Family Day on Japanese Culture

Access to Japan Series


Part IV: “Family Day on Japanese Culture” (Feb., 26, 2011)

12:00-4:00 p.m., February 26, 2011

On Saturday February 26, 2011 the Family Day on Japanese Culture event was held at the Institute of Texan Cultures. The event was hosted by UTSA’s East Asia Institute and co-hosted by the Institute of Texan Cultures. The sponsors for the event were the Center for Global Partnership of the Japan Foundation, H-E-B, and the Japan America Society of San Antonio.

This event was the fourth installment of the East Asia Institute’s Access to Japan series. More than 150 people of all ages attended. Family Day had a large variety of activities throughout the day dealing with culture and art, music, story telling and games.

The East Asia Institute’s Associate Director Mimi Yu gave an introduction to Japan. She began by describing the geography of the country. Japan is slightly smaller than the state of California and is made up of four main islands. She also talked about some of the innovated technology and ideas such as the capsules hotels and the ASIMO robot.

Following this, Yu gave a small introduction to the language. She displayed a chart of hiragana and katakana, the Japanese syllabic writing systems. The participants were given worksheets to decode Japanese words by using the charts.
Family Day on Japanese Culture

writing systems. The participants were given worksheets to decode Japanese words by using the charts.

Yu was also introduced traditional Japanese toys and games. The first toy she showed was the kendama, a small, wooden, hammer like object with a ball attached to it with a string. The following game displayed was the Fukuwarai, similar to the pin-the-tail-on-the-donkey game. The goal of the game is to place facial features such as an eye or a nose, onto a blank canvas of a face. This game had been traditionally played by the Japanese children on New Year’s Day. The goal of the game is to place facial features such as an eye or a nose, onto a blank canvas of a face.

Professor Keri Toma of UTSA and the Northwest Vista College was present to talk about various holidays held in Japan. The first one she spoke about was Hinamatsuri, which is also known as Girl’s Day. This holiday is mainly for girls and takes place every March 3rd. Next was Kodomo No Hi, Boy’s Day which is held May 5th. Shichi-Go-San celebrates the ages of three and five for boys while for girls it’s three and seven. Sejin No Hi is the coming of age day. This usually takes place the second Monday of January and for people who reach the age of twenty. Finally she discussed Setsubun, which signals the beginning of spring. One of the traditions of this holiday is that the father will put on an oni mask while the children toss beans at him.

Right: Northwest Vista College students hold Oni posters and the young participants throw mame (beans) at the Oni while chanting “Oni wa soto, fuku wa uchi! (Demons get out, good luck come in).
The student interns of the EAI presented various aspects of Japanese culture through display boards. The topics included Japanese weddings and funerals, tea ceremony, religion, anime and manga, and cuisine. These students were quite knowledgeable about the topics they presented.

There was also a children’s story reading presented by Ruth Murphy using kamishibai. Kamishibai is a form of storytelling using a hollowed out wooden box, which serves as a stage, and several illustrated boards, which are removed one at a time as the story progresses. The story Murphy told was Issun Boshi, the One Inch Boy, which is similar to the English stry, Tom Thumb.

Shakuhachi specialist, Martha Fabrique of Our Lady of the Lake University’s Music Department, gave a performance of three songs. A shakuhachi is a flute-like instrument made of bamboo. It is said to represent one of the original genres of traditional Japanese music.

Hiroko Fay, a long time charter member of the Japan America Society of San Antonio, gave a demonstration of Japanese Calligraphy. This is an art form that has been studied for over 3,000 years and is a combination of skill and imagination using only lines. Basically calligraphy is an attempt to bring words to life. However, the most important rule to follow is that characters can only be written once. No alterations or touch ups may be added.

Chigiri-e was also presented during this time, but was aimed mainly at the younger participants. This art form became popular to produce realistic images as well as abstract ones. The technique used to produce the artwork is quite simple. The artist uses colored paper, usually homemade, torn to small pieces to create images. The calligraphy session and Chigirie were held simultaneously.
In addition, Tomoko Warren gave a beautiful performance on her koto, including “Sakura”. The koto is the national instrument of Japan made from kiri wood. This instrument has thirteen strings that are placed over thirteen moveable bridges along the width. The player can adjust the string pitches by moving the bridges before playing. Afterwards, Warren took questions from the audience on Koto.

Hiroko Fay also gave a hands-on demonstration of origami, the Japanese art of paper folding. Many of the guests were surprised to find out that origami originated in China long before it spread to Japan. Back in the older days, the directions of folding origami were passed down from one generation to the next.

This lasted for several centuries until the late 1700s when the instructions were finally written down. It is said that if people fold 1000 cranes, they will be granted

Miyako Wallace instructed the last event of the day, ikebana, which is the Japanese art of flower arrangement. Ikebana is more than just putting flowers in a container; in actuality, it is a disciplined art in which the arrangement is a living thing, bringing nature and humanity together.

After a long day of fun-filled activities, Family Day turned out to be a greater than anticipated success. Many of the attendees expressed how much they loved the different activities and presentations. Most importantly, they expressed how much they are looking forward