On Thursday, March 24, the East Asia Institute invited Professor Yoko Hosoe of Jissen Women’s University in Tokyo, Japan to present a lecture entitled, “Japan’s Senior Life Design in the Positive Welfare Era”. Audience members gathered to learn about the current issues facing seniors and what the Japanese government can do to eradicate these issues.

Hosoe introduced the current state of senior life. Right now, Japan is supporting “negative welfare”, also known as dependent-type welfare. Through this, society helps the socially weak. With current economic and social conditions, Japan has a need to transform to “positive welfare” or independent-type welfare, in which, the government supports motivation for social participation. This includes employment and family formation reform.

Next Hosoe explained the causes for the need to transform into a positive-welfare society and the changes in condition of Japanese society. She stated three reasons: changes in population structure, changes in financial conditions, and changes in the living environment. These reasons are changing for the worse.

Japan’s society is contributing to the changes in the population structure. The population is dwindling due to low birthrate. The current population is aging exponentially where people who are over age of 65 outnumber children who are less than 14 years old and this pattern will continue to grow throughout the years. In the 1950’s, the senior population accounted for 5% of the country’s population, and by 2050 it will account for 35% of the population. Japan spends
27.3 trillion yen (51% total expenditure) annually on their social security system.

Financial conditions will continue to get worse in the upcoming years. The average annual income of salaried employees was at its peak in 1997. After that year, the average has showed a decline for the next 14 years. Statistical predictions indicate that it will still decrease through the 2020's. The current state of employment is unfavorable and has been getting worse.

Japan's living environment is gradually changing. The number of households that have been receiving social security and welfare benefits has been increasing with citizens in their 60’s receiving the most aid out of any age group. The current situation has caused the homeless rate to increasingly grow. The poverty and suicide rates are increasing due to the burden and stresses imposed on the people.

After the lecture, Hosoe told her own personal story. During the winter break, she was diagnosed with cancer and had to undergo a seven-hour long surgery. Since she loved teaching her students so much that she decided to return to work two weeks after her surgery. In order to do so, she had to start exercising two days post-operation to build up her strength. She told her story to show the importance of using one’s own actions to pursue one’s own personal goals. “If you continue to think that you can not complete your goal, then you won’t,” advised Hosoe. “Therefore, it is not just enough to set goals.” Being involved in a good support group that encourage you will play a big part in accomplishing your life’s goals.

After the lecture, Hosoe invited the audience to ask questions. An attendee asked, “Do Japanese people usually think or talk about their life design?” Hosoe answered, “Recently the Japanese people keep their life design in mind because they are worried about their post-retirement funding due to pensions decreasing.”

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.