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Chinese Language and Culture Pedagogy at the University of Latvia

Abstract

The article gives a detailed analysis of Chinese language and culture studies at the Department of Asian Studies of the University of Latvia from the foundation of the department in 1991 and the enrolment of first students in 1993 up to the year 2023. The text is divided in six chapters: institutional history; students and graduates; local teaching staff; guest lecturers and Chinese-speaking language teachers; academic mobility; and research and international cooperation.

This is the first in-depth introduction to Latvian Sinology studies in the English language, and its special value lies in the unique perspective of the author (former Sinology student and current associate professor of the Department of Asian Studies) who has witnessed and experienced nearly the entire history of the institutional development. The article combines a historical approach with biographical (at times autobiographical) descriptions, analyses of statistical data, and a personal case study.

Keywords: Department of Asian Studies at the University of Latvia, history of Sinology in Latvia, Chinese language teaching methods, international cooperation in higher education



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摘要

本文详细分析了1991年成立的拉脱维亚大学亚洲研究系，从1993年首次招收汉学专业学生至2023年期间，中国语言文化研究情况。文章共分六部分：机构沿革历史、本科生和研究生、本土教师、客座教师和中文母语教师、学术交流、学术研究和国际合作。

本文首次用英文深入且系统的介绍了拉脱维亚汉学史与研究成果。其独特之处在于作者本人独一无二的视角，作者曾为拉脱维亚大学汉学专业首届本科生和研究生，目前为拉脱维亚大学汉学专业副教授，见证和亲历了拉脱维亚大学汉专业的发展演进历程。文章是历史考证与传记叙述、资料分析与个案研究的结合。

关键词：拉脱维亚大学亚洲研究系；拉脱维亚汉学史；中文教学方法；高等教育国际合作。

Introduction

My experience in Chinese language and culture studies (hereafter Sinology) goes back to 1993, when I began my studies in the first study group to ever enrol in the then Department of Oriental Studies of the University of Latvia (now the Department of Asian Studies) (DASUL, 2022). In 1999, after my graduation from the Master's Programme in Oriental Studies, I took up studies at the University of Cologne, because in Latvia there is no doctoral programme in Sinology. After obtaining a PhD degree, I returned, joined the teaching staff of the Department of Asian Studies of the University of Latvia (hereafter DASUL), and up to now (2023) I have continued my work at the University of Latvia.

At present, there are only two of my colleagues who may have had equally long and similar experiences, but they do not specialise in Sinology. A history professor and specialist of Indonesia, Leons Taivāns was among the founders of the DASUL and is still engaged in academic and teaching

work. My classmate, Agnese Haijima, who first studied Sinology but later went to Japan and wrote her dissertation there is now my colleague and an associate professor in Japanese studies.

Almost 30 years have passed since the beginning of my own academic career and also since the beginning of Sinology studies at the University of Latvia. In the meantime, many teachers have changed, many students have graduated, teaching materials and methods have grown old, and new ones have been taken up. There have been many different cooperation partners and cooperation projects, as well as other activities relating to Sinology studies. My experiences as both a student and a teacher (though from quite different perspectives) can be a truthful witness to all these developments. In order to render correct factual data, I have also consulted archive materials of the university, articles written by our professors in the journal *LU raksti/Acta Universitatis Latviensis* [Scientific Papers of the University of Latvia], published and unpublished teaching reports by visiting Chinese language instructors, as well as some other documents and personal information from my colleagues and classmates. Some data are inferred, deduced, or combined from several factual sources.

Institutional History and Background of Sinology Studies

At present, the Department of Asian Studies of the University of Latvia (hereafter DASUL) is the second largest department in the Faculty of Humanities (after English studies). It was established in the year of the restoration of Latvia's independence (1991), and at that time the department was called the Chair of Oriental Studies (Orientālistikas katedra; Ivbulis, 2012: 7). Our faculty has a long and interesting history. It was established in 1919, the same year as the University of Latvia, as the Faculty of Linguistics and Philosophy. In 1921, it was renamed the Faculty of Philology and Philosophy, and in 1944 the Faculty of Philology. In 1965, foreign language studies were separated, forming the Faculty of Foreign Languages, which became the Faculty of Modern Languages in 2000. In 2008, the Faculty of Philology was renamed the Faculty of Philology & the Art Sciences. However, in 2009 both institutions (the Faculty of Philology and Art Sciences and the Faculty of Modern Languages) were merged, creating the Faculty of Humanities (FMZF, 2022; Krūmiņš, 2004: 29).

In the very beginning there was only the Bachelor's Programme in Chinese language and culture studies (hereafter Sinology), and the whole study process was mainly orientated toward Asian language studies. We had classes in modern and Classical Chinese, as well as in Japanese and Korean. Later, however, it was acknowledged that it was quite impossible to simultaneously master several Asian languages. Therefore, a group of students for specialised Japanology studies was enrolled in 1995, a group of Near East studies (Arabic, Farsi, and Turkish) in 2005, and groups of Korean and Hindi Studies in 2013 (Ivbulis, 2012: 11; LSM, 2013). Each group studied only one Asian language, and over time, increasingly more theoretical courses about culture, history, and literature of the respective regions were added. Hindi, Farsi, and Turkish language teaching was discontinued due to a lack of teachers and new students. At present, there are groups in Chinese, Japanese, Arabic, and Korean studies.

At first, BA studies in Sinology lasted four years and were followed by MA studies in Oriental studies for two years. In 1997, six of us¹ graduated with a BA degree (Šeitere, 1997) and after two years, in 1999, two of us² completed the MA (Krūmiņš, 2004: 226). For a long time, Sinology students started their studies with zero knowledge about China. Only in the last few years have there been some newcomers with prior knowledge of Chinese language. After the adaption of the Bologna Declaration of 1999, the bachelor's programme was shortened to three years. For Chinese studies this meant a decrease in the programme's quality, because in such a short period of time it is quite impossible to obtain proper knowledge and professional skills insuch a complex subject as Chinese civilisation and language.

In 2003, when professor Leons Taivāns took over the leadership of the department, he initiated several changes: the Sinology and Japanology Bachelor's Programmes were incorporated into the Asian Studies Programme, the Near East Subprogramme was added, and in 2006 the whole department was renamed Asian Studies. Later, in the framework of the DASUL, five research centres were established: the Centre for Japanese Studies, the Centre for Southeast Asian Studies, the East Asian Research Centre (AsiaRes), the Centre for Near East and North Africa Studies, and the Centre for Korean Studies.

