On Tuesday, October 29, 2013, the East Asia Institute (EAI), with a generous grant from Houston’s Taiwanese Academy, hosted the second installment of the Understanding Taiwan Through Film series with a showing of the movie entitled “Go Grandriders”. Appropriately 25 people showed up for the screening.

“Go Grandriders” is a documentary about a group of elderly people, with the average age of 81, who take a roadtrip around the island of Taiwan with joint pains, needing hearing aids, disabilities, and objections from family members who try to stop them from their adventurers.

Along the way the documentary tells the background story of several Grandriders, which explains the culture of Taiwan through history about the Japanese occupation and Chinese Civil War, religion, and how families treat each other and their elders.

Following the movie, there was a group discussion about the film along with Taiwanese refreshments provided by the East Asia Institute. Topics discussed included how the elderly are taken care of, how couples show affection for each other, how Taiwanese culture differ from other cultures of the world, and many more.

The audience had many interesting questions regarding Taiwanese culture while others wanted to point out their thoughts.

One audience member mentioned “the way Taiwanese people take care of the elderly is much better than most places! They are not forgotten, but are cared for by family members instead of nurses in a retirement home.” Audience members were asked one by one how their own culture takes care of the elderly. Some participants responded by saying that the oldest child, usually the male, takes care of the aging parents. Meanwhile, others stated that the wife of the youngest male child is volunteered to care for them.

Most of the viewers had the same conclusion that elderly people should be able to do whatever they want despite the disabilities that accompany aging.

Facts about the aging population in Taiwan:

-Senior citizens accounted for 11 percent of the Taiwan’s population as of the end of August, 2013, up from 10.9 percent at the end of 2011.

-Life expectancy in Taiwan is now at the same level as in Germany and Britain, higher than in the United States, China, Malaysia and the Philippines, and lower than in Canada, France, Japan, South Korea and Singapore.
The third and final installment of the Understanding Taiwan Through Film series was the public screening of the movie entitled “Love”, attended by more than 50 people at UTSA.

“Love” is a movie about eight people who try to end their loneliness by searching for that one person to love, the one who can make their life complete. This film is similar to the English version of “Love Actually”. Many of these eight people eventually find love while the others are left alone for their own good. This film illustrate the cross-strait culture gap as a theme in people-to-people relations between Taiwan and Mainland China as well as how different genders perceive love. The audience laughed and wept a little with the film as it unfolded.

Following the movie, there was an open forum about the film along with Taiwanese refreshments provided by the East Asia Institute. The open forum was led by EAI’s Program Coordinator Erina Romanowich and the panelists were comprised of Dr. Paul Romanowich (US), Joseph Lauzon (US), Euroya Yu (Taiwan), and Mark Henderson (US). Interracial relationships and how Asian people view relationship were discussed.

Many questions were brought up around “love” and “relationship”: How did the parents react to the panelists’ interracial relationship? How do arguments get solved? How do they express their affection and if different customs get in the way of the relationship? Some couples had background stories on how the parents reacted. Some of them said that they were liked from the start while others mention that they had to impress their significant other’s parents. The panelists also talked about how it was looked down upon to have a relationship with someone from another race, but the younger generation are dating mates of their choice and the older generation are becoming more open-minded to accept other people from a different land.

“This is a film that illustrates issues concerning love and relationships in Taiwanese society, but I feel we can see these same issues in different cultures as well”, said Luis Nunez, a UTSA student. “Even though people came from different cultural backgrounds with various customs, in terms of love and relationships, we have the same rules and values couples must obey to keep a successful relationship. After watching all three films in the film series, I now have a clear understanding of what Taiwanese culture consists of. Their rich history and amazing customs makes me want to look into it further. ”

UTSA’s Taiwan Series is comprised of a Seminar Series, Lecture Series, Film Festival, Visiting Artist Workshops, Sinology Trivia Contest and Chinese Video Contest, and an art tour to the San Antonio Museum of Art to learn more about their Chinese art collection, Chinese history and culture. For more info about the entire Taiwan Series program, please visit the East Asia Institute homepage at http://www.utsa.edu/eai. All events are free and open to the public.

Post-screening panel discussion led by Erina Romanowich, Program Coordinator of the EAI.