

A Comparison of IUP (Beijing) and ICLP (Taipei)

The following comparison of the IUP and ICLP language programs was prepared by Blakemore Fellow Eirik Harris, a Ph.D. candidate in Chinese Philosophy at the University of Utah. It is based on Eirik's experiences during the 2003/2004 academic year at the IUP in Beijing and the 2004/2005 academic year at the ICLP. The opinions expressed are those of the author alone.

Facilities

IUP

The IUP is located on the top three floors of Wenbeilou on the Tsinghua University campus in northwestern Beijing. These floors include a general office, Director's office, Head Teacher's office, computer room, library, lounge area, presentation room, and numerous small classrooms. The computer room consists of 4 fairly old IBM compatible computers, three of which have internet access. Obtaining a password which allows you to use the internet is the responsibility of the student and necessitates going to a computer technology office, registering, and perhaps paying a deposit. When I was there, there was a minimal charge for accessing websites outside of China, which was taken out of the deposit. These computers are equipped with Chinese Windows 2000 operating system as well as Chinese Word. Sometimes one or more of them will have other word processing software on them, but management of this seems quite hectic and disorganized. One of the computers also has Adobe Acrobat. In addition, there are two printers. The library is a general study area with a couple of dictionaries of interest but very little of real value. It holds multiple copies of some old worn out dictionaries, some very outdated textbooks, a few English language novels, and that's about it. In general, expect to have to purchase your own dictionaries and reference works, and not to rely on this library. The lounge area consists of a microwave, refrigerator, sofa, and mailboxes, as well as a couple of desks and chairs. All classrooms have their own air conditioners and the building itself has central heating (which sometimes necessitates opening windows for temperature control).

ICLP

The ICLP is located on the third and fourth floors of the Yuwen Zhongxin. These floors include a general office, Director's office, Head Teacher's office, computer room, library, lounge area, presentation room, language laboratory and numerous small classrooms. The computer room consists of 9 IBM compatible computers running either Chinese Windows 2000 or XP. They are all equipped with Chinese Office as well as other Chinese word processing software, and Adobe Acrobat. There is also one Apple e-mac with equivalent software as well as a laser printer. The library is a general study area with a wide variety of dictionaries and reading material. Although at least five times larger than the library at IUP, the vast majority of the material is from the 70's – the 90's, and it does not appear to have been updated very recently. The lounge area consists of hot and cold water machines, a refrigerator, and mailboxes, as well as lounge chairs. The language laboratory consists of approximately 30 new IBM compatible computers with flat screen monitors and an equivalent number of audio tape players. This year, ICLP has switched over to using digital media and all course materials are stored on computer. All these computers have advanced software allowing students to listen to recordings at various speeds, repeat sections, mark sections to return to, etc. Both floors have central air conditioning.

Comparison

The edge has to go to ICLP in terms of facilities. There is no language lab of any sort at IUP – students are given a recommendation as to what tape recorder to purchase and tapes for some courses are available. CDs of some material are available but without accompanying software, many students have found them to be less than ideal because you cannot slow down the CD's like you can with tapes or like you can in ICLP's language lab. Both places are air conditioned, but IUP has individual air conditioners in each room, and teachers are often reluctant to use them because of the

noise. ICLP's central air conditioning does not have this noise problem. The ICLP library is also much better than the IUP one, although it could definitely use some improvement. On the plus side for IUP, it has central heating. For most of the year, this is not an issue at ICLP, but for two to four weeks in January-February, the lack of heating means bundling up for class. (This lack of heating is almost universal in Taipei, so the same problem will arise with regards to your apartment).

Teaching Quality

IUP

IUP has some extremely enthusiastic teachers. They are always friendly and willing to help students both inside and outside the classroom. Unfortunately, in some cases this enthusiasm is not coupled with very extensive teacher training. IUP has a teaching methodology that focuses first on spoken Chinese, and courses are run with closed textbooks and important vocabulary written on the blackboard, which is to guide class discussions. However, many of the teachers have not had any pedagogical training that extends beyond the director explaining this system, and so they are not as effective in explanations as could be wished. This is not to say that all teachers are like this, however. There are some teachers, especially those who have taught abroad and those who have graduated from teacher training colleges in Beijing who are very good at the art of teaching.

Of course, one of the difficulties in obtaining and effectively training teachers for IUP is the fact that most teachers only teach at IUP for a couple of years before going on and finding new jobs elsewhere.

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The ICLP also has extremely enthusiastic teachers, just as IUP does. The main difference that I see here is that the teachers at ICLP have much better training. Many of the teachers at ICLP have spent many years teaching at ICLP and consider their teaching job there to be their career. In fact, two of the teachers there remember teaching my advisor when the program was still run by the universities that currently run IUP. In addition, many of these teachers have MA degrees in teaching Chinese as a foreign language. ICLP also runs training programs for Chinese teachers that focus on teaching Chinese as a foreign language. This has a twofold benefit. First, it ensures that ICLP itself keeps abreast of developments in teaching Chinese as a foreign language and second it allows ICLP to take the cream of the crop among the students in the teacher training program and offer them permanent positions at ICLP.

