

3. Inter-University Center for Japanese Language Studies (IUC)

a. Yoojin Han, Summer 2019 Final Report

Before I begin this report, I would like to thank the Light Fellowship for allowing my time at IUC possible; without their generous support, my studies this summer (as well as my year abroad in China before) would not have been possible.

A bit of background information about myself before the bulk of the report: my name is Yoojin Han, and I am a rising senior majoring History and Global Affairs. I have been learning Japanese since elementary school, and took Japanese for a year at Yale, taking JAPN164 and 165: Professional and Academic Spoken Japanese. As a native speaker of Korean and learner of Chinese, having been exposed to Chinese characters and East Asian culture for over a decade while being born and raised in Korea, as well as having benefitted from the similar grammar structure between Korean and Japanese, my language learning background may be rather different from most Yale students embarking for a year/summer in IUC. I have also attended IUP, a Chinese language program in Beijing, ran by the same university consortium, prior to coming to IUC for my summer. Bearing that in mind, here are my major takeaways from IUC.

Housing

I went to B-Site Yokohama, one of the options provided by IUC's housing suggestion list. The price was more expensive than the other options, but it was one of the very few relatively affordable short-term housing options near IUC that did not require a subway commute. It came full-furnished, with biweekly cleaning service, and really nice amenities; I also enjoyed getting to meet other IUC students just by the virtue of living in the same building. There was a supermarket nearby, and I enjoy cooking anyway, so I basically prepared most of my meals myself and saved a lot of money from the food stipend to compensate for the more expensive housing fees. I heard other options are nice too, and some people found decent AirBnB options a couple stations from IUC and got a commuter's pass for the daily commute.

Placement and Coursework

The placement exam was a combination of listening and reading comprehension, some diction, and an interview with two teachers. Our classes were announced the next day; I was placed into 夏海, which I was later told was the highest level offered by IUC—but more importantly, taught by Seto Sensei from Yale!! I did not have a chance to take his course back at Yale so I was more than excited for the opportunity.

Classes started at 9:40AM and ended at 2:30PM everyday, which made my mornings significantly more bearable compared to my 8AM classes + 15 minute bike commute during my days at IUP. The first three days of the week was taught by Seto sensei, and the other two days by another teacher. I do not know how the other classes were structured, but from the feeling I got, the 夏海 course focused more on individual needs than following a set curriculum, perhaps as an effort to take into account everyone's advanced language levels and needs. Hence, the course was a mix of the following:

- Daily presentations by two people, one on current affairs from Japanese news, another on any topic (each person would have to deliver about one of each speech per week)
- Significant amount of workload focused on readings, anything between 2 ~ 30 pages, from an actual Japanese publication (novel, essay, poem, etc.), unedited
- 4 grammar patterns per 1~2 days, from JLPT N1
- Other grammar drills, i.e. 「は」と「が」、接続詞、etc.
- Occasional listening passages
- Conversation exercises for given settings, i.e. making a request, taking a request, turning down a request, thanking someone, visiting someone's house, etc.

As you can see, there was a LOT of content that the teachers tried to cover, and I spent a minimum of 3~4 hours of homework per day (in the beginning, it was closer to 5~6). As such, the course discussions for grammar drills and listening passages often became more like a checking-what-questions-everyone-had, rather than a step-by-step explanation of everything. As for the listening, N1 grammar patterns and conversation exercises, the teachers tried to provide detailed explanations, but it was clear that we were operating under a time constraint, making it sometimes hard to talk through everything. Especially regarding listening, it felt that there was not much attention being paid into that part; even our midterm and final exams did not have listening parts (although I assume this was the case for everyone in IUC, since we all took the exams in the same room).

The disconnection between the two teachers also came to me as a surprise. What I found particularly helpful while I was studying Chinese in IUP was that the teachers knew the content of the textbooks of almost all courses like the back of their hands, since they have been teaching the material for years. As such, even as I took more advance classes, the teachers would make sure to review key grammar/vocabulary that are similar to the ones currently being taught—hence, review was inbuilt to IUP courses, which in turn significantly raised my retention rate. In IUC, however, the teachers were very well-versed with their part of the material, but that was not necessarily the case for each others' material. For instance, when we were reading a passage and came across a grammar pattern covered by a different teacher in a previous course, even when the students would mention the fact, the teacher would not be able to confirm whether that was the case. I found this unfortunate since these would all have been great opportunities to

review what we have already learned. It is understandable that IUC wants us to be exposed to various teaching methods, and I indeed benefitted from it, but it would be appreciate if this kind of discontinuity in instruction is addressed for future courses.

