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# **The Current Status and Challenges of Master's Education in Chinese Language Education in Central and Eastern Europe: A Case Study of Eötvös Loránd University, Hungary**

## **Abstract**

Central and Eastern Europe has a profound tradition in Sinology, with its master's programmes in Sinology historically focusing on areas such as Chinese phonetics, literature, history, and philosophy. However, as economic and cultural cooperation between Central and Eastern Europe and China continues to deepen, the demand for Chinese language professionals has become increasingly diversified. In recent years, the rapid development of Sino-Hungarian relations has led to a significant influx of Chinese enterprises into Hungary, further driving the transformation and innovation of master's education in Chinese language education. This paper takes Eötvös Loránd University in Hungary as a case study to explore the current status and challenges of master's education in Chinese language education in Central and Eastern Europe. It analyses the transition from traditional Sinology master's programmes to a diversified 'Chinese+' training model and proposes future development strategies.

**Keywords:** Central and Eastern Europe, Chinese language education, master's education, Hungary, 'Chinese+'

叶秋月

## 中东欧中文教育硕士培养之现状与挑战—— 以匈牙利罗兰大学为例

### 摘要

中东欧地区拥有深厚的汉学传统，其汉学硕士培养长期以来聚焦于汉语语音、文学、历史、哲学等领域。然而，随着中东欧与中国在经济、文化等领域的合作不断深化，对中文人才的需求日益多元化。尤其是近年来，中匈关系的快速发展促使大量中资企业入驻匈牙利，进一步推动了中文教育硕士培养的转型与创新。本文以匈牙利罗兰大学为例，探讨中东欧中文教育硕士培养的现状与挑战，分析其从传统汉学硕士到“中文+”多元化培养模式的转型路径，并提出未来发展的对策建议。

**关键词:** 中东欧，中文教育，硕士培养，匈牙利，“中文+”

### Introduction

Central and Eastern Europe has long been a significant hub for Sinology research, producing a large number of Sinologists in fields such as Chinese phonetics, literature, history, and philosophy. However, with the acceleration of globalisation and the rise of China's international status, economic and cultural cooperation between Central and Eastern Europe and China has become increasingly close. The demand for Chinese language professionals has gradually shifted from traditional academic research to a broader range of applied fields. This shift has presented new requirements and challenges for master's education in Chinese language education in Central and Eastern Europe. This paper takes Eötvös Loránd University in Hungary as a case study to explore the current status and challenges of master's education in Chinese language education in Central and Eastern Europe, analyse the transformation of its training models, and propose future development strategies.

## **The Current Status of Master's Education in Chinese Language Education in Central and Eastern Europe**

### 1. Traditional Sinology Master's Education

Sinology research in Central and Eastern Europe has a long history, with traditional Sinology master's programmes primarily focusing on Chinese phonetics, literature, history, and philosophy. Eötvös Loránd University, as a key institution for Sinology research in Central and Eastern Europe, has long oriented its Sinology master's programmes towards academic research, emphasising students' deep understanding of Chinese language and culture. The two-year master's programme focuses on Sinology research. While continuing to study modern and classical Chinese to improve their language proficiency, students also delve into various aspects of Chinese language and culture, including Chinese linguistics and contemporary Chinese society and culture.<sup>1</sup> Courses on Chinese philosophy and religious history have always been an integral part of Sinology research.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, this training model emphasises the ability to read ancient texts and analyse documents. Students are required to read a large number of Chinese classics and write research papers to develop their academic analytical skills. This model has produced a significant number of Sinologists for Central and Eastern Europe, promoting the development of Sinology in the region. However, it also faces the challenge of being disconnected from market demands.

### 2. The Transformation of Master's Education in Chinese Language Education

As economic and cultural cooperation between Central and Eastern Europe and China continues to deepen, the demand for Chinese language professionals has gradually shifted from traditional academic research to a broader range of applied fields. In recent years, Chinese investment in Hungary has significantly increased, especially under the Belt and Road Initiative, leading to deeper economic cooperation between China and Hungary. Major areas of Chinese investment in Hungary include infrastructure projects (e.g., the Hungary–Serbia Railway), energy sectors (e.g., photovoltaic power generation and electrical facilities), manufacturing industries (e.g., automobiles, elec-

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<sup>1</sup> Ye 2021: 181.

