UTSA’s East Asia Institute hosted the San Antonio’s Inaugural Calligraphy Contest on April 7, 2018, with support from the Japan Foundation Center for Global Partnership (JFCGP), the Japan Outreach Initiative (JOI) program and the Japan America Society of San Antonio (JASSA) at UTSA’s main campus. The participants came from local high schools, San Antonio College, and UTSA. We even had a high school Japanese instructor to test his calligraphy skills.

They were divided into two divisions, Adult and High school, and were all eager to test their skills at the art of Japanese calligraphy. Chinatsu Oku, a Japan Outreach Initiative Coordinator, sponsored by the Japan Foundation and the Laurasian Institution who is housed at the East Asia Institute at UTSA, offered a few practice sessions and created tutorial videos for contestant to prepare for the contest beforehand.

The event started off with Chinatsu thanking participants for coming to the event as well as JASSA and the JFCGP for donating participation gifts for the event.

Dr. Wan Xiang Yao, the Director of the East Asia Institute and Confucius Institute then welcomed the participants and their friends and family members for coming. He thanked the staff for preparing and holding the event, encouraged the participants to do well, and helped calming their nerves for the upcoming contest by stating that he was even more nervous having to be a judge. He closed his introduction by wishing everyone good luck and stating, “By giving your best performance, you’ll all be winners.”

Chinatsu informed the audience of the reasons for holding the calligraphy contest. Sharing her experiences with learning calligraphy from a young age, she learned discipline and to appreciate the beauty of Japanese culture. As a JOI coordinator, she hopes to promote and teach the importance of learning Japanese calligraphy to enrich people’s understanding of Japan by hosting this contest. She also explained how the Kanji that were assigned were divided between High-School Level (division 1) and College Level & Up (division 2), them being Japan (日本) and Tradition (伝統) respectively.
The kanji were selected not only based on their difficulty but on their importance as self-existing kanji, and the meanings behind them. There are a few tools required for calligraphy that were provided for the participants, these are a brush (筆 fude), ink (墨 sumi) and traditional Japanese paper (和紙 washi).

Before the contest began, the three judges were introduced; Mr. Nobuaki Yokoo, president of JASSA, Dr. Tomoko Terasawa, Board Member of Japanese Association of San Antonio, and Dr. Wanxiang Yao, the Director of the East Asia Institute.

During the practice, many participants were initially very nervous in their brushstrokes, which resulted in many students grabbing a new sheet of paper to try again, but with perseverance each student became more and more confident in their calligraphy efforts and were eager to turn in a finished product.

After all participants submitted their final work, judges started their evaluation. The points were given in a six separate criteria on a five-point scale. These categories ranged from the basic properties of calligraphy to the artistic elements shown in the work and the lively or energetic elements displayed in the lines. Participants were given an hour practice session to familiarize themselves with the tools and brushstroke order of the given kanji. Participants were given many sheets of practice paper to try and find the perfect balance between their artistic and accurate representation of the kanji.
The winners of the 1st Division (Elementary to High School students) are as follow:

1st: Hailey Drake  
2nd: Abigail Weissmuller  
3rd: Michelle Vo  

The winners of the 2nd Division (College students to adult) are as follow:

1st: Aisha Odulaja  
2nd: Anthony Moraga  
3rd: John Cedena

During the awards ceremony, the judges shared their stories of calligraphy and how they became to be experienced in it. Mr. Nobuaki Yokoo spoke about how in Japan; calligraphy is part of the school curriculum, at least in elementary school and junior high school. Appreciating participants’ desire of learning Japanese culture, he hopes this event will continue for many years to spread Japanese culture, traditions, and customs in San Antonio.

“All participants enjoyed learning calligraphy and expressing their artistic skills in the writing at the end.” Chinatsu said. “I was happy that many people attended this event. I am glad many participated in the contest even though Japanese calligraphy is not familiar to the Western society and was surprised of the participant’s passion and enthusiasm in learning about Japanese culture. I hope I can organize future events to spark more interest and to give better understanding of Japanese culture to the people of San Antonio.”

The Japan Foundation, (JF) promotes international awareness and mutual understanding between Japan and the U.S. through cultural exchange, and also administers a wide range of programs and grants aimed at introducing Japanese arts and culture, supporting Japanese Studies and language education, and promoting publications, translations related to Japan. The Japan-American Society of San Antonio, or JASSA, was established in 1985 to foster increased understanding and cooperation between the citizens of San Antonio and Japan. As a nonprofit, educational, and cultural group, we strive to make Japanese culture better known in San Antonio.

Sponsors

Practice Session cont.

Dr. Tomoko Terasawa  
JASSA Board Member

Dr. Wan Xiang Yao  
Director of East Asia Institute and Confucius Institute

Calligraphy Practice

[3]