Another unfortunate thing was the class size. There were eight students in our course, and while I loved every single one of our classmates, the sheer number of students, their very different language backgrounds (four US citizens completing their East Asian Studies-relevant graduate studies; three being native Chinese speakers, each being an undergrad, a Masters graduate with no intention to go for a PhD, someone pursuing a science degree; and me), combined with the amount of content we wanted to cover, left very little time for the teachers to give us individualized feedback. This was particularly disheartening since I believe that most people in our course came to IUC to further improve their advanced Japanese skills, which relies heavily on individualized feedback. Especially considering that IUC prides in offering advanced Japanese language courses, this was a rather surprising discovery for me.

Regardless, the program did come with undeniable strengths: the diverse backgrounds of the classmates allowed for very advanced debate, and an opportunity to discuss in Japanese topics unfamiliar to me. The unedited texts were in a way a true immersion to Japanese even within classroom walls, and the exposure to Japanese literature and opinions allowed me to better understand Japanese society and culture. The conversation exercises were the true gem of IUC, and I hope they expand on this further!

Outside-of-classroom time and events

One thing I really enjoyed about IUC was their weekly excursions. I went to an actual trial at the Yokohama Court, visited the Meiji Shrine and participated in a Shinto ritual, went to Kamakura and did a goshuin-meguri with my classmates, watched a Kabuki show, and a class-organized field trip to Yokohama. All were great opportunities to get to explore Japan and put our Japanese to practice. Barhopping in Noge-cho with IUC participants was also a very fun way to explore the surrounding area. If Yokohama isn't enough, Tokyo is just an hour away by subway, and I went to Tokyo at least 15 times during IUC. I even squeezed in a trip to Kyoto during Gion-Matsuri, and witnessed the Pikachu parade during the last week of IUC. It's really what you want to get out of the program—both during class and outside!

Overall, it was a fun summer for me, with definite language gains and deepened cultural understanding. I do believe the course structure could have been better, but this doesn't mean that the course would not help improve your language skills; in fact, it definitely fulfills that role, and that very well. With that said, if you are looking for something more intense and structured, perhaps the year-long program might be better, since the teachers and other participants alike mentioned how different the summer and year-long programs are (do check other reports,

though, since I didn't participate in the latter). It also does require a level of independence, since IUC's participants are predominantly graduate students (and by predominant, I mean probably over 80%), with their own research to do after courses—which means you have a lot of time to spare with perhaps not a group of undergraduates with similar interests to hang out with. With all of this, though, IUC was a great experience, and I would recommend it to people who are looking for an advanced language course with more freedom on your hands to decide what you get out of the experience, both inside and outside the classrooms. Again, I would like to thank the Light Fellowship office for allowing me this experience.

b. Bryan Lynch, Spring 2018 Final Report

Brief Recap

Today, my year-long foray at IUC Yokohama came to a close. I have never been the type of person to be overly sentimental about places or things, so I'll spare all of you the boring details about all the wonderful friends I've made or the "magical memories" I've had this year.

As a refresher, I ended the first half of IUC's ten-month program in a downward spiral. During the summer course, and the half year following, I was still in turbodrive, studying from dusk to dawn, with nothing but sleep in between. Yet after a turbulent second semester, my spirits were at an all-time low, so I decided to take it a little easier on myself from there on out.

During the winter break, as I pondered a solution to my blues, I recalled my biggest takeaway from the Light Fellowship pre-departure meeting -- "go for the A-". I figured that since I deserved an "A+++" for my first six months of study at IUC, as long as I made a "B-" during my next sixth months it would average out to somewhere around an "A-". Therefore, I made it my goal to prioritize life outside the IUC center, even if it meant turning in a few homeworks late or not being fully prepared for class each day.

My Newfound Life Outside of IUC

My number one priority was to make Japanese friends and interact with locals as much as possible. So I did my best to find a way for someone like me (extremely introverted, not very good with making conversation or dealing with people over long intervals) to do so.