<sup>2</sup> Ye 2021: 181.

tronics, and chemicals), financial and service sectors (e.g., Chinese banks and cross-border e-commerce), technological innovation and research (particularly in information technology and artificial intelligence), and cultural education and tourism. The development of these industries has created a demand for cross-disciplinary professionals with Chinese language skills.

In response to these new market demands, Eötvös Loránd University has adjusted its master's programmes, expanding from traditional Sinology to include master's programmes in Chinese language teaching, Chinese teacher education, and 'Chinese+Translation' programmes. Li Yuming (2011) pointed out that it is essential to focus on introducing contemporary China rather than ancient China to Chinese language learners.<sup>3</sup> Eötvös Loránd University has also introduced a master's programme in Chinese Studies, covering developments in Chinese culture, technology, and trade. This transformation not only meets the diversified market demand for Chinese language professionals but also injects new vitality into master's education in Chinese language education. To enhance graduates' employability, master's classes are scheduled to start at 16:00 on weekdays, allowing students to work or intern before 16:00, thereby combining theory with practice and consolidating and deepening their knowledge structure through practical experience.

### **Challenges Facing Master's Education in Chinese Language Education in Central and Eastern Europe**

#### 1. Changes in Market Demand

The demand for Chinese language professionals in Central and Eastern Europe is undergoing significant changes, shifting from a traditional Sinology research-oriented model to a more diversified, application-oriented talent training model. This change is primarily influenced by the following factors. First, with the deepening of the Belt and Road Initiative, economic, cultural, and technological cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European countries has become increasingly close, leading to a significant increase in demand for professionals proficient in Chinese language and culture from enterprises, government agencies, and international organisations. Second, the

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<sup>3</sup> Li 2011: 72.

growth of multinational corporations' investments in Central and Eastern Europe has led to a surge in demand for professionals familiar with the Chinese market, legal environment, and business practices. Therefore, the traditional Sinology master's training model, which primarily focuses on in-depth research in literature, linguistics, history, and philosophy, can no longer meet the growing demand for application-oriented Chinese language professionals.

In response to these market changes, Central and Eastern European universities need to re-examine their master's education systems in Chinese language education, adjusting their talent training objectives to include not only academic research capabilities but also cross-cultural communication skills, business practical skills, translation practice skills, and other multi-faceted abilities. This shift poses new requirements for the curriculum design, teaching models, and practical systems of master's programmes in Chinese language education.

## 2. Curriculum Adjustments

To meet the diversified market demand for Chinese language professionals, the curriculum system of master's programmes in Chinese language education in Central and Eastern Europe needs to be adjusted to enhance students' practical abilities and career competitiveness. Currently, Eötvös Loránd University has added applied courses, such as Chinese language teaching and translation, to its master's programmes to meet the talent demands of different fields. However, the existing curriculum system still faces the following issues.

**Insufficient proportion of practical courses:** Although courses such as Chinese language teaching methods and translation have been added, there is still a lack of internship programmes in collaboration with enterprises and government agencies, resulting in limited opportunities for students to apply their knowledge in real work environments.

**Insufficient interdisciplinary integration:** The current master's curriculum in Chinese language education primarily focuses on linguistics and cultural studies, with a lack of courses in business, international relations, and science communication.

**Insufficient curriculum flexibility:** Some students wish to continue academic research, while others prefer careers in international business or cultural exchange. Therefore, universities could consider adopting a modular curricu-

lum system, allowing students to choose different course combinations based on their career development plans.

### 3. Insufficient Faculty Resources

The transformation of master's education in Chinese language education in Central and Eastern Europe not only requires adjustments to the curriculum system but also places higher demands on faculty resources. However, the current faculty in Chinese language education in Central and Eastern Europe still faces several shortcomings, mainly in the following areas.

**Lack of interdisciplinary faculty:** Most Chinese language teachers come from Sinology research backgrounds. While they possess solid academic foundations in language, literature, and history, they have limited experience in teaching interdisciplinary subjects, such as business, law, and international relations.

**Need for optimised teaching methods:** Some teachers still rely on traditional lecture-based teaching methods when delivering practical courses, resulting in limited hands-on experience for students.

**Limited sources of faculty:** Universities could consider collaborating with Chinese universities to introduce more short-term or long-term visiting teachers or adopt a combination of online and offline teaching models to address the shortage of local faculty.

