial.

The topic we chose for discussion is a challenging and risky one, namely, making decisions far beyond the observed data range. As professional statisticians, we usually warn people of the dangers of extrapolating a prediction deep into regions where no data have ever occurred. But as Mendy's paper demonstrates, prediction far beyond the data-land is often a necessity in real life. Indeed, great fortune, or unexpected disasters, are of a "grand scale" because they are so far from what we normally see or experience. It is precisely these outer regions that make the prediction most exciting and rewarding. Of course, there is no free lunch—anything we can say or even speculate about what can happen in these regions must depend on strong and non-verifiable (by existing data) assumptions, and with high

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risk of being completely wrong. Whereas each of you will have your own opinion about how useful Fygenon's approach is, we believe you are likely to share our admiration for Mendy, for his adventurous spirit in tackling this controversial topic. We surmise that Mendy's somewhat unusual background—earning fame and fortune on Wall Street where risk often means reward for those skillful in reasoning with uncertainty—played an important role in his “outlook” into the extremely risky regions.

Fortunately, we have a great outlook of zero risk for *Statistica Sinica*. During the discussion paper meeting, the journal's Advisory Board met at the Institute of Statistical Science, Academia Sinica and selected Professors Peter Hall, Jing-Shiang Hwang, and Kung-Yee Liang as Co-editors of *Statistica Sinica*, beginning on August 1, 2008. Their brief biographies can be found on Page 4. It is our fortune to have such a great trio to trust for continuing the scholarly adventure of *Statistica Sinica*, as started by the founding editor George Tiao and all our predecessors. Incidentally, all of them happened to attend the Taipei meeting, providing a wonderful photo opportunity!

Let us conclude by inviting you to join an adventure in Mendy's wonderland, and to invest in multiple copies of this issue for risk-free return on e-Bay, especially if you can have them autographed by all of *Statistica Sinica*'s editors in its first 20 years of existence! Where can you find another journal that publishes photos of all its previous, current, and incoming editors in a single issue? What is the probability of that happening again, even for *Statistica Sinica*?

— Michelle Liou and Xiao-Li Meng



Professor Xuming He obtained his Ph.D from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 1989. After teaching at the National University of Singapore for four years, he joined the University of Illinois faculty in 1993. He served as Program Director of Statistics at the National Science Foundation (USA) between 2003 and 2005, and is currently Editor of the IMS Bulletin and Associate Editor for several premier statistics journals including Statistica Sinica. His research interests range from theory and methodology in robust statistics, quantile regression, and resampling methods to applications in bioinformatics, educational testing, and speech and hearing sciences. He is a fellow of the ASA and IMS, and served on the IMS Council and the ICSA Board of Directors. He enjoys many aspects of life, including fine food, travel, investing, and of course friendship.

Chief-editors of Statistica Sinica Since Inception



From right: G. C. Tiao (1991-1993), C. F. J. Wu (1993-1996), C. S. Cheng (1996-1999), K. C. Li (1999-2002), Y. C. Yao (1999-2002), J. L. Wang (2002-2005), H. C. Ho (2002-2005), M. Liou (2005-2008), and X. -L. Meng (2005-2008).

Incoming Editors of *Statistica Sinica*



Professor Peter Hall was born in Sydney, Australia, and received his BSc degree from the University of Sydney in 1974. His MSc and DPhil degrees are from the Australian National University and the University of Oxford, both in 1976. He taught at the University of Melbourne before taking, in 1978, a position at the Australian National University. In November 2006 he moved back to the University of Melbourne. His research interests range across several topics in probability and statistics.



Professor Jing-Shiang Hwang is currently a Research Fellow and serves as Deputy Director in the Institute of Statistical Science, Academia Sinica. He received his Ph.D. in Statistics from Harvard University. He is also a professor at National Yang-Ming University, as well as an adjunct professor at National Taiwan University. His research interests are in environmental health statistics, quality of life research, Bayesian computation and inference, spatial-temporal statistics and social networks.



Professor Kung-Yee Liang received his Ph.D. in Biostatistics from the University of Washington, Seattle, in 1982. Currently he is Professor in the Department of Biostatistics at Johns Hopkins University. Professor Liang is a worldwide noted epidemiologist. He and Scott Zeger developed “GEE” (Generalized Estimating Equations) and were honored with the American Statistical Association’s Snedecor Award for best publication in Biometry for 1986. In 2002 he was elected as an Academician in Academia Sinica.