My solution was to channel my inner otaku. As a middle schooler, I was a champion player of the Japanese trading card game Yugioh (遊戯王). Though I hadn't kept up with the game for many years, I learned that the game still had a vibrant player base in Japan, especially among those between ages 18-30. Overall, it sounded like a perfect way for me to branch out and make friends. So, one cold morning I took the train to Akihabara and purchased all the cards needed to carry out my playing strategy (that same day I was also accosted on the street by the TV crew of the popular Japanese show "Youは何をしに日本へ?". The topic: dating Japanese

women versus American women. I'm pretty sure I totally bombed that interview, and to this day pray that no one discovers it amidst the dregs of the Internet.)

Anyways, the card game idea was a smashing success. I started participating in a local card shop's tournament every week, and none of my fellow players could believe that this Japanese-speaking gaijin with Japanese cards could understand the ins-and-outs of this complex Japanese game (I've included an example card text [here](#)). Not only that, but once I figured out the lexicon of the game, I started winning local tournaments almost every week, along with the \$50 or so in prize money. Before I knew it, I quickly went from a curious spectacle to a player everyone dreaded facing (my strategy involved gradually frustrating my opponent by thwarting his every move. Then, when the time was right, I would strike back with a crushing counter blow).

These tournaments were some of my happiest times in Japan this year. I loved the feeling of leaving the tournament building: downtown Yokohama 10 p.m., the variegated store lights flashing, the smell of ramen-stewed pork belly and beer wafting through the air, salarymen staggering down the street, groups of well-dressed twenty-something girls cackling, my belly full of delicious takoyaki, my pocket full of newly earned prize money.

Given my success at the local level, I received an invite to compete at the national championships, with prizes ranging up to \$50,000 for winning events. Here, I learned a valuable lesson: Japanese people, while very courteous and polite on the outside, when put in a situation where victory or defeat involves a lot of money, will lie and cheat just as much as (or even more than) your average American. I've had opponents purposely stall time for several hours, criticize me for reacting too slowly, even trying to get me disqualified because one of my card sleeves was slightly bent on one corner. The only thing that Japanese players won't do, yet some American players will do in a blink of an eye, is steal. There were several times where some of my more expensive cards accidentally got mixed into my opponent's deck. But once discovered they were promptly returned to me after the round was over.

While the lying and cheating was a bit much to handle, overall the experience was extremely rewarding. For the first time, I began to feel that Japanese people were not "taking it easy on the gaijin", but rather treating me as an equal adversary. This I greatly appreciated. Additionally, due to having to constantly play a reading and speaking-intensive Japanese game under heavy pressure, my reading and conversational ability improved greatly, and my fear of talking to strangers practically disappeared. In light of this, I would highly recommend this route to any of the nerdier, more introverted language learners looking to get involved in a local hobby.

The Second Half at IUC

Third Quarter

Anyways, back to the details of my experience at IUC. During the third quarter, students are allowed to take a course on their field of study, along with an additional elective course. I

chose modern history (the history class's sections were divided between ancient and modern), and for my elective chose Japanese post-war history.

The history class was a mixed bag. It was taught in seminar style, and thus contained all the pros and cons of that method of conducting class. Each week, a student would be assigned to give a short presentation on a topic, then select an academic article in Japanese that students would read and dissect together in class. While in theory this should make for an interesting class, there were two large drawbacks.

First, the topics chose by some students were soul-crushingly boring ("Today I will simply recap the history of post-war nursing textbooks"), while in other cases the presenting student's knowledge of their subject was too shallow. This led to situations where only one or two of the students were engaged.

Second, and perhaps most importantly, students were grouped based on field of study, not on language ability. For someone like me, who was four to five levels higher than most other students in my class, it was just frustrating to listen to other students trip over simple words and phrases. Most of the time I would have to turn to the instructor in order to have a fruitful conversation.

The post-war Japanese history class, conversely, was amazing. We primarily watched documentaries and news reels regarding current events at the time, with students making a presentation on events that interested them. Overall, I liked it because the class was brimming with substantive content, rather than some student's obscure research interests. I walked away from the class feeling much more informed on the subject of modern Japanese history.

Fourth Quarter

The fourth quarter was almost the exact same as the third, except that students could opt to do "project work" instead of taking an elective course. Given that I'm not a PHD student, I decided to take the JLPT N1 prep course during the afternoons, along with a novel-reading class once a week. These two courses were about how one might guess, filled with taking mock exams and reading novels. Overall, these were solid courses, but nothing exceptional.