¹ Evita Bankova, Evita Grase, Agnese Haijima, Dana Rudāka, Rolands Ūdris, and myself.

² Agnese Haijima (at that time with the maiden name – Agnese Iljina) and myself.

Each of them includes several lecturers and professors from the DASUL, who manage the respective subprogrammes and courses and perform research activities related to their respective regions (Department of Asian Studies, 2022). The East Asian Research Centre was especially active during the time of Sinology professor Frank Jochen Kraushaar, who became the director of the DASUL in 2010. The Centre for Korean Studies was founded by visiting professor Seo Jinseok from Korea in 2016 (University of Latvia Library, 2017). During his time Korean language students were enrolled under the subprogramme of Sinology.

In recent years, there have been many newcomers who have taken an interest in Korean culture and language. Therefore now it is planned to separate Korean Studies from Chinese Studies as an independent subprogramme. Both the BA and MA programmes of the DASUL include Chinese, Japanese, Arabic, and Korean language specialisation groups. Thus, in the MA programme, in-depth research into one's selected regional culture and language is possible. This is a unique case in the academic community of the Baltic States. Recently, Associate Professor Kaspars Kļaviņš has taken over as director of the MA Programme in Oriental Studies as well as the lead of the Centre for Korean Studies. Thanks to his efforts, a new international BA Programme of East–West Intercultural Studies has been launched, with the first group of students enrolled in 2021.

Students and Graduates

At first, students were enrolled in the DASUL every second year, but after 2000 the interest and demand for Asian languages rapidly grew, and new groups were formed every year. In 1993, two years after the founding of the DASUL, I, together with 10 other students, was accepted for Sinology Studies. But the university offered only 10 budget places. One student discontinued after the first semester, and as a result we all could study free of charge (now the budget is divided among Sinology, Near East Studies, Japanese and Korean studies, so only 2-3 Sinology students per group can obtain budget places). The first group of students turned out to be very hardworking and with high aspirations. Later, many of my classmates (including Ligita Jurkāne, Dace Liberte, and Dana Rudāka) worked for the Latvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs or Saeima, and currently some (including Evita Grase, Agnese

Haijima, and myself) work as Chinese or Japanese language teachers in Latvian educational institutions.

There were also some very talented and efficient students from later groups, including graduates from both the Bachelor's Programme of Asian Studies as well as from the Master's Programme in Oriental Studies. Many of them (including Georgijs Dunajevs, Ginta Elksne, Diāna Komova, Žanna Musina, Marija Nikolajeva, and Karens Petrosjans) successfully continued academic careers, and others have begun or have already completed PhD studies. Some of the earlier students engaged in educational work. For example, Kaspars Eihmanis, Jūlija Gumiļova, Irina Marinska, Karīna Jermaka, Irina Bezručenko were teachers of the DASUL for many years. The young sinologists are rather active in scientific research, and results can be seen in their publications. A couple of them are listed below:

- (1) Kaspars Eihmanis 'Pārdomas par starpkultūru hermeneitikas metodoloģiju' [Rethinking the Methodological Approaches of Cross-Cultural Hermeneutics] (Eihmanis, 2004). His other articles, for example, about Buddhism are uploaded to the Academia site of the National Cheng Chi University in Taiwan (Academia, 2022)
- (2) Karīna Jermaka 'Ķīniešu (haņ tautības) bēru rituāli [The Burial Rituals of the Han Chinese]' (Jermaka, 2021)
- (3) Marija Nikolajeva 'Latviešu un ķīniešu valodas telpisko adpozīciju analīzes metodoloģija: tēlshēmas un metatietvari [Methodology of Analysis of Latvian and Mandarin Chinese Spatial Adpositions: Image Schemas and Metaframes]' (Nikolajeva, 2016)
- (4) Karens Petrosjans 'Senķīniešu vēsturnieka sniegtās ziņas par Āzijas huņņiem [The Sources of an Ancient Chinese Historian on the Xiongnu]' (Petrosjans, 2015).

It is impossible to enumerate all of those who work as translators and interpreters. For example, Inese Lielmane has translated two modern novels from Chinese into Latvian. Some of the most important translations are listed in my article 'Constructive Evaluation of Literary Translations from Chinese into Latvian Language' (Baltgalve, 2020: 50). Other sinologists, including Jana Daniča, Anastasija Galkina (née Krilova), Marija Jurso, and Madara Smalkā, worked or still work in the Confucius Institute at the University of Latvia as Chinese language teachers or administrative staff. Many of the graduates teach Chinese language in secondary schools or give private les-

sons. Still others have engaged in social or political work related to China. Egils Dzelme and later Aleksandra Grevceva took up the director post of the Asia and Oceania Division at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Arita Karīna Braķe, Edvīns Gajevskis, Krista Muižniece, Laura Pinkena, and others work at the Chinese Embassy.

Young sinologists contribute to bilateral relations of Latvia and China in different ways. Jekaterina Pavlova is the head of the Library of the Baltic Research Centre for East Asian Studies (or AsiaRes), which is part of the National Library of Latvia. Pārsla Dambe and Martin Survillo work in the Chinese Cultural Center of Riga. Jānis Ozoliņš and Aļešja Rogača are professional tour guides for Chinese delegations and tourist groups. Ilona Jevstropova has spent many years in China and has become a Chan Buddhist nun. Now she lives in Riga and gives Chinese language lessons and instructions about Buddhist meditation. Anželika Smirnova has become a well-known TV show host in the People's Republic of China (PRC), and she often uses this possibility to introduce Latvian culture for Chinese people (Čunka, 2016). Regarding graduates, lastly I want to mention Artur Lyubanskiy, who spent many years in China, but after that returned to Latvia and completed his BA studies at the DASUL. Up to now, he is the only student to have written his bachelor's thesis in the Chinese language (Lyubanskiy, 2018).

Since Latvia joined the European Union, there have been increasingly more international students (many via Erasmus exchange) who have taken part in some of our programme's courses or have even graduated from the DASUL. For example, Aleksi Miiika Viljami Nuppula from Finland and Dilge Bengü Özcoşkun from Turkey have completed their BA studies in Sinology, while Elizaveta Klevtcova from Russia, Kaliningrad, Patricija Uļičeva-Kvietkauskā from Ireland, Ermolina Polina from Russia, and Matthew Mark Shaw from Canada are all enrolled full-time in Sinology Studies and are now in their second or third year. Although lectures generally take place in the Latvian language, foreign students are always welcome and receive special advice and homework for individual studies. In addition, starting from the second semester, they can directly take part in Chinese language courses, which are then mainly taught in Chinese or partly in English.

