On October 21st, UTSA’s East Asia Institute welcomed Dr. John Lin who gave an informative lecture on “Understanding Contemporary Taiwanese Culture from Historical Perspectives”. Dr. John Lin, assistant professor of College of Management at the National Taiwan University of Science and Technology located in Taipei, discussed the changing patterns in Taiwanese culture. At this talk, Dr. Lin focused on observing the diverse culture in Taiwan from the historical, sociological, political, and business approaches. In addition, he discussed how Taiwan has looked back at itself to preserve its own language and cultural heritage not only in Taiwanese and Hakka, but also among the indigenous groups.

The lecture started off with a glimpse into Taiwanese culture with a miniature Taiwanese food set that was passed around the audience for viewing. The foods displayed in the set were common dishes seen within Taiwan. A traditional glove puppet was shown as well. These puppets are commonly seen in Taiwan. Also, they are uniquely and exclusively representation of Taiwanese culture.

Dr. Lin began his powerpoint presentation by giving Texas. The waist of Taiwan is only 89 miles with the torso being 245 miles. The population is also very dense with only 31% of the land being arable. To compare the size between Taiwan and Texas, one could fit 19 Taiwans inside the state of Texas. Lin made this clear with pictures of maps that emphasized these points.

A brief history on Taiwan was also given, starting out with the indigenous people who came around 4000 BC, and then going on to a more recent history. Dr. Lin discussed how Taiwan has been ruled by several different countries. For nearly two hundred years, Taiwan was ruled by China under the Qing Dynasty. It was also occupied by the Dutch from 1624-1662 and the Spanish from 1626-1642. After the Sino-Japanese War in 1895, Japan took control of Taiwan. During this time, Japan deprived Taiwan of their many wood resources to make Toriis (a traditional Japanese gate) as well as trying to imperialize Taiwan. However, as Lin further explained, it was under the Japanese rule that Taiwan went through a period of rapid industrialization, and enormous economic progress was made.
After WWII, Taiwan had to make reconstruction efforts throughout the 1940s because of the damage from the war. As Lin had explained, this reconstruction era promoted the agricultural and industrial growth of Taiwan during that time period and their wanting independence. The Japanese Occupation ended in October of 1945 and Taiwan became the Republic of China. The 1980s was around the time that Taiwan began to become more outspoken about their freedom of speech and culture. Taiwan is now one of the most unrestricted countries in Asia when it comes to freedom of expression, right behind Japan.

After briefly touching on Taiwan’s history, Lin began discussing the more modern ways that the Taiwanese culture has been influenced and spread. Although Taiwan only covers 0.33% of the world’s population, they have accomplished many things. For 8 consecutive years Taiwan placed 1st of 148 countries for Industrial Clusters. Taiwan also ranks number one in laptops and tablets in the world as well as in other products produced there. Quality education is also present in Taiwan as nearly 100% finish school. They also have the world’s largest collection of Chinese arts. When the Republic of China retreated to Taiwan, they managed to bring a lot of Chinese artifacts when they were relocated to the island.

Lin explained that Taiwan is an ideal place due to its comfortable living environments, free press, convenient and diverse life, and its unique blend of regional and foreign culture. The lecture was closed out with a free food tasting of fried rice and many were left with a new and better understanding of Taiwan and its culture.

The UTSA East Asia Institute’s mission is to promote appreciation and understanding of East Asian societies and cultures both on campus and in the community through research, outreach, networking, education, student/faculty exchange, and business development and cooperation. The East Asia Institute organizes seminars, workshops, lectures, conferences, film festivals, visual art exhibitions as well as bringing in performing art groups from China, Japan, Korea, and other Asian nations. It also encourages faculty research collaborations both within UTSA and with participating East Asian university researchers. All events are free and open to the public.

Did you know....
Taiwan’s literacy rate is 96.1%
Taiwan’s major trading partners are China, U.S., Hong Kong, Japan and Singapore
Population of Taiwan: Taiwanese/Hakka-84%; Mainland Chinese-14%; Aborigines-2%
Religions in Taiwan: Buddhist, Confucian, and Taoist-93%; Christian-4.5%; Other-2.5%

This lecture was generously sponsored by Houston’s Taiwan Academy and the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of China (Taiwan).