Finally, as part of every students' graduation requirements, we were required to do a fifteen-minute presentation on a topic of our choice on the last day of class. Typically, students are encouraged to either "recycle" or "add-on" to speeches or presentations given during the year. Unfortunately, my presentation advisor was really strict (you must present groundbreaking research, not just simply introduce a topic!), so I ended up writing my presentation from scratch. Overall, the day of the speech, my delivery was very fluent and smooth, yet because I picked a rather boring topic I'm pretty sure half the assembly was asleep by the time I finished.

As an additional requirement, all students must take an exit exam that measures the improvement in their Japanese skills. For the most part, the test is very simple, and consists of the usual suspects: reading, speaking, listening, etc. On the last day of classes, students meet with their homeroom teacher and discuss the results.

Reflections

Overall, I'm fairly disappointed that my level of effort and intensity dropped off during my second half of the program. I'm convinced that if I would have kept up the frantic pace, I would be speaking at native fluency by this point. But as it stands, I guess things aren't too bad. During the exit exam, my test scores were over 90th percentile in reading, writing, listening, kanji, and speaking, this despite me only having a year and a half of Japanese study under my belt. I can pass the JLPT N1 practice test with ease (I'm registered to take it in July), and can have conversations with natives on about 99.99% of subjects. Viewed from this angle, it's hard not to consider my time here at IUC as anything but an enormous success. I guess even if you slack off, coming to class and speaking Japanese six hours a day will cause you to improve by osmosis.

In closing, I'd like to give a few pieces of advice to prospective students.

First of all, your homeroom teacher can make or break the program for you. Bad teachers, in particular, can make your life a living hell. Take for example Yuki sensei (結城先生). While she is a very intelligent and capable person, she has the tendency to be very condescending and demeaning towards students, to the point of causing them to have mental breakdowns. From what I've heard (thankfully she was never my main teacher), two of her students quit the program altogether due to being insulted constantly in front of the entire class (apparently both of them cursed her out on separate incidents). Another friend of mine, a star in the program, after being denied a transfer to another class just quit going to her class all together. The remaining students in her class all looked miserable compared to other students.

My advice is that if you find yourself in a situation like this, do your best to find a new teacher immediately. Once a week or two passes it's already too late. You may feel yourself to be a nuisance for requesting something like this so soon after arriving, but trust me you do not want to be suffering for the next ten months.

My second advice is to find a hobby outside of IUC that involves you in the local community. That way whenever the program feels overwhelming (and trust me it will at some point!) you will have an alternate reality to escape into. In my case, it was playing card games and surfing. I liked these hobbies because, while they allowed to take my mind off of classwork, they still required me to utilize my Japanese on a daily basis. I highly recommend hobbies that require Japanese, as opposed to eating ice-cream and going on a Netflix binge whenever you feel sorry for yourself.

In conclusion, I am highly grateful for the time I've spent here at IUC. I'm also forever indebted to the generosity of the Light Foundation, for I have never been able to accomplish something like this without their funding. These past twelve months, I've grown to love the Japanese language, culture, society – and most of all the people, especially those like Otake sensei (大竹先生) at IUC who work tirelessly on their students' behalf. From here on, I will do my best to return to Japan whenever possible, and make the utmost effort to incorporate the invaluable Japanese abilities I've picked up over this year into my career and life plans.

Overall, I couldn't have asked for a better year abroad.

c. Ryan Cain, Summer 2019 Final Report

Before beginning I would like to extend my deepest thanks to each member of the Light fellowship office – without them I could never have had the opportunity to engage so deeply with the Japanese language. Additionally, I owe a great deal to my previous Japanese instructors at Yale and to the professors who wrote my recommendations. Even though the program is completed, I remain grateful for all the time they took to help me succeed both at Yale and abroad.

With that said, let's first get into my Japanese language background. My first introduction to the Japanese language was far from inside a classroom. After graduating high school, I decided to take a gap year and ended up moving to Japan for close to 10 months. There, I lived in a small village with a lovely Japanese family and worked as a studio apprentice to a Japanese artist. Before that experience, I had zero language training, and though I learned to hold a conversation by the time I came to campus for the fall of my freshman year, I still had no Japanese classroom experience.