Asian language teachers from the DASUL pay much attention to the attraction of new students from secondary schools and high schools. My colleague, the sinologist Karīna Jermaka, who is now the Head of the Latvian Chinese Studies Association, organises many diverse activities related to Chi-

nese culture and language, in order to arouse interest about China among children and teens. In recent years, I have myself held lectures about Chinese and Tibetan languages and cultures in several schools (e.g., Baldone Secondary School, Plavnieku Gymnasium, and Brāļu Skrindu Atašienes High School), while in the meantime introducing Chinese Studies at the DASUL. Our colleague from the Centre of Near East Studies and expert of Arabic language and culture Ingrīda Kleinhofa organises an annual lecture series titled ‘Small Academy of Asian Studies’ (Mazā Āzijas studiju akadēmija). Lectures are especially designed for pupils of grades 9–12, and the teaching staff of the DASUL give both captivating and useful introductions to different Asian countries, including China (Kleinhofa, 2022).

Local Academic Staff

The first to come up with the idea of setting up a separate department for Asian Studies was professor of Indology Viktors Ivbulis, and he also became the first director of the department. He was joined by three other prominent personalities and Asia specialists: Edgars Katajs, Pēteris Pildegovičs, and Jeļena Staburova. The expert of Chinese and Japanese languages, Edgars Katajs was born in Harbin and had experienced there both Chinese and Japanese rule there. He described his life and work in the autobiographical monograph *Zem desmit valstu karogiem* [Under the flags of Ten States] (Katajs, 2000). His publications are voluminous and include translations of novels and stories of modern Japanese and Chinese literature (into Latvian), commentaries on Chinese idioms, and a monograph about Japanese culture. At the university Edgars Katajs mainly taught subjects about Japanese literature and history.

In 1990s, China still seemed to be a mysterious and exotic place for Latvians, very far and unreachable for the most people. Only two individuals (i.e., Edgars Katajs and Pēteris Pildegovičs) had acquired deep knowledge about Chinese culture and had spent a long time living and working in Chinese society. In newspaper articles about China published by Latvian journalists, there were always many mistakes, and I remember that Edgars Katajs always pointed out and criticised them. Another important contribution to the development of Latvian Sinology is his transcription table of Chinese sounds, which was the first of its kind (Katajs, 1995). In later years, other

sinologists also published their own transcription proposals, which focused more on the specifics of the Latvian language (Staburova, 2006; Pildegovičs, 2010; Baltgalve, 2014).

In the beginning phase, professor of history Jeļena Staburova was also teaching at the DASUL. She invested much effort into developing Sinology and Japanology programmes and acted as the head of the Master's Programme in Oriental Studies. She also held courses on Chinese history and Classical Chinese language. Staburova has published several important monographs in Latvian, including *Balts zirgs nav zirgs jeb Tradicionālā Ķīnas filozofija* [White Horse is Not a Horse or the Traditional Chinese Philosophy] (Staburova, 1995), *Latvija-Ķīna-Taivāna: trīsstūris vai aplis?* [Latvia-China-Taiwan: Triangle or Circle?] (Staburova, 1993), and many more in Russian. In addition, she has also translated two of the most important Chinese Classics from Chinese into Latvian: *Analects of Confucius* (Staburova, 2006) and *Daodejing* (Staburova, 2009). In 2005, she quit her job at the DASUL and established the Confucius Centre (later renamed as the China Studies Centre) at the Riga Stradins University. Now, her daughter Una Aleksandra Bērziņa-Čerenkova, a doctor of social and political sciences with an in-depth specialisation in Sinology, has taken over the management of this institution (Bērziņa-Čerenkova, 2022).

Two very important Latvian sinologists who joined the DASUL at the very beginning were the outstanding professional diplomats and father and son pair Pēteris Pildegovičs and Andrejs Pildegovičs. At the same time, they also worked for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, often representing Latvia in other countries as envoys and ambassadors. Andrejs Pildegovičs was still a young man when he became one of our Chinese language teachers, only four years older than most students. However, he had already mastered the Chinese language and could advise us on this matter very professionally. After some time, he discontinued teaching activities due to the big work load involved in diplomatic missions.

The deepest impression for me and many young sinologists has been left by Pēteris Pildegovičs, who taught Chinese language courses at the DASUL for many years, even up to 2011, when he became director of the Confucius Institute at University of Latvia. Moreover, Pēteris Pildegovičs was the first Ambassador of Latvia in the PRC, and he has also received the highest national award, the Order of the Three Stars, for his great personal contribution to the successful development of mutual relations between Latvia and China.

Pēteris Pildegovičs is the only sinologist who has focused on compiling Chinese–Latvian and Latvian–Chinese dictionaries. In addition, he has also published a voluminous diary-chronicle *My China Story* (Pildegovičs, 2019). While the original text was in Latvian, the book now also has Chinese and English editions.

Another one of our teachers was the young sinologist Ina Forande, who had studied Chinese language at the Faculty of Asian and African Studies of the St. Petersburg University in Russia. In 1997, she took part in the academic project ‘Recommendations for Rendering Chinese Personal Names in Latvian’ (Forande, Gailīte, 1997). However, soon after, she left the university due to family matters, and now she is the manager of a Korean restaurant in Riga. For a couple of years, a part-time teacher was Arnis Altners, who had received MA in philosophy at the University of Latvia and later learned Chinese language at the National Taiwan Normal University. He taught Chinese philosophy and calligraphy.

In 1999, after the obtaining an MA in Oriental studies, I went to Germany for a doctorate and returned only in 2007. In the meantime, some of my classmates and other graduates stayed and worked as lecturers at the DASUL. Here is an alphabetical list (by surname; working years are given in brackets):

- (1) Irina Bezručenko (2007–2013)
- (2) Aleksandrs Dmitrenko (2013)
- (3) Kaspars Eihmanis (2000–2014)
- (4) Julija Gumilova (2009–2017)
- (5) Karīna Jermaka (2014–2022)
- (6) Ligita Jurkāne (2001–2004)
- (7) Evita Kalme (2000–2005)
- (8) Ieva Lapiņa (2009)
- (9) Dana Rudāka (2002–2003)
- (10) Irina Siuhina-Marinska (2007–2014).