### 4. Shifts in Student Career Orientation

As the market demand for Chinese language professionals increasingly shifts towards applied fields, the career orientation of master's graduates in Chinese language education has also changed significantly. Traditional academic research is no longer the primary career choice, with more graduates seeking opportunities in enterprises, government agencies, and cultural exchange organisations. Therefore, enhancing students' practical abilities and professional skills has become an important task in master's education in Chinese language education.

First, universities should strengthen cooperation with enterprises and social institutions, establishing school–enterprise collaboration mechanisms to provide students with internship and practical opportunities. For example, partnerships with Chinese enterprises operating in Hungary could offer intern-

ship programmes, allowing students to apply their knowledge in real business environments.

Second, universities could offer career development courses to help students enhance their employability. These courses could cover job search skills, career planning, and cross-cultural communication, helping students better adapt to the international workplace.

Additionally, universities could consider establishing alumni networks, allowing employed graduates to provide career guidance and industry information to current students, further enhancing the career orientation of master's programmes in Chinese language education.

In summary, master's education in Chinese language education in Central and Eastern Europe faces challenges such as changes in market demand, curriculum adjustments, insufficient faculty resources, and shifts in student career orientation. Universities need to adopt systematic reform measures to adapt to the evolving market demands, improve the quality of education, and ensure that graduates possess international competitiveness.

### **Practices and Explorations at Eötvös Loránd University, Hungary**

#### **1. From Traditional Sinology Master's Programmes to the Diversified 'Chinese+' Training Model**

Eötvös Loránd University has adjusted its master's programmes, expanding from traditional Sinology to include master's programmes in Chinese language teaching, Chinese teacher education, and 'Chinese+Translation' programmes. This transformation not only meets the diversified market demand for Chinese language professionals but also injects new vitality into master's education in Chinese language education. At the same time, the university actively incorporates the latest Chinese language education concepts from both domestic and international sources, optimising the curriculum system to meet the career development needs of different students. The university has not only innovated in curriculum design but also introduced more practical and interactive teaching methods, such as case studies and scenario-based teaching, to enhance students' practical application abilities.

## 2. Exploration of the Diversified ‘Chinese+’ Training Model

The Chinese Department at Eötvös Loránd University is currently exploring new directions for master’s education, such as ‘Chinese+Teaching’, ‘Chinese+Translation’, and Chinese Studies (‘Chinese+Contemporary China’). This diversified training model not only broadens students’ career prospects but also provides new ideas for master’s education in Chinese language education. As cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European countries continues to deepen in various fields, the demand for Chinese language professionals with interdisciplinary skills is growing. Therefore, Eötvös Loránd University has not only adjusted its curriculum structure to include contemporary Chinese society and economy but also strengthened industry collaboration. For example, in the Chinese Studies programme, experts from relevant fields are invited to give special lectures to broaden and deepen students’ knowledge.

## 3. The Launch of Joint Training Programmes with Chinese Universities

Eötvös Loránd University has established joint training programmes with Chinese universities such as East China Normal University and Fudan University, further enhancing the quality and internationalisation of its master’s programmes. Through collaboration with Chinese universities, Eötvös Loránd University has not only introduced advanced teaching resources and faculty but also provided students with more international exchange opportunities, enhancing their cross-cultural communication skills. These collaborative programmes include short-term exchanges, joint degree programmes, and online–offline hybrid teaching models, allowing students to receive professional guidance from top Chinese universities. Additionally, the university encourages students to study in China, offering internships and cultural exchange programmes to deepen their understanding of Chinese society and improve their career competitiveness. The university also plans to establish long-term collaboration mechanisms with more Chinese universities, developing joint research projects to provide broader academic and practical platforms for faculty and students.

## Recommendations

### 1. Adjust Curriculum to Include More Applied Courses

To better meet the diversified market demand for Chinese language professionals, the master's education model in Chinese language education in Central and Eastern Europe needs to adjust its curriculum to include more practical and applied courses. In addition to traditional language courses, courses such as Chinese language teaching, translation, business Chinese, cross-cultural communication, and artificial intelligence should be introduced. These courses can help students build a solid foundation in Chinese language while also enhancing the skills needed in practical work environments. In the 'Chinese+Business' direction, the university could invite corporate executives to give special lectures and provide internship opportunities, allowing students to apply their knowledge in real work scenarios. Additionally, in the 'Chinese+Artificial Intelligence' direction, the university could explore courses in natural language processing and data analysis, laying the foundation for future high-end interdisciplinary talent. Furthermore, given China's rapid development in the global economy, technology, and culture, courses related to contemporary Chinese economy, technological innovation, and cultural industries would better align with market demands. Hybrid online-offline teaching models could also be introduced, allowing students to receive instruction from experts at Chinese universities, further improving teaching quality.

