On Tuesday, October 24th, 2017, the East Asia Institute and the Confucius Institute hosted “The National Committee on U.S.-China Relations: CHINA Town Hall” for the first time at UTSA. UTSA was selected among the 86 venues around the United States for the event. There were over 200 people in attendance and the event was followed by a reception.

The primary focus of the event was to raise awareness, facilitate understanding, and engage conversations about the complexity of U.S-China relations. Each year the event has a prestigious and highly qualified speaker initiate the discussion via webcast online. Afterwards, a local speaker makes a live presentation in the cities that are a part of the town hall meeting.

For the first-half of the event, the Honorable Susan E. Rice, former National Security Advisor and U.S. Ambassador to the UN, via webcast, spoke about the complex U.S.-China relationship and its influence on the U.S. economy, policies, and security.

For the second-half of the event, local speaker Dr. Wang Yu, Deputy Consul General of the Consulate General of People’s Republic of China in Houston discussed the “One Belt, One Road Initiative,” with an open discussion afterwards.

Starting off the event, Dr. Wanxiang Yao, director of the Confucius Institute and the East Asia Institute, welcomed audience members and thanked Dr. Wang and Mr. Wang Yi, Consul of Education for attending the day’s event.

The audience’s focus was then redirected towards Susan Rice as the live town-hall discussion began. Rice talked about the many pressing issues that were of importance to not only the United States, but to China as well. She spoke about issues in regards to the South China Sea, national security, climate change, and even North Korea. “All of these issues have a mutual impact on both countries and hold key importance for the future of both parties,” said Rice. Therefore, it would be beneficial for both countries to cooperate accordingly.

Rice stated, “In our current globalizing society, now more than
ever, the world and its countries are inevitably becoming more interconnected and intertwined. It is, therefore, up to both the United States, as the world's leading power, and China, as a more recent rising world power, to maximize their relations and progress towards more actions of cooperation together.

Another intriguing topic discussed by Rice was the importance placed on managing points of friction between the two countries. Rice stated, “There were ample tangible gains in my time working under the Obama administration concerning U.S.-China relations. Because of my work, hot issue of cyber theft between the two companies has substantially diminished in recent years compared to how it used to be. Each time before the President's arrival in China, I would partake in a similar excursion to assure that the President’s trip was successful and productive.”

Rice also remarked on President Trump's first visit to China on Nov. 8th. She advised President Trump to come with “concrete acts and demands to deal with the progress of North Korea, the South China Sea and cyber security, and look for areas to expand cooperation.” She also warned that if the U.S. were to speak with hot rhetoric, it would be setting itself up for failure, and that the U.S should hasten to make China-U.S. relations a priority. She mentioned that it is crucial we cooperate together as well as take a strong stance for issues that we believe in. “The U.S.-China relationship works best when there’s a high degree of communication and maximized mutual understanding at the highest level,” asserted Rice.

The discussion was then opened to take in questions from curious viewers all over America who were watching this live event. In regards to questions relating to issues between U.S. and China, Rice encouraged us to always leave room for diplomacy as well as to uphold and keep our promises, especially if it is in regards to a deal we had previously committed to. Her reasoning was if we, as a country, were to choose not to, the U.S would be causing a power dynamic shift in the latter's favor, which would lead to further issues and possible a rift of in our relations. Rice placed great emphasis that holding a steady, uncontentious relationship would be advantageous for the two countries and, perhaps in a greater sense, for the world.

Following the webcast, our local speaker Dr. Wang discussed the One Belt One Road Initiative (OBOR). The key points of Dr. Wang’s presentation could be explained by what he called the ABCD’s of the initiative: ‘A’ stands for “A Tale of Two Roads”, ‘B’ for previous backgrounds and current backgrounds of the era we are living in and if we can we keep up with the features of the time, ‘C’ for “Connectivity,” which according to Wang was the most crucial key point to the OBOR initiative, and lastly, ‘D’ for the dividends and differences between the OBOR Initiative and the Marshall Plan. The Marshall Plan was an American initiative to aid Western Europe after the end of World War II.

When discussing “A Tale of Two Roads”, Wang discussed the previously existing and historical Silk Road and Maritime Silk Road. He linked the spirits of these two roads and what they helped create to what he called the “Three No’s” to promote peace between cultures. The “Three No's” were as follows: no trade wars, no slavery trade and no colonization. Wang explained, “These three key points can be summed up as peace,
collaboration and mutual respect for each other, which tied into the beliefs and conception of the One Belt One Road Initiative.”

For ‘B,’ Wang discussed the backgrounds of the OBOR Initiative which can be divided into three “I’s”, Imbalance, Inequality, and Impoverishment. The imbalance of development according to “the theory of new-institutionalism, the development lies in social, economic and cultural factors intervolving together,” said Wang. He also mentioned that if a country is developed in an imbalanced way in line with another country, it will be left behind and inequality and impoverishment will follow. “We believe development is of the utmost importance to improve people's livelihood and protect peace,” said Wang. He concluded his talk on the background of the OBOR Initiative by asserting, “Eurasia is the heart of the world and if Eurasia is at peace then the world is at peace.”

Connectivity according to Wang is the most important part of the ABCD’s of the One Belt, One Road Initiative. “China's plan is a five-pronged plan, starting from building a strong infrastructure combined with policy coordination and financial integration,” said Wang. “The parts of the five-pronged approach are as follows: policy coordination, connectivity of infrastructure, unimpeded trade, financial integration, and forming close ties between people.” Dr. Wang believes that all of these five key points are critical to the success of the OBOR Initiative.

The closing segment of Dr. Wang’s presentation consisted of the final part of the ABCD’s of the One Belt, One Road Initiative. The dividends and differences from the Marshall Plan will contribute to win-win situations for China and its neighboring countries. The One Belt One Road Initiative is being promoted to develop the economy and accelerate trade and cultural exchanges. "We have sent an invitation", said Dr. Wang. “This is an open and comprehensive initiative, and China welcomes other countries, including the US, to be a part of it.”

After the lecture, a few audience members had the opportunity to ask Dr. Wang some questions about different topics such as China’s policies and its state of affairs. A reception was followed by the lecture for attendees as a meet-and-greet to speak with Dr. Wang and discuss the lecture, as well as speak with fellow peers, and more.

“The chance to speak with Dr. Wang after the event encouraged me to learn more about U.S.-China Relations. This was a great opportunity to broaden my knowledge of China’s policies and values,” said an audience member. With many attendees learning about US-China Relations as well as the One Belt, One Road Initiative, this event allowed UTSA to stay connected with what is happening in the world.