Among them, the most outstanding personality is Kaspars Eihmanis, who was in the second sinologists’ group and graduated from MA programme in 2001, together with my classmate Ligita Jurkāne (Krūmiņš, 2004: 226). As one can see in the list above, he worked at the DASUL for 14 years, much longer than anyone else. He developed the general frame of the Asian Studies Bachelor Programme, and his lectures about Chinese philosophy and lit-

erature have left a deep impression in the memories of all the students. Being very talented and erudite himself, Eihmanis was very strict regarding academic research work, and in his time many students' theses were rejected even during their defence.

Kaspars Eihmanis had his own perspective on reality in China and in Latvia, and he boldly expressed his views on various topical issues. His articles and interviews can be found online, for example, 'Bypass Nowhere (Do the Chinese Have a Philosophy at All?)' (2011), 'Education is Not a Virtue That Can Be Observed in Latvia' (2013), and 'To Bow or Not to Bow to the Emperor?' (2018). Since the very beginning, Eihmanis was deeply interested in Buddhist philosophy and presented his analytic wisdom and research results in the form of public lecture. These lectures are now available on the Satori Space and LU Open Minded online platforms (Eihmanis, 2019). It is really a pity that he gave up work at the DASUL and, together with his family, 'emigrated' to Taiwan. Currently, Eihmanis still takes up occasional jobs, while at the same time carrying on with his doctoral studies at the National Chengchi University (Eihmanis, 2022).

Two other teachers whom I would like to point out are Jūlija Gumiļova and Karīna Jermaka. Jūlija Gumiļova finished her BA in 2003 and then spent some years in Taiwan, obtaining an MA from the Ming Chuan University. After returning to Latvia, she took up work as a Chinese language teacher for first year students. Gumiļova never taught any other course except phonetics, but she was really excellent at her subject and always developed new and effective visual and audio teaching methods. All of the students who had attended her Chinese phonetics classes had perfect tones and pronunciation.

Karīna Jermaka was at first my student, but after her graduation from the master's programme in 2012, she soon became my colleague. She teaches mainly modern Chinese language classes and has also many private students. One can even say that she helps raise the new generation of sinologists, motivating them with her own enthusiasm and excitement about Chinese culture and language. In addition, Jermaka organises and participates in a great many activities related to China and acts as an event manager and interpreter at various events organised by the Chinese Embassy and by the Confucius Institute. She is also currently pursuing her doctorate at the Institute of Literature, Folklore, and Art (within the Faculty of Humanities).

My own teaching experience started in 2001 in the Institute of East Asian Studies at the University of Cologne, where I held the position of a research

assistant. My duty was to teach Classical Chinese and to supervise the registration of Chinese language books in the library catalogue. After the defence of the dissertation in 2006, I returned home and started teaching at the DASUL. There were urgent needs for personnel with a PhD degree and also for new courses in the master's programme. After some years, I took over the lead of the master's programme and prepared it for the following accreditation. From 2015 to 2017, I acted as the director of the Centre for Indian Studies and Culture (University of Latvia) and had a grand experience organising the International Yoga Day. I was young and enthusiastic and voluntarily accepted this double administrative workload for which I was not financially compensated. I must admit that it was a very hard period in my life but also a very valuable experience. Moreover, I was able to launch the first Sanskrit language group at the University of Latvia, involving a teacher from India.

However, after a half year of academic research in China at Sichuan University, I understood that my heart's deepest desire is to teach Asian languages and to do research about Chinese and Tibetan cultures. Evidently, this desire was genetically inherited, because my mother was also a lecturer of the university, and my grandfather was a high school teacher. Thus, I gave up all administrative duties and invested more effort into academic projects related to Chinese classics, traditional and modern Chinese literature, Buddhist studies, Tibetan language, and Sanskrit literature, as well as into teaching, translating, and interpreting activities. At the moment, I am working on the compilation of a *Tibetan Language Textbook* and on the translation and commentaries of the Chinese *Book of Changes* (Yi jing 易经).

Visiting Professors and Chinese-Speaking Teachers

First of all I would like to mention the Chinese language and literature specialist professor Frank Jochen Kraushaar from Germany. He worked in the DASUL for more than 10 years (2005–2019). Originally he was a visiting professor but then mastered the Latvian language and was elected as a permanent staff member. I met him for the first time at the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich during my qualification studies. He had just obtained his PhD degree and was teaching Chinese poetry. In the beginning of his career, Kraushaar focused on traditional poetry but later also on contemporary

and online poetic works. He has published a wide range of research works on diverse topics, including *Internationalization of Higher Education in Latvia* (a monograph together with Maija Veide), 'Eerie Parties: Ghosts and Shaman in Li He (790–816) "Songs on Magic Strings"', 'Imprint of Civilization: Book Culture in Literary China (AD 900–1900)', and 'Neoklassizistische Cyberlyrik im China Netz' (DFG, 2021).

Kraushaar was very active in international cooperation with sinologists from other Baltic states, Germany, and Taiwan. He has worked on many academic projects, organised local and international conferences, and acted as editor of Sinology journals. He had a definite vision regarding the development of Far East studies at the University of Latvia and implemented some changes while the head of the DASUL (2010–2015). In electronic mass media, one can find interviews with Kraushaar about actual social and cultural topics related to contemporary China, including 'Beijing Olympics: A Guide to the Language of Symbols' (Kraushaar, 2008) and 'The Red Dragon Is Not Really Red' (Siliņa, 2021). He does not take into account what others might think or say but always openly expresses his views. Kraushaar has given a wide range of guest lectures at the Latvian Academy of Culture, Tallinn University, the University of Trier, and the University of Hamburg, and now he is a guest professor at the University of Innsbruck.

There have not been many visiting professors who have held lectures in the DASUL, because financial resources have always been rather limited. However, it is possible to name a few. In the very beginning, the DASUL had a close cooperation with Scandinavian universities, for example the University of Copenhagen's Nordic Institute of Asian Studies and Stockholm University's Department of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies. Accordingly, at first Torbjörn Lodén, professor of Chinese language and culture from Stockholm University, was invited. He was followed by Rotermund Hartmut Otto Walter, professor of Chinese and Japanese Studies from Germany (2008–2009); Mark Gamsa, professor of Chinese history and literature from Tel Aviv University (2011); Helmolt Vittinghoff, professor of Sinology from the University of Cologne (2012); and Wang Baohua 王葆华, professor of Chinese literature from South China Normal University (2018).