### 2. Strengthen Faculty Development

The quality of Chinese language education largely depends on the level of the faculty. Therefore, the transformation of master's education in Chinese language education in Central and Eastern Europe urgently requires high-quality faculty support. Although Eötvös Loránd University has established a training centre for local Chinese language teachers in Central and Eastern Europe, offering regular training sessions that have achieved some success, the region still faces issues such as insufficient faculty numbers and uneven quality. To cultivate Chinese language education experts with international perspectives, faculty development must be strengthened. This could be achieved through deep collaboration with Chinese universities and educational institutions, promoting regular faculty training and teaching exchange programmes to enhance teachers' interdisciplinary teaching abilities. Additionally, to im-

prove local teachers' language proficiency and teaching quality, regular lectures and seminars by domestic and international experts should be organised to promote professional development and internationalise academic research. During holidays, local Chinese language teachers in Central and Eastern Europe could be organised to participate in workshops at Chinese universities, continuously updating their knowledge and improving their teaching abilities. In today's digital and intelligent era, how to empower international Chinese language education with artificial intelligence is also an important topic in the professional development of Chinese language teachers in Central and Eastern Europe.

### 3. Enhance Students' Practical Abilities and Professional Skills

In the context of a growing market demand for Chinese language professionals, in addition to academic research training, master's education in Chinese language education also needs to enhance students' practical abilities and professional skills. To meet societal demands, universities should collaborate with enterprises and industry associations to create more internship and practical opportunities. Through internship programmes, students can translate their knowledge into practical skills while gaining a better understanding of workplace demands, thereby improving their employability. For example, long-term partnerships could be established with Chinese enterprises, multinational corporations, and local companies in Central and Eastern Europe to provide regular internship positions and practical opportunities for students. Additionally, the introduction of case studies and project-based learning can help students learn how to apply Chinese language, translation skills, and business communication knowledge in solving real-world problems. This practice-oriented training model can effectively enhance students' comprehensive abilities, making them more adept in their future careers.

### 4. Explore the Diversified 'Chinese+' Training Model

To further broaden the career prospects of master's graduates in Chinese language education, exploring the diversified 'Chinese+' training model is an important direction for the future development of Chinese language education. Comprehensive universities should leverage their strengths and regional demands to maintain the basic characteristics of international Chinese language education while integrating Chinese language teaching with related

disciplines, developing a joint training model of 'International Chinese Language Education + Related Disciplines'.<sup>4</sup> This training model not only focuses on language teaching but also combines knowledge from other fields to cultivate diversified interdisciplinary talent. Master's programmes in Chinese language education in Central and Eastern Europe could draw on the experience of Eötvös Loránd University in Hungary, exploring combinations such as 'Chinese+Translation', 'Chinese+Teaching', and 'Chinese+Business'. Additionally, to meet the needs of different types of students, Eötvös Loránd University is exploring interdisciplinary talent training directions, such as 'Chinese+Business' and 'Chinese+Science Communication'. This training model can help students broaden their interdisciplinary knowledge beyond language learning, enhancing their career flexibility and competitiveness. For example, 'Chinese+Translation' can train students to become high-end translators between Central and Eastern Europe and China; 'Chinese+Business' provides students with opportunities to enter international enterprises; and 'Chinese+Artificial Intelligence' can cultivate technical talent with Chinese language skills to meet future demands for cross-cultural communication in the technology sector. This interdisciplinary training model not only improves students' employability but also better serves the diversified demand for Chinese language professionals in Central and Eastern Europe.

## Conclusion

The transformation and development of master's education in Chinese language education in Central and Eastern Europe are facing challenges as they shift from traditional Sinology master's programmes to diversified 'Chinese+' training models. In this process, Eötvös Loránd University in Hungary has provided valuable insights and approaches for the future development of Chinese language education in Central and Eastern Europe through curriculum adjustments, faculty development, and the introduction of diversified 'Chinese+' training models. In the future, master's education in Chinese language education in Central and Eastern Europe should further align with market demands, optimise curriculum structures, and enhance students' practical abilities and professional skills to meet the increasingly diversified and specialised global demand for Chinese language professionals.

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<sup>4</sup> Guo 2024: 104.

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