

REMINISCENCES OF MY DAYS WITH IUP IN TAIPEI

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I cannot recall when the ICLP Newsletter began, for that was well after 1997, the year I left my post as the Field Director of ICLP's predecessor IUP. But I do remember very clearly my feeling that it was a godsend that reconnected me to the institution that was pivotal in my career development and for which I will forever cherish poignant memories. Since its inception, I have looked forward to every issue, and always delighted by the marvelous melding of sophisticated Chinese-style writing with refreshing global perspectives reflected in the essays authored by ICLP students. To my mind the newsletter is the perfect vehicle to maintain ICLP's profile in the field and to provide evidence that ICLP is carrying on the best practices that began with IUP half a century ago.¹ So congratulations to ICLP on passing its newsletter's 100th issue milestone!

As some readers may know, I was the last Field Director of IUP Taipei in 1994-1997, just before it transitioned to ICLP, and the founding Field Director of IUP Beijing in 1997-2000. What I have to offer to the reader in this essay are my personal reminiscences of my three years with IUP Taipei, rather than a history of that period. Internally, IUP-ICLP has sustained for over half a century a strong core teaching team and highly-regarded pedagogical methods, both of which it developed within a few short years of its founding, but externally this institution was always subject to the vicissitudes of the Sinological field in the U.S., and buffeted by the winds and storms of the political environments of its host. So its fifty-year history has not by any means been a stable continuum, and in fact IUP has gone through periods of grave precariousness. During my three years with IUP Taipei, I was perhaps the person most closely associated with some of the most politically tumultuous events in IUP's history, so my perspective would naturally be colored by my personal involvement with those events.

How I came to be the Field Director of IUP is one of those serendipitous life-changing events in my life. 1994 marked the twenty-fourth year of my contented career at Oberlin College, and I would have been happy to remain in that niche for another 24 years or retirement, whichever came first. But in 1994, I was nearing age 50 and tempted to explore another neck of the woods before it's too late. What tipped the scale was my marriage that year to James Dew, a colleague in the field who had directed IUP for a total of 13 years - longer than anyone else in the field. And in fact, by the time of my first retirement in 2000, IUP had been under the watch of one or the other of us for more than half of its existence. Back in 1994, the idea of assuming the post that had been such a huge part of my new husband's professional life was a rather romantic notion. The next six years turned out to be anything but romantic. They were filled with daunting challenges, professional growth, and life-enriching experiences. What started out initially as misfortune - it felt to me like stepping into a landmine - turned out to be a unique opportunity, and I'm grateful for the privilege of having a seat at the helm of a ship navigating through some perilous uncharted territory.

¹ IUP was officially founded in 1963.

The romanticism that roped me into IUP vanished upon my arrival in Taipei in early August 1994 as I was immediately confronted by the anti-American sentiments sweeping across Taiwan at the time and manifested in concrete terms on the National Taiwan University (NTU) campus. In the spring of that year, my immediate predecessor at IUP C.P. Chou had mentioned some anti-American activities at NTU and even sent some photos of a student march on campus, but this was not unprecedented in Taiwan, and we all thought that it would blow over quickly as it always had in the past. In any case, IUP had never before been directly targeted by anti-American incidents. But by the third day after my arrival, IUP was confronted by the message - delivered by the then Dean of the School of Humanities - that our status at NTU had in effect become that of an unwelcomed squatter. We had been residing at NTU since 1963 without a formal contract and without compensation, and we were occupying "prime real estate" that NTU now wanted to put to more worthwhile use. NTU's attitude toward IUP, just as the political climate in Taiwan at large, was by no means monolithic. IUP had always had friends at NTU and at the Ministry of Education, but at that time it was the stance represented by the Dean that prevailed. IUP's response to this situation was devised through normal protocol, i.e., consultation between the Field Director (myself) and the Executive Director (Prof. Lyman Van Slyke of Stanford) and communication with the IUP board. The first step was to establish IUP's legitimacy through a formal agreement with NTU. Our proposal for a ten-year contract was summarily rejected, so we settled for the best we could negotiate for - a three-year contract which included an annual fee paid to NTU and a sugar-coating clause to the effect that we would jointly seek alternative space within NTU beyond the three years. As Field Director, I did expend quite a bit of effort searching for alternative space, even though I doubted NTU's sincerity regarding this clause in our agreement. At the same time, IUP sought the help of 教育部国际文教处, and explored the possibility of moving to another host institution in Taiwan. We did not want to leave any stone in Taiwan unturned.

However, the winds of the times were not in our favor. That fall, the pro-Taiwan-independence 民进党 candidate 陈水扁 was elected mayor of Taipei (6 years later, in 2000, he became the first non-Nationalist Party candidate to become the President of Taiwan). At about the same time, anti-American sentiments were in ascendancy, as evidenced by the incident of the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT, the de facto representative office of the U.S. government) being pelted by eggs, and bombarded by calls for eviction. One unforgettable image etched in my memory is that of Doug Spellman - then Director of AIT - taking a large trash can to the front of AIT and urging angry citizens to toss their eggs in there instead of at the AIT building. I felt that the fate of IUP in Taiwan was already written on the wall.