At this point I would like to tell a little more about Professor Wang Baohua. The usual practice in the DASUL is that theoretical subjects about Asian literature, religion, history, and culture are covered by local specialists, and native speakers are appointed only for language classes. However,

already at a very early stage of my sinologist career, and even later – during my MA and PhD studies – I had a ‘dream’ to listen to lectures in Chinese by a Chinese professor. At first, it was rather impossible due to a lack of Chinese language skills, but also later there was no such opportunity. For many reasons, it is not common for European universities to invite Chinese professors to give regular theoretical lectures. Only when I became a teacher myself could I fulfil this dream for my students. In close cooperation with the Confucius Institute of our university, we applied to Hanban for a special academic exchange project. After hard and lengthy efforts, in the winter term of 2018, Professor Wang Baohua finally arrived in Latvia. He spent two months at the DASUL, giving specialised lectures about Chinese language and literature for advanced Sinology students.

Starting from the second semester, Chinese language classes at the DASUL are usually taken over by Chinese teachers. During the time of my own studies, there were two teachers: Mr Xian Shizhen 鮮軾振 from National Taiwan Normal University and Ms He Jie 何杰 from Nankai University (PRC). Xian Shizhen was a very hard-working and diligent man, and everybody had a good impression of him. However, He Jie seemed rather strange to us young people. She did not have a precise and methodological way of teaching but often just talked about communism and taught us songs of Mao Zedong. I attended her lectures after my return from exchange studies in Taiwan, and she kept repeating that it was impossible to understand my Taiwanese Chinese speech.

After his return to Taiwan, Xian Shizhen published an article ‘Latuoweiya jiu yue’ 拉脱维亚九月 [Nine Months in Latvia], where he described his experience in this ‘snowy’ country (鮮軾振, 1996). He Jie, for her part, wrote a complete monograph about her impressions in Latvia, titled ‘Wo de yangchadui: meili Boluodihai’ 我的洋插队：魅力波罗的海 [My Trip Abroad: Charming Baltics] (何杰, 2018). However, this book should be considered more as a fictional work, for there are too many imaginative episodes and factual inaccuracies. Thereafter, the Ministry of Education of the PRC regularly sent Chinese language instructors to teach Chinese at the DASUL, including Mr Yu Congyang 于丛扬 from Beijing Language and Culture University (1998–2002), Ms Wang Shan 王珊 from Xi’an International Studies University (2002–2004), Ms Zhang Junling 张俊玲 from Jiaying University (2005–2007), and Ms Cui Yanlei 崔艳蕾 from the Renmin University of China (2006–2007).

Wang Yingjia 王英佳 from Wuhan University should be mentioned in particular. She was a Russian language specialist, had an excellent relationship with students, and demonstrated an effective cooperation with colleagues. As such, her contract was extended, and she stayed for two two-year terms (2007–2010). She was followed by three other officially appointed teachers from the PRC: Ms Zhang Hong 张红 from Nankai University (2007–2009), Ms Wang Yeshu 王烨姝 from the Changchun University of Science and Technology (2009–2011), and Ms Fan Li 樊莉 from the Anyang Institute of Technology (2011–2013). Students were not very happy with the teaching methods of Ms Fan Li, and also there were many newcomers, so having just one language teacher was no longer sufficient. Therefore, another Chinese teacher was recruited in parallel – Ms Li Manlan 李满楠, who was already living in Latvia and was well acquainted with the needs of Western students and with the Latvian environment. She worked for three years (2012–2014).

After the founding of the Confucius Institute at the University of Latvia in 2011, all subsequent teachers were invited through it. A very professional, communicative, and hard-working teacher was Ms Wang Qiongzi 王琼子 from Huanggang Normal University. She first came in 2013 and stayed for two years (which is the usual term for Chinese language instructors). However, in 2018, she was again invited and continued teaching at the DASUL for two more years, until 2020. In addition to her work at Huanggang Normal University, she is now also enrolled in doctoral studies. In between Ms Wang's two stints, we invited Mr Pan Junwu 潘军武 from South China Normal University, who worked here from 2016 to 2018. I expected that students, who were mainly girls, would be pleased to have a male teacher for a change and to have the chance to hear different pronunciations and lexica. However, this did not turn out to be a very successful case, because students could not get used to his strict critiques and modernised teaching methods. The last teacher to be mentioned is Ms Bai Bingyu 白冰玉, also from South China Normal University, who has been teaching our students since 2020. Despite the fact that due to the COVID-19 pandemic lectures at the time took place online, all students were very satisfied, and Bai Bingyu expressed a sincere wish to come to Latvia personally, as soon as the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs of Latvia would issue her a visa.

All of the Chinese language instructors who have taught at the DASUL have written detailed reports describing their impressions, experiences, difficulties, and teaching methods while working with Latvian students. These

manuscripts are stored in the archives of the Chinese Embassy and of the Confucius Institute. Some of the instructors have even published articles in academic journals about specifics of teaching the Chinese language to Latvians, for example, *Research and Exploration of Chinese Teaching in Latvia* 拉脱维亚视阈下的拉脱维亚与中国研究 (journal edited by Shang Quanyu 尚劝余, 2016) and article ‘Analysis of Grammatical Errors in Written Texts by Latvian Students of Chinese as a Foreign Language’ (Wang Qiongzhi 王琼子, 2020).

Teaching Process, Materials, and Methods

Chinese language acquisition in the Bachelor’s Programme of Asian Studies starts with two separate courses: Chinese Language Phonetics and Chinese Characters. General language courses (e.g., Chinese I, Chinese II) begin only in the second semester and include a complex training of all skills (i.e., reading, writing, speaking, and listening). During MA studies, general Chinese language courses are continued, but in addition there are specialised courses of Written Translation, Consecutive Translation, and Literary Language. For many years, newcomers were first taught by local teachers, who could better introduce the basics of the Chinese language. However, in recent years, due to the fact that most students already have had some experience with Chinese language and culture, native speakers start teaching conversation classes already in the first semester. Generally, language classes are taught on a shared basis, both by Latvians and by Chinese. Grammar, text translation, and literary language courses are the responsibility of local teachers, but all other aspects (especially conversation and written composition) are covered by native-Chinese-speaking teachers.

In the 1990s, the library of the faculty had hardly any books about Chinese culture. There were only some outdated publications from the Soviet era. The first textbook that we used for studies of the Chinese language was *Jichu Hanyu Keben* 基础汉语课本, which was in Russian. However, mostly we learned from lecture notes and copied materials. Jeļena Staburova taught us Classical Chinese, and we exercised writing characters on the blackboard. Ina Forande held classes in a specially equipped auditorium for learning phonetics where everybody sat in a separate box with headphones and repeated phrases and sentences after the teacher or after the tape recorder.

