On Tuesday, March 17, 2015, the East Asia Institute (EAI) hosted Nozomu Takaoka, Consul General of Japan in Houston, to present a lecture entitled “Japan, Asia, and the U.S.” This event was free and open to the public. Students and faculty from many different areas of study attended to hear what the Consul General had to say about the recent developments of Japan and the relationship Japan and Texas have.

Consul General Nozomu Takaoka graduated from the University of Tokyo with a bachelor’s degree in Liberal Arts. Later, he studied International Relations at Oxford University. An experienced diplomat, Takaoka has worked in many official posts around the world including the United Kingdom, Egypt, United States, Italy, Sweden and Iran.

Before the lecture, a private reception was held in honor of Takaoka. Those who attended the reception were faculty of UTSA from several departments, city officials, past and current Japan American Society of San Antonio board members, officers of the Japanese Self-Defense Air Force officers and student representatives of UTSA. Dr. Wanxiang Yao, Director of East Asia Institute, and Dr. John Frederick, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, addressed their welcoming remarks to the guests. Councilman Ron Nirenberg, City of San Antonio District 8, formally introduced the Guest of Honor, Consul General Nozomu Takaoka.

After the reception, Takaoka and the group moved into the lecture hall to begin his presentation, where students and faculty were waiting. Takaoka discussed the market trend status of Japan and the United States, and how
Takao next talked about high speed rail in Texas between Houston and Dallas planned to be done by 2020, capable of reaching speeds of 200 mph and moving passengers from one city to the other in less than 90 minutes. An environmental survey is currently underway through the Texas Central Railway, for this private, market-led project. The high speed rail train will help businesses connect with each other from the two major cities of Texas. Also, the train will pave the way for other rails to be built around Texas, and eventually, the United States. This is an example of how a part of Japan is present in Texas.

The last high technology project presented by the Takao was Kounotori, an unmanned space capsule designed to launch exclusively to International Space Station (ISS). It will be able to be caught and guided by a robotic arm installed in ISS for the purpose of fast delivery of goods.

In addition, Takao talked about some recent government developments from Japan on how Japan can handle international threats. In the past, the Japanese constitution said Japan cannot engage in war only if they were attacked on their main island or any other Japanese islands. This would have prevented Japan helping their allies if the support was needed. Last July, the Japanese Diet reinterpreted the Japanese constitution to change the war clause. Now Japan can send troops to allied nations for support only if the survival of Japan is threatened.

At the end of the lecture, Consul General Takao took the time to answer a few questions from the audience members. One of the attendees asked why Japan’s apologies for their involvement in World War II are not being accepted in Asia in the same way that Germany’s apologies were accepted in Europe. The reason behind this, according to the Consul General, is that because Europe was making an effort at the time to produce a unified Europe. Germany’s apology would have needed to be accepted in order for them to move on with this plan. But Asia did not have any plans for unification or making the Germany’s apology would have needed to be accepted in order for them to move on with this plan. However, Asia did not have any plans for unification or making the states equal, so it was not as easy for them to accept Japan’s apology and promise to become a peaceful nation. Another reason for this problem was the history both continents have experienced for hundreds of years. Europe has a long history of warfare within the continent. Europe was used to having war so the people can use history to learn about forgiving countries. In Asia, it is the opposite. The only country to forgive Japan so far is South Korea and that is why their economies are superior. The only thing Japan can do for now is to “keep apologizing”.

The lecture was officially concluded with Dr. Yao presenting a gift to Consul General Takao on behalf of the East Asia Institute. The audience members had a chance to meet with Takao to say hello or ask a question. An audience member said “I did not know Japan had a huge presence in Texas. This seems like the Japan and Texas relationship will grow in the future.”