After a placement test, I entered and completed two semesters in Stever and Saito sensei's Japanese 150/151 class (3rd year, L5). In many ways, I had to play catch up since I had spent very little time abroad learning to read or write Japanese kanji (adopted Chinese characters). Yet, thanks to the help of the two fabulous instructors, I saw considerable improvement and was also fortunate enough to qualify for the Light Fellowship.

With that, I began to look at several programs in Japan and consulted this forum heavily for advice. Since I had lived alone in Japan for nearly a year (I lived with a Japanese family and shared many cultural immersion-type outings with them), I was looking for a program where I could be most independent in my studies, not a typical cultural immersion program. Naturally, I chose IUC. (I will not touch on it here because several other posts have covered this topic well, but IUC is not like other programs and could be considered by some as quite isolating. It is by no means a "bad" quality; it just means that the program tailors itself to different needs and has different expectations for its students. I strongly consider reading other students' responses that discuss this more). For now, I will get more into details of my experience.

Getting into the specifics of IUC, it makes most sense to consider the placement test as this is taken on the first day. I personally took the advice of many other thread posts here and realized that though short, the placement test should be taken with care. Though the content most obviously changes from year to year, what does not is the fact that it tests your understanding of minor subtleties in places of the language that you might not have realized there were any differences – consider the differences between は and が where they are both used two or three times in a single sentence. Transitive, intransitive, and ambitransitive verb cases

came up and seemed to stump many people as well. That being said, the test is fair overall and almost everybody I met in the program was happy with where they ended up. If it turns out you feel improperly placed, all of the teachers and the director himself make themselves available to talk and seem open to accommodating any transitions (I knew of one or two students who did this).

Personally, I tested into the 夏海 “natsu-umi” class which was the second highest level. (As some others have noted the level of difficulty seems to vary in relation to how close one is to the ground). Regardless, I was initially shocked and felt out of place, especially when I recognized another considerably exceptional Yale upperclassmen in my class. Nevertheless, I realized that though there were slight differences in everyone’s skill level, the instructors seemed incredibly open to tailoring the course material to each student’s needs. From the very first days of the course it was made very clear that the instructors wanted to do their best to incorporate course material that was relevant to everybody’s ranging interests. Since most of the students were graduate or PhD candidates – just maybe three or four undergraduates in the program as a whole – IUC really works to give its students room to pursue their own specialties, in fact, that is really what it is designed for.

On the day to day level, again this is still something that I think will vary slightly from class to class, the curriculum is quite structured. Class begins with a five-minute kanji quiz and then two “one minute” speeches from either you or your classmates. Though I think that there is a lot of merit to presenting information to the rest of the class in a clear, succinct way each morning, I sometimes felt that the speeches took away from the productivity of the day. I enjoyed learning about new topics each day from my peers, but they more often than not went on for close to thirty minutes and sometimes we were unable to finish getting through the reading material for the day. This may have been just a small shortcoming of my class, but it is one of the few criticisms I have of the course.

Moving on from that though, the reading materials and discussions we had in class were always productive and the material engaging. As I said before, IUC really tries to fit the needs of each student, so my instructor even chanced a portion of the curriculum to include some economic related materials that I mentioned I was interested in. After the morning discussions and review of grammar concepts, we would break for lunch and then have another short fifty-minute afternoon session. The shorter session tended to focus more on speaking and the proper use of honorific expressions which I found incredibly useful! Most students dispersed quickly after this, though some would stay around the center to finish their homework.

Listening to some friends that I had in another class, the homework load seemed to vary considerably by class. But for me, I found each night’s workload to be immense. So much so that when I was handed reading materials on the first day of class I mistook it for the full course reading packet when in fact it was just one week’s worth. Again though, I knew that this class was designed for students who already had a strong foundation in kanji so they were able to manage the homework load in a much more reasonable fashion that I was able to. Still though,

whatever the class, IUC is not the place to come if you expect to have a lot of free time to relax in the summer. For students who are truly invested in the Japanese language however, I believe that there could be no better place to study in Japan than at IUC.

If any student reading this has any questions about the program and would like to know more, please do not hesitate to contact me! I would love to speak more to my experience.

Lastly, I really would like to thank again the Light foundation and all the members of the team who make such opportunities abroad possible for students. My experience this summer has really convinced me to pursue more professional study in Japanese and even a potential career abroad. Thank you!