In academic year 1995-96, IUP began to prepare for the worst case scenario, i.e. IUP under U.S. sponsorship would cease to exist at NTU in 1997.² At the annual board meeting in January 1996, after extensive deliberation, the board ironed out its internal disagreements and hammered out a consensus regarding the future of IUP. It approved a two-prong approach whereby IUP would endeavor to preserve the center in Taiwan in some form even without the auspices of IUP's member institutions, and at the same time launch a new center in mainland China. Political changes in China and developments in the Sinological field also gave impetus to the new initiative, but without the inhospitable push from NTU, it probably would not have gained enough

² By coincidence, the return of Hong Kong to China was also scheduled for 1997, so it was only natural that one would associate the two events even though there is no connection between them.

momentum. Long story short, in the end, IUP succeeded on both fronts, and now 17 years later, two high-quality in situ Chinese programs trace their roots to the IUP founded in 1963. However, as one can imagine, the transition was bumpy and wrenching.

The battle for IUP's survival in Taiwan and crafting IUP's new lease on life in mainland China consumed all my time and energy in the years 1994-97. On the Taipei front, I was extremely fortunate to have had 200% support from the local staff at IUP. Not a single one of the staff abandoned ship during this perilous period. The core teaching staff who have devoted their entire careers to IUP not only continued with their excellent teaching through difficult times, but were also able to recruit and train new teachers as needed. I was able to entrust the internal operation of IUP to this capable staff so that I could focus on negotiations with NTU to preserve the existing center and on launching a new center in Beijing.

Transferring IUP from the sponsorship of a group of US institutions to NTU entailed much more than changing its name from Inter-University Program for Chinese Language Studies (IUP) to International Chinese Language Program (ICLP). I will touch on only the key elements of change here:

1. IUP under U.S. auspices had an employee salaries and benefits structure that was a hybrid of the conventions followed in the U.S. and in Taiwan. This structure provided incentives for talented teachers to commit themselves to a long-term career in IUP. After 1997, this structure gradually transitioned to the model used in other Chinese language centers in Taiwan, in which the majority of the teaching staff are paid by a standard hourly rate regardless of whether they were full-time or part-time, and regardless of seniority. As a result, a number of mid-career teachers left IUP to seek advanced degrees and other avenues to develop their careers. This employment model also had an effect on recruitment of new teachers. However, the negative impact proved not to be as serious as one might have expected. ICLP today has in fact retained several excellent core teachers from the pre-1997 era, and has continued to recruit and train new blood each year.
2. IUP had historically received generous support from the ROC Ministry of Education International Division (教育部国际文教处) in the form of an annual lump sum scholarship. With the transition to ICLP, scholarship support was reformatted so that students attending ICLP would need to apply individually to the Ministry of Education, so in effect, they entered a competitive pool with all other foreign students studying Chinese in Taiwan. It is hard to know what the net effect was in terms of the amount of scholarships received by students at ICLP, but the change in the scholarship structure - along with the higher cost of ICLP as compared with other Chinese centers in Taiwan - seems not have had a negative impact on its enrollment.
3. When IUP was renamed ICLP and transferred to NTU in 1997, NTU had already been administering a Chinese Language Program within its own Language Center. In fact, IUP had shared the same building with NTU's Language Center since the building was completed in 1983. While IUP/ICLP may appear to serve the same function as NTU's Language Center, there are enough differences between the two to make merging impractical and coexistence awkward. After IUP's transition to NTU ownership, NTU provided a roof for ICLP, but the internal operation continued to be sustained by the core staff from the former IUP, but without the sponsorship of the former IUP member institutions. In the intervening 17 years,

ICLP has proven to be quite resilient, and has by now built an independent international reputation, as evidenced by its Newsletter.

4. In the 30+ years of IUP's existence in Taiwan, the center under the leadership of successive Field Directors had continuously developed excellent teaching materials, but for various reasons, these materials were used in-house only and never published. In preparation for transitioning to NTU auspices, in order to establish an identity for IUP/ICLP and to create a profile in the field, I led a team of long-time teachers to update and publish three of IUP's core textbooks: 中国文化丛谈, 思想与社会, and 进阶文言文. These books have since been adopted by some institutions beyond IUP and are still in use today. In addition, by way of commemorating the final phase of IUP in Taiwan, I produced an advanced reader entitled 从精读到泛读 and had it published in Taiwan.

Human memory being what it is, I cannot vouch for the accuracy of the above portrayal, and hence this essay should be seen as random reminiscences rather than history. One thing that is indisputable though is how I felt at the time about the transition of the IUP staff to NTU's management. In short, I felt like a mother in feudal China about to marry off her precious daughter, not knowing what she will face in her new home under the thumb of her mother-in-law. I could give her the best dowry that I could afford, which wasn't much, and I could hope for the best, but I knew she would have only herself to rely on once she left my door. I don't know if any other Field Director would describe the experience of transferring the ownership of IUP-Taipei to NTU quite this way, but I'd imagine any Field Director would have experienced poignant emotions. Now that 17 years have passed since IUP in Taipei transitioned to ICLP, I am gratified that ICLP is continuing to flourish as an excellent training ground for future academics and professionals who aspire to achieve advanced Chinese language proficiency.