UTSA’s East Asia Institute hosted the 5th annual Kimchi Festival on Saturday, April 15, 2017 in the University Center Retama Auditorium and Galleria at UTSA’s main campus. Celebrating Korea and its culture, this event was held in collaboration with the Consulate General of the Republic of Korea in Houston, Houston Korean Education Center, San Antonio Korean American Association (SAKAA), Korean American Cultural Center of San Antonio (KACCSA), San Antonio Joong Ang Dance Group, and UTSA’s Korean Culture Club. More than 300 people in total attended this much anticipated event on a beautiful Saturday afternoon.

The festivities began at 2:00 P.M. and guests were invited to visit cultural and educational booths through games, art, craft activities, and short presentations. Many were attracted to the craft booths where they made Korean flags while learning the meaning of the yin-yang and line symbols in the flag that represent.

Other people participated in Korean paper folding to make hanbok (Korean traditional clothes). There was also hanbok wearing, where guests were able to try on the colorful traditional Korean clothing. Other popular attractions included yut (four-stick game), the Korean trivia game, and informational booths on the Korean language classes and English teaching opportunities in Korea.
Guests also played other games, including Gong-Ki-no-ri (Korean jacks), jegi (Korean hacky sack), and paenghi (Korean top game). There were many other booths activities such as chopsticks case making, face painting/hand tattoos, and playing sa-mul-nori (Korean percussion instruments).

After enjoying the booth activates for an hour, the participants were invited to the Retama Auditorium for the program. San Antonio Joong Ang Dance Group opened the program with the Korean Fan Dance, a traditional performance to celebrate festivals. The dance was elegant and the outfit was elaborate!

After the performance, Dr. Wanxiang Yao, Director of the East Asia Institute took the stage and gave welcoming remarks and many thanks to all the organizations that helped volunteer at the festival. Once the opening remarks were concluded, Cody Smith, a UTSA Korean language student took a stage as the MC of the event who introduced upcoming Korean performances and presentations.

The KACCSA Youth Dance performed O-go-mu: 5 standing drum dance, Onara: Taeguk Fan Dance, and Jang-go-chum: hourglass drum dance. Other traditional dances including the Korean Fan dance, Symbol Dance, and 4-drum Nanta which is a blend of intricate rhythm and movement performed by the San Antonio Joong Ang Dance Group.

There were also electrifying K-pop dances performed by KACCSA and UTSA Korean Culture Club who danced to the Korean pop music with synchronized dance steps.

“Korea also enjoys people-to-people exchange with Texas which is the third most popular study abroad destination for Korean students. These people-to-people ties give us opportunities to share and learn about each other’s culture.”

Deputy Consul Myoung-joon Kim
In addition, UTSA Korean Culture Club also made a presentation about the LiNK program, an organization that rescues North Korean refugees, and invited the audience to join them for this very worthy cause.

Special guests from the Consulate General of the Republic of Korea in Houston included Deputy Consul Myoung-joon Kim and Consul Ggochnim. Deputy Consul Kim gave remarks on stage as well. “Korean peninsula is only one-third the size of the state of Texas, but it has had a strong, long standing, and mutually beneficial relationship with the US,” said Kim. “Korea is the fourth largest trading partner with Texas. In addition, Korea is the number one foreign investor to Texas.” Kim mentioned Korea also enjoys people-to-people exchange with Texas which is the third most popular study abroad destination for Korean students. “These people-to-people ties give us opportunities to share and learn about each other’s culture,” emphasized. Kim invited everyone to enjoy the Korean food tasting afterwards to learn about Korean cuisine and culture.

In addition, the 2017 Korean Speech contest winners recited their speeches to the audience and were able to showcase their Korean language proficiency. They both earned warm rounds of applause from the audience for their dedication to mastering a difficult, but beautiful language.

After all of the performances and presentations were finished, certificates of appreciation were presented to the performers. There was also a raffle the audience entered in order to receive door prizes from the East Asia Institute in thanks for their participation at this year’s Kimchi Festival. Dr. Deukhee Gong, professor of Korean language at UTSA and the the University of the Incarnate Words gave her closing remarks afterwards.

As the event grew to a close, all of the guests seemed very pleased with their experiences. “Understanding and appreciation for the world cultures is increasingly important in today’s global community,” said Dr. Wanxiang Yao, director of the East Asia Institute. “Our office is proud to serve as the bridge between San Antonio and Korea!”