Pēteris Pildegovičs mainly taught text translation, and in his lessons involved analysing excerpts from newspapers and magazines about current events. His own experiences and stories from China were especially interesting and motivated us greatly.

Our first native Chinese teacher, Xian Shizhen from National Taiwan Normal University, taught modern and Classical Chinese; he used Taiwanese textbooks with full form Chinese characters. I learned simplified characters only during my MA studies. That is why I got used to traditional characters from the very beginning, and perhaps that is one of the reasons why my later research focused on Chinese Classics and traditional Chinese literature. At first Mr Xian used *Guoyu Huihua* 國語會話 as the basic teaching material, but later he added the textbook *Xinxuan Guangboju* 新選廣播劇, which also had tape recordings. In this way we could improve our listening and understanding skills and learn about Chinese literary trends as well. In Classical Chinese we read idiom stories and fragments from the *Four Books* (*Sishu* 四書). In addition, Mr Xian gave us many speaking, writing, and translation exercises (Xian, 1996: 13).

Teachers from the PRC at first used the following textbooks: *Sucheng Hanyu Chuji Jiaocheng* 速成汉语初级教程 and *Qiaoliang: Shiyong Hanyu Zhongji Kecheng* 桥梁：实用汉语中级课程 (Yu, 2002: 2). Classes were enhanced with CD and DVD audio and visual materials, documentaries, and feature films, as well as with interactive knowledge-based games and in-class competitions, Chinese folk songs, and popular songs. Other teachers used their own compilations of teaching materials from different textbooks, based on the necessities and knowledge levels of each group and each student.

When I started teaching at the DASUL, we decided that utilising unified teaching materials would be of a great advantage for bachelor's students, and we started to use *Xin Shiyong Hanyu Keben* 新实用汉语课本 for all groups. However after some years, teachers noticed that many topics were out of date and replaced it with a newer textbook, *Boya Hanyu* 博雅汉语, which is used still today. Chinese teachers also use *HSK Biaozhun Jiaocheng* HSK 标准教程, which has standard lexica, grammar, and topics covered on the HSK exams. For the MA students different materials are used, according to the interests and levels of each group. Furthermore, they are often asked to write essays about various topics in order to develop composition skills. In conversations they learn to express their own views and attitudes. Sometimes MA students help in the faculty library to register new Chinese books. This

is a very good bibliographic exercise that can develop both reading and comprehension skills and enhance their background knowledge about Chinese literary tradition and sources.

Each teacher has, of course, a different approach to teaching and a different attitude to students. For example, Frank Kraushaar, who had a Central European educational background, used to hold lectures in the form of seminars and discussions, in order to shape students' critical thought and scientific perspectives. Kaspars Eihmanis put more emphases on the proper understanding of scientific research methods and on the comparison of Chinese and Western ideas. On his exams students had to explain core concepts of Chinese culture with great detail and in correlation with historical and social backgrounds. A repetition of standard phrases and common assumptions was not accepted. Karīna Jermaka has developed many effective methods for learning language along with social culture and art elements (drawing in tongue twisters, interesting facts about traditional festivals, and modern life). She attracts students with diverse activities, practical exercises, and visual and interactive materials, but she also assigns a lot of homework.

As for myself, I mainly hold lectures about Chinese literature, culture, and history, where I try to tell and visually show students my own experience in China and with Chinese people. Lectures are supplemented with photos, pictures, charts, and video materials. Students are required to actively participate, for example to answer questions, to translate words or sentences, and to express their attitudes. When a group is small enough, half of the lectures are organised in the form of a seminar, and then students have to prepare presentations, write essays, or carry out group work. In translation and interpreting courses for master's students, actual issues are taken as bases. Sometimes students are asked to individually choose the texts (or video recordings), for example, those that could be useful for their research. Regular homework and interim tests are the rule. At the end of each semester, I always distribute a questionnaire for each course, asking students to express their opinions about the respective course in an anonymous form.

Concerning theoretical lectures, nowadays, the main problem is not a lack of textbooks and materials (like in 1990s) but rather the surplus of information sources (mainly electronic media). Therefore, students must learn to filter the information according to objective and academic criteria. Regarding language lessons, a serious problem is the different levels of students. There are always some who have talent and are very successful in

language learning, but others are not so gifted, have learning difficulties, do not know how to complete homework individually, are lazy, or do not even regularly attend class. In recent years, there have been groups of first year students in which some individuals had already learned Chinese for two or three years, while others had only learned for a few months, and still others who had had no knowledge at all. In parallel to their studies at the DASUL, some diligent students regularly attend classes at the Confucius Institute, and their language skills improve much more quickly. Teachers have tried various ways to solve this problem: they have differentiated difficulty levels of the homework, given additional homework for some students, divided students into several groups, and held lectures at different times; at times, even extra lectures are arranged. Better students are sometimes allowed to attend classes of more advanced language groups, and some BA students have even successfully attended MA classes.

Over time, new teaching methods have been developed. Lately, seminars, workshops, and .ppt presentations have become the norm. Teachers focus not so much on the quantitative knowledge of students but instead give more effort to improve their practical and autodidactic skills. In this way, students cannot only profit from learning new information but can also develop their academic skills and competences by themselves. Online language learning tools, .ppt presentations, different types of software, and interactive internet sites are put in use increasingly more often.

In addition to the compulsory lectures, teachers and students organise and participate in many extracurricular activities relating to Chinese language and culture. The Chinese Bridge Competition 汉语桥比赛 has been organised annually by the Confucius Institute (since 2004). The Chinese Language Salon 汉语沙龙 has taken place at either the university or the Chinese Cultural Centre bimonthly (since 2008). The Chinese Talent Show 才艺大赛 (since 2016) and Video Competition 视频比赛 (since 2017) have been organised by Karīna Jermaka and the Latvian Chinese Studies Association every year.

