On Tuesday, April 6 UTSA’s East Asia Institute hosted a lecture by Consul General Yun-Soo Cho as part of celebrating Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders Heritage Month. It was an event free and open to the public, held in the Business Building at UTSA’s Main Campus.

More than 100 people attended the lecture, including San Antonio City officials, members of the Korean American Association of San Antonio, UTSA faculty, staff, and students. Consul General Cho has covered his foreign diplomat career in many countries such as Singapore, Russia, Germany, and the U.S. for the past 26 years. He has translated several books on economy, history, and politics subjects, including Edwin Reischauer’s “Japan: Past and Present”; currently he is serving his tenure as the Consulate General of Korea in Houston.

Consul General Cho’s lecture title was “Partnership between Korea and Texas”. He focused on Korea’s past and present, the Korea-US Free Trade Agreement, the G-20 Summit held in Korea, and the business relationship Korea has specifically with Texas.
Basic facts about Korea:

- Area: 99,700 sq km. (or 38,224 sq miles; 1/7 of Texas)
- Population: 48 million (Texas: 24 million)
- 13th largest world economy
- Per capita income (2008)
  - Korea: $21,530
  - USA: $39,732
  - UK: $30,806
  - Japan: $29,567
  - Mexico: $10,139
- Trade total in 2008: 857 billion
- #1 LCD maker (2007)
- #2 Mobile phone maker (2007)
- G-20 Summit to be held in Korea in 2010
- $1 U.S. dollar = 1118 Korean Won

Consul General Cho speaks at UTSA’s East Asia Institute on April 6, 2010

Korean figure skater Yuna Kim: 2010 Winter Olympics gold medalist

called TaLK. Many felt that Consul General Cho’s lecture was very informational and a great opportunity to catch up on what they’ve been missing, as many admitted not knowing much about Korea at all.

Consul General Cho’s lecture started out with some basic facts about Korea: South Korea’s area covers 99,700 sq. km., which is about 1/7 the size of Texas, population is 48 million, about twice as many as Texas, their economy is placed 13th in the world (as of 2007), has strong ties with U.S. including medication, politics, and especially military, and it went from being an aid recipient to donor country quite rapidly. He then began to emphasize on Korea’s "unique case" in world history as Korea went from being the least developed, war torn country to a politically democratic and economically thriving country after the Korean War (the "unforgotten" war), where 14% of U.S. deaths were from Texas.

Korea’s economic status as of 2007 includes its GDP as the world’s 13th economy; some companies that keep this stable are Samsun, LG Corporation, and Hyundai. Consul General Cho emphasized how Korea’s goal was to create stronger ties with the U.S. by bringing in more businesses. With Texas in particular, being one of the top trading states in America, Korea is trying very hard to increase trading here. Especially with the current project of the expansion of the Panama Canal, trade will be greatly increased between Texas and not only Korea but with other East Asian countries as well. Expected completion of the canal is to be 2014. Consul General Cho mentioned the importance of trade with Texas is very big right now, and with the expansion of the canal this will greatly increase the economies of both Korea and Texas. As the General puts it, if Texas were its’ own country right now independent of the U.S. it would actually be the 12th largest economy in the world. With the future completion of the Panama Canal and the hopeful signing from the U.S. congress of the Free Trade Agreement with Korea, the future looks very good for not only Texas but both Korea and the United States.
“Considering the amount of trade between Korea and Texas, the inaction of the U.S. Congress in delaying the approval of the Free Trade Agreement with Korea can also be translated as a significant lose for Texas, which includes 27,732 jobs, $2.9 billion manufactured goods export, and $3.76 billion output,” says Consul General Yun-Soo Cho.

Before 1962, Korea was the world’s poorest agrarian country, after the same year Korea had the fastest growth in the world. As of 2008, there are already 36 Korean companies stationed in Texas alone. Most of the production Korea manufactures in Texas ranges from electronics, auto mobiles, and cell phones from Samsung, Hyundai, and LG Company.

Consul General Cho also mentioned some inspirations that the young Korean generation look up to icons such as Kim Yuna, 2010 Olympic gold medalist, Park Chan-Ho, baseball player for the Texas Rangers, Michelle Wie, professional golfer, Hines Ward, wide receiver for the Pittsburgh Steelers, and the Wonder Girls, the all girl pop sensation group that is very popular in East Asia that recently toured with the Jonas Brothers Band.

At the end of his lecture, Consul General Cho spoke about Korea’s government sponsored program, TaLK. The program is sponsored by the Korean Ministry of Education, Science and Technology. Participants will teach English in after-school classes of Korean elementary schools at rural areas. The program recruits native English speakers from countries such as the U.S., England, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa. Many UTSA students seem interested in participating in TaLK as there were a lot of questions asked at the end of the presentation.

Consul General Yun-Soo Cho’s presentation/lecture was a huge success. Many people can now say that they know a little more about Korea!