On Monday, April 1st, 2019, the East Asia Institute (EAI) hosted Director-General Peter Chen of the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office (TECO) in Houston and his delegation, comprised of Sophie Chou, Director of the Education Division, Patrick Ho, Director of Political Affairs Division, and Philip Shih, Director of the Information Division.

UTSA Students and faculty from many different areas of study, San Antonio city officials, including City Councilman Art A. Hall, and Sherry Dowlatshahi, Chief Diplomacy & Protocol Officer, and representatives from various offices at UTSA greeted the TECO delegation and attended Chen’s lecture entitled “Connect to Taiwan” to learn more about Taiwan’s economy and culture, and TECO-Houston’s role in promoting U.S.–Taiwan relations.

Chen, who received both his BA and MA in Diplomacy from National Chengchi University, began his lecture by introducing the audience to the basics of Taiwan. “Today, I want to provide a brief overview of Taiwan, my office, and finally, US-Taiwan relations,” said Chen.

“Taiwan is home to more than 23 million people, almost 2.7 million of whom live in the capital city of Taipei, and at just 13,891 square miles, Taiwan is only about 1/19 the size of Texas.” Taiwan’s small size highlights its impressive economy; Taiwan has the 22nd largest economy in the world and is the U.S.’ 11th largest trading partner.

Chen spoke in detail about Taiwan’s innovative industries, referring to Taiwan as “Asia’s Silicon Valley.” He continued adding, “Taiwan is very important in the semiconductor industry, where it ranks 1st in semiconductor manufacturing.” The other booming industries in Taiwan are Biomedical, Green Energy, Smart Machinery, and Security Defense. These are referred to as the 5 Pillar Industries with two more on the rise: Agriculture and Circular Economy.

Chen then highlighted US-Taiwan relations by introducing Kaohsiung, San Antonio’s sister city in Taiwan. The two cities share some similarities, most notably the presence of the San Antonio Riverwalk and the Ai River (Love River) in Kaohsiung.

Next, Chen provided more examples of what makes Taiwan a great place to visit and shared beautiful images
of Taiwan’s beaches, festivals, architecture, and food. As a picture of Taiwanese bubble tea appeared on the screen, he joked “I think many of you already know what this is... But did you know bubble tea was invented in Taiwan?” From here, Chen continued his presentation by talking about the economy and business of Taiwan, as well as U.S.-Taiwan relations. Because Taiwan is part of the U.S. Visa Waiver Program, Americans can visit Taiwan for up to 90 days without needing a visa and vice versa. “Nowadays, there is also a direct flight to Taiwan from Houston,” he informed the audience.

The end of Director-General Chen’s presentation outlined the 40 years of partnership that the U.S. has maintained with Taiwan. In 2017, Taiwan was the US’s 11th largest trading partner, accumulating $68.2 billion dollars in bilateral trade. Taiwan and the United States also share many important values and ideals, such as democracy, accessible health care, and human rights.

The lecture concluded with a brief Q & A session, which included further clarification of U.S.-Taiwan relations after an audience member commented on possible conflicts with other countries.

Following the Q&A session, San Antonio City Councilman Art A. Hall gave closing remarks, welcoming the TECO members, thanking students for attending the lecture, and encouraging students to explore other cultures.

“I tell all the students that I interview [for Harvard] to study abroad for at least one semester.” He emphasized, “My international experience paid dividends tremendously.”

After the lecture an audience member commented on the event stating, “It was refreshing to hear about U.S.-Taiwan relations, which we as Americans know so little about.” Chen’s lecture was informative, and it sparked a deeper understanding of Taiwanese culture. TECO has awarded many grants to the East Asia Institute in support of continued education for the UTSA and San Antonio communities, making events like this one possible. Continuing their support, TECO will provide a stipend for over 60 UTSA Modern Languages students on their upcoming summer study abroad trip to Taiwan.

This event was sponsored by:
Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in Houston

TECO