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Chinese Teaching and Study Center Class Review

This past year I have had the privilege of taking two-on-one private classes through the Chinese Teaching Study Center. I first heard about the center from my supervisors. I originally looked into taking Chinese classes through Taitung University with a different department. Those classes did not work out for me, so I looked for other options. As I was looking, my friend and classmate came across a brochure for the Chinese Teaching and Study Center. From that brochure we called the office and inquired about the logistics of taking Chinese through the center. As it turns out, we decided to continue taking classes for the entire year. We were looking for a Chinese class that used teaching materials in simplified characters. We were also looking for a teacher who would be sensitive to our needs and wishes for the class. That is exactly what we found with the center.

Our first class, we met our teacher Dolly (方品惟) and immediately felt a great connection. One of the best things about her is her ability to understand and anticipate our questions and problems. She is one of the most caring and considerate teachers I've ever had the privilege of being taught by. At the beginning she listened to our goals in terms of the class and with the Chinese language long term. From there she discussed a long term plan with us. Over the course of the year, we ended up asking her if it would be acceptable to change our focus. She readily agreed to any changes we wanted to make. Every time we have class, I can easily see the effort and care she takes in her preparation. In Taiwan, I understand that traditional characters are the norm. However, Dolly takes the time to translate traditional characters into simplified ones for us. She chooses all of our class material and ensures that it's in simplified one way or another. Her ability to understand the level of the class is amazing. Not one article has been too easy or difficult. They are all at the perfect level; just hard enough to keep pushing us. Additionally, the class material varies from texts of literature to short stories. We never know exactly what we will be reading the next week; however, I know it will be interesting and informative. Overall, Dolly is always gracious with changes and gracious with her teaching. Every class is always full of smiles.

Dolly employs many different teaching strategies. For one, if we receive a new article in class, we typically have around 3 minutes to skim and figure out the main idea. In this way, Dolly is not only training us to improve our reading skills, she is also helping us improve our understanding of Chinese articles. We have gone over the different writing styles in Chinese and discussed how articles are written differently depending on their purpose. These skills will help us long after we finish the class. Being able to be proficient in our reading will help in my future quest towards finding a career with Chinese. Of course, we are not always correct. Still, Dolly takes the time to carefully give us the details and point us in the right direction. She does not spoon feed us. Instead, she guides us to the right path and allows us ample time to critically analyze and dissect the piece before she dives in with us. Another activity she has us do is a read aloud of the article. This allows us to improve our intonation and reading ability. It also helps with our vocabulary. We work on ensuring that we group the right words together and that a word

stays together. We are constantly engaged either through active speaking or active listening.

Other than the traditional methods, Dolly employs a lot of fun and meaningful exercises. For instance, we once took newspapers and articles and created our own headlines and stories. Dolly brought in many different materials for us to use. From those materials, we cut out different words. Only the words cut from the materials could be used in our story. I had to get extremely creative and carefully analyze each word that was in front of me. It was a great way to review past vocab but also learn how to use words in a more formal manner. Another activity Dolly used was another vocab mixing activity. In preparation for our class, she cut out flashcards of our previous vocabulary. From these flashcards we needed to pick a topic and then write an essay. Every word on the table needed to be used. It was no card left behind. It was extremely challenging; however, it allowed us to review a lot of vocabulary. I now remember a lot more than I would have without this activity. Dolly works so hard to make sure that we don't feel completely drained from learning Chinese.

One suggestion I have is for there to be a specific classroom on the city campus of Taitung University. In my case, it worked out well for our class location to not be in Zhiben. However, I know that people in the future may be more amenable towards taking classes with the Chinese Teaching and Study Center if there was an office or something in the city. That way the audience may be pushed even further outwards to Dulan. There are many foreigners in Dulan who I believe would be open towards taking classes if there was a closer location. Or perhaps, if there was a virtual option where students could skype with the teacher. I know that virtual teaching is not a substitute for in-person classes; however, it may be a good way to expand the reach of the center. Also, I think if there is more advertisement about the teachers being current graduate students will bring in more people. I think foreigners may get scared off from taking Chinese classes at universities because they're afraid of a traditional Taiwanese teaching style. I believe the current graduate students very clearly understand what foreigners want out of a Chinese class. They are an asset that could be exploited more. Overall, I would recommend the center to anyone who asked. I hope the center continues to reach more students in the years to come!