Academic Mobility, Research, and International Cooperation

Starting with us as the very first group of students, there have been rather many opportunities to continue Chinese language studies in China. After

graduation from the bachelor's programme, my classmate and I were offered scholarships for exchange studies in either the PRC or Taiwan (at National Taiwan Normal University). Two of us went to Taiwan, but all of the others went to the PRC. Later, scholarships from the PRC's Ministry of Education and Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs were available each year, and most students who wanted to improve their language skills in a Chinese-language environment were able to do that. Since the foundation of the Confucius Institute, those who attend classes there can also apply for scholarships offered by the Confucius Institute. Occasionally, there are also other opportunities, for example the Erasmus Plus Program or European scholarships, to study in China. Especially Taiwanese institutions, but later also those in the PRC, gave preference to those students who wanted to continue their academic careers, not only further learn the language. In recent years, there have been increasingly more people who apply to MA and even PhD programmes in China (for example, Aleksandra Grevceva, Diāna Komova, Žanna Musina, Anželika Smirnova). However, since the beginning of the pandemic, exchange studies took place only in online format. Students were very satisfied with online lectures by Chinese teachers. However, they still greatly lacked live Chinese language practice. In my opinion, for advanced students the daily environment is even more important than official language classes.

Young sinologists also accept offers for exchange studies at Central European and Scandinavian universities. After my MA studies, I myself applied for a DAAD scholarship and took up qualification studies at the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich (1999–2001). In recent years, rather many students have applied for Erasmus Mundus scholarships (18 students of the DASUL received this scholarship from 2015 to 2021). It must be said that there are more opportunities to use Chinese on a daily basis in Central European countries than in Latvia. In the last few years, our teachers and professors have also used Erasmus Plus and other mobility programmes to apply for guest lectures in other universities, for example at Beijing Language and Culture University, South China Normal University, and others.

Sinology professors of the DASUL have always been active in international cooperation and academic projects. A very successful, long-term cooperation project is the East Asian Research Centre Reading Room in the National Library of Latvia (LNB, 2022). It was initiated by Frank Kraushaar in 2014. Libraries and institutions from different countries donate and send valuable publications about the culture, literature, history, and languages of

Far East countries every year. Books are mainly in Chinese, English, Japanese, and Korean, but some are in Latvian and Russian. Several cooperation partners (alphabetically listed below) are involved in this project (LU, 2014):

- (1) Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation
- (2) Embassy of Japan in Latvia
- (3) Embassy of the PRC in Latvia
- (4) Japan Association of Private University Libraries
- (5) Japan Foundation and Japan Publishers Association for Cultural Exchange
- (6) Korea Foundation
- (7) National Central Library of Taiwan and its Center for Chinese Studies
- (8) Press and Publications Administration of the PRC
- (9) Taipei Mission
- (10) Window of Shanghai Project of the PRC and Shanghai Library.

The AsiaRes Reading Room is also a site for specialised events, the aim of which is to acquaint Latvian society with the cultures of East Asian countries, as well as with the newest academic research activities about Asia. Both local specialists from the DASUL and foreign scientists from Europe and Asia take part in these events (Baltgalve, 2014). In the scope of this project, the National Library of Latvia hosts many lectures and other activities related also to Chinese culture: exhibitions of Chinese paintings, workshops of Chinese calligraphy and paper-cutting, Chinese tea ceremonies, performances, discussions on contemporary Chinese documentary movies, Chinese and Tibetan language seminars, and lectures about Chinese poetry and about Chinese Classics.

In 2017, Frank Krauhaar together with Kaspars Eihmanis organised an international lecture series: 'Island of Faith: Buddhism and Buddhist Teachings in Taiwan'. The prominent Buddhist teachers Lin Chen-kuo and Huimin Bhikshu were invited to introduce a Latvian audience to the meditation practices and activities of Buddhists in Taiwan (Zilberts, 2017). The DASUL is a member of the Baltic Alliance for Asian Studies (BAAS), and there is an active cooperation in the form of guest lectures, conferences, and common publications among sinologists of the three Baltic states. The 3rd BAAS conference was held at the University of Latvia in 2018, and the 5th BAAS conference, 'Asia in Transition: Tradition as the Source of Change', was held at the Tallinn University on September 23–25, 2022 (Peets, 2021).

My own major projects have been related to literary translation and the compiling of teaching materials. Two textbooks *Mūsdienu ķīniešu valodas pamati* [Basics of the Modern Chinese Language] (2014) and *Ievads senķīniešu valodā* [Introduction to Classical Chinese] (2016) and the anthology of *Mūsdienu ķīniešu stāsti un esejas* [Contemporary Chinese Stories and Essays] were published in 2018 with the support of the Taipei Mission. Currently, I am working on a Tibetan language textbook, and this project is supported by the Embassy of the PRC in Latvia. The DASUL strongly motivates graduate students to participate academic projects. That is why in the compilation of the teaching material *Introduction to Classical Chinese* and the translation of *Contemporary Chinese Stories and Essays* I also involved Sinology students from the Master's Programme in Oriental Studies.

Department members are usually elected for a six-year term, and once per term it is possible to take an academic vacation. In 2013, I received a Taiwan Fellowship scholarship from the Taiwan Ministry of Foreign Affairs to research Chinese short prose of the Six Dynasties period (220-589 CE) at Academia Sinica, and in 2018, I participated in Understanding China Program (through the Confucius Institute). The latter research took place at Chengdu University, for which I translated the body text of the *Book of Changes* into Latvian and wrote preliminary commentaries. After completing both researches, I published several articles, including 'Ķīniešu stāstošās prozas (sjaošuo 小說) jēdzieniskā problemātika [Problematic of the Chinese Narrative Prose Concept *Xiao Shuo* 小說]' (2015), 'Vārds kā simbols ķīniešu „Pārmaiņugrāmatā” [The Word as a Symbol in Chinese “Book of Changes]” (2019), 'Literāro tekstu tulkojumi no ķīniešu valodas [Translations of Literary Texts from Chinese into Latvian]' (2020), and 'Word ZHEN 貞 in the “Book of Changes”: Deconstruction Approach' (2020). The research on the *Book of Changes* is still ongoing. Every year, with the support of the Embassy of the PRC, open seminar series are organised, where I offer a detailed introduction about each hexagram. In addition, practical exercises of eight trigram palm (*baguazhang* 八卦掌) are held, as well. In this way the teaching of *Changes* (*yixue* 易学) can be explored in both theoretical and practical forms.

Since the establishment of the Confucius Institute in 2011 and the Chinese Cultural Centre in 2017, our teachers have maintained a close cooperation with these two institutions. Teachers hold lectures and practical seminars about Chinese language, literature, and culture there, and students often

help as interpreters or volunteers for different events. Teachers and students of the DASUL assist the Confucius Institute in organising celebrations of traditional Chinese festivals (e.g., Mid-Autumn Festival and Spring Festival), concerts, performances, and other activities. Teachers participate in the Chinese Bridge Competition as members of the jury. Chinese language specialist Karīna Jermaka, who is also the head of the Latvian Chinese Studies Association, has an especially good and productive cooperation with Confucius Institute and Chinese Embassy. Many of her private students attend classes at the Confucius Institute and always rank first in the Chinese Bridge Competition.