This is not to say, however, that there are not disappointing teachers at ICLP. I have encountered such teachers, and while it is often possible to either talk to such teachers directly or indirectly through the head instructor, there are times when you will feel that you are not getting as much out of a certain course as you could because of the teaching style of the instructor.

Comparison

While there are some teachers at IUP that are as good as the best ICLP instructors, ICLP does have the edge in this area. The teachers at ICLP are more consistently trained to a higher level and in general more capable of teaching effectively.

Student Diversity

IUP

The majority of students at IUP are undergraduates or students who have graduated from university the previous term, and no more than 20% of the students had had their BA for more than a year prior to attending IUP. This is not necessarily a bad thing. However, because the needs of undergraduates and graduate students, as well as the needs for other students such as journalists are different, it is only natural that IUP focuses mostly on the areas of interest for undergraduate students. In addition, it

seems to be very uncommon for students to spend more than one year at IUP. (Of course, as I was only there for one year, I am unable to say whether the student diversity during my year was consistent with previous years.)

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While there are quite a few undergraduate students at ICLP, more than half of the students were graduate students, journalists, or diplomats sent by their country for a year in preparation to taking up a position in either China or Taiwan. In addition, many of the students at ICLP spend more than a year at ICLP. This past year, there were at least three students who were at ICLP the previous year, and numerous others who had spent previous summers at ICLP.

Comparison

There is no way to say which school is better in this regard. They are simply different and where to go certainly depends on what you expect from the program and what sort of classmates you wish to have.

Educational Diversity

IUP

IUP focuses its training on students who have had two years of college level Chinese, and is quite good at training them to speak modern Chinese, and to a lesser extent to read modern Chinese. There is a great focus on contemporary spoken usage and newspaper usage. In addition, the director is pushing to include more business Chinese into the curriculum. As long as your interests fit into the courses that they offer, IUP is extremely effective. If, however, you enter with a more advanced level of Chinese, you may find two things: First, they will not have effective materials to use as teaching aids, and second, you may find that there are few if any other students at your level. In addition, if you are interested in the premodern Chinese language, you will discover that there is only one or two teachers you can study with at anything but the very beginning level.

In addition, the teaching materials that IUP uses are not always as good as they might be. They have three or four texts that they brought to China from the time the program was in Taiwan, and these are far and away the best materials they have. However, they supplement them with various Chinese produced materials that are of a very uneven quality. In addition, they do not seem to be producing new material on their own.

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ICLP has a much larger range of students - from those who have only had a year of Chinese to those who have had six years or more, and they do a very good job with both. ICLP has an extremely wide array of teaching materials they have developed themselves, and these are supplemented by other Taiwanese produced materials. While I have not myself used these other materials, I have heard many positive reports about them from other students. Since they have such a diversity of materials, they are able to offer a much wider array of courses and to offer courses to students at a higher level of Chinese competence than is possible at IUP. Much of this is due to the fact that many students study at ICLP for two or more years, and so they have experience working with a wider variety of students. Additionally, at least a third of the faculty is fully competent to teach courses in premodern Chinese as well as modern Chinese, and there are also numerous teachers able to teach Taiwanese.

Comparison

I would have to say that the wider variety of courses makes ICLP a better choice in terms of educational diversity. However, there are certainly educational reasons to prefer IUP to ICLP. If your future work is going to be in mainland China, or your dissertation will be written on modern or contemporary China, then IUP would certainly have advantages.

Conclusion

It is fairly clear that I found ICLP to be a more effective teaching environment than IUP. However, there are certain things about my own situation that led to this, and that may not be relevant to many other students. First of all, I am interested in classical Chinese. Therefore, the lack of well trained teachers in this area was something that I really missed while at IUP. In addition, I had a strong desire to learn how to write Chinese, and this is not an area focused on at IUP. However, to be fair, I am not sure that I would have been able to focus on writing if I had spent my first year at ICLP instead of IUP. From what I could tell, not many students at ICLP actually focused on writing skills, so this might be something that they only allowed me to do because my speaking and reading skills were more advanced.

This is another reason to take what I write here with a grain of salt. While I am in a position to compare these two programs, I am looking at them through slightly different lenses. My Chinese ability when I arrived at ICLP was certainly much higher than when I arrived at IUP, and so many of the opportunities I had at ICLP can be attributed to this level. On the other hand, had I spent another year at IUP, I still believe that I would not have had these opportunities.

Certainly, for more advanced students, ICLP seems to be the better place to go. However, students with only two or three years of college level Chinese may still have good reasons to go to IUP, and while I feel that the overall teaching at ICLP is better even at this lower level, I can't say so with certainty. If I were giving recommendations, I would say that unless a student has overwhelming external reasons that would make Beijing a better place to spend a year, they should at least give strong consideration to ICLP.

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