Other cooperation partners of the DASUL in respect to Sinology include the International Confucian Association, Beijing International Chinese College, Beijing Foreign Studies University, Lanzhou University of Technology, and Northeastern University. In parallel with studies and work at the university, our teachers and graduates also work as translators and interpreters; they have occasional job contracts with translation agencies, including SIA Nordtext, Skrivanek Baltic, Linearis Translations Ltd., and others. In comparison to experts in other Asian languages, for sinologists there are many opportunities to develop themselves in research and translation work, as well as in other kind of academic and social activities.

Conclusions

The DASUL was founded in 1991, but in 1993, the first group of Sinology students was formed. Since then, the DASUL has developed and expanded greatly. In the beginning, there were only 10 students, and new groups were formed only each second year. Now there are Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, and Korean specialisation groups every year, and the number of students varies from 15 to 25 in each of them.

Many young sinologists (i.e., graduates of the bachelor's and master's programmes of the DASUL) have successful careers and are active in education, culture, and politics. They contribute to the promotion of relations between China and Latvia as Chinese language teachers, officers of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and of the Chinese Embassy, tour guides, interpreters, translators, librarians, and leading managers in international cultural institutions.

A certain number of the graduates continue further academic studies and research in MA and PhD programmes, both in Latvia and in China.

The teaching staff of the DASUL consists of visiting and local language teachers, lecturers, assistant professors, associate professors, and full professors. Most outstanding sinologists of the country have worked as Sinology professors at the DASUL, among them Pēteris Pildegovičs, Jeļena Staburova, Edgars Katajs, Kaspars Eihmanis, and others. Ten Sinology teachers have been former graduates. Visiting professors from European, Chinese, and other universities have been invited, among them Torbjörn Lodén from Sweden, Frank Jochen Kraushaar (who was later elected as a full professor) from Germany, Wang Baohua from the PRC, and others.

In the span of 30 years, more than 20 visiting native-Chinese-speaking teachers have worked at the DASUL. Yu Conyang, Wang Yingjia, and Wang Qiongzhi could be mentioned as the best ones. All of them have written detailed reports, describing their impressions, experiences, difficulties, and teaching methods while working with Latvian students. These manuscripts are stored in the archives of the Chinese Embassy and of the Confucius Institute. Some of the native-Chinese-speaking teachers have published articles in academic journals about specifics of the teaching the Chinese language to Latvians.

Sinology studies at the DASUL consist of theoretical lectures about different aspects of Chinese civilization and of practical language lessons. The former are usually covered by local teachers, but language courses are taught on a shared basis. Several textbooks have been used for Chinese language studies, including *Guoyu Huihua* 國語會話, *Xinxuan Guangboju* 新選廣播劇, *Sucheng Hanyu Chuji Jiaocheng* 速成汉语初级教程, *Qiaoliang: Shiyong Hanyu Zhongji Kecheng* 桥梁：实用汉语中级课程, and *Xin Shiyong Hanyu Keben* 新实用汉语课本. At present, bachelor's students basically learn from two books: *Boya Hanyu* 博雅汉语 and *HSK Biaozhun Jiaocheng* HSK 标准教程. Classes are enhanced with audio and video materials, documentaries, and feature films, as well as with interactive knowledge-based games, in-class competitions, and Chinese songs. For MA students, teachers mostly compile teaching materials from different sources, taking into account actual social and cultural issues, as well as the needs and knowledge levels of the students.

There are also some problematic issues regarding Sinology and Chinese language studies. Regarding theoretical lectures, in 1990s there was a lack of

materials about China, but nowadays, on the contrary, there is a surplus of information sources. Therefore, an emphasis must be put making correct choices when choosing information sources. Regarding language lessons, a serious problem is the different levels of students. Teachers have tried various way to solve this problem (e.g., they have differentiated difficulty levels for homework, given additional homework, divided students into several groups, held lectures at different times, and arranged extra lectures).

All students and teachers who are ready and wish to work, research, or study in China are able to receive financial support and fulfil their desires. There are different kinds of mobility programmes and scholarships both for students and teachers (e.g., Erasmus Mundus, Erasmus Plus, Chinese Government scholarships, scholarships from the Confucius Institute, and the Taiwan Fellowship). In addition, there are many opportunities for sinologists to develop themselves in academic research, interpreting and translation work, and different kinds of cultural and social activities.

In recent years, since the COVID-19 pandemic, many academic activities and international conferences offer onsite as well as online participation. Online format is a good chance to invite participants from far-away countries, who perhaps would not have been able to attend the event in person. However, on-site activities offer more intense contact and discussions with each other, as well as a daily Chinese language and culture environment for students.

Latvian sinologists are largely involved in international cooperation. A major long-term cooperation project among several institutions from Latvia and European and Asian countries is the East Asian Research Centre Reading Room in the National Library of Latvia. Moreover, there is an active cooperation in the form of guest lectures, conferences, and common publications among sinologists of the three Baltic states. In Latvia, a close and successful cooperation has been developed with the Chinese Embassy, Chinese Cultural Centre, Confucius Institute, and Taipei Mission. In the international field, Latvian sinologists have contacts with Academia Sinica, Beijing Foreign Studies University, Beijing International Chinese College, Chengdu University, the International Confucian Association, the Lanzhou University of Technology, the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich, Northeastern University, South China Normal University, Stockholm University, the University of Copenhagen, and many other higher education institutions.

Over the past 30 years, Sinology at the University of Latvia has developed rapidly. As new generations of young sinologists are born, they become involved in academic research, as well as in strengthening social, cultural, and political ties between Latvia and China. However, in my opinion, most Western students, and even PhD graduates and teachers, are rather low-level specialists. Only when newly enrolled Sinology students will *a priori* possess speaking, reading, and writing skills in Modern Chinese language (just like those who are enrolled, for example, in Spanish, Russian, or German Studies) and only when all teachers (including local Latvian teachers and visiting professors from other European countries) will be able to lecture fluently in Chinese and write their articles in Chinese can it be considered a proper start for specialised and professional Sinology studies. Then bachelor's and master's students will be able to analyse Chinese language in depth and to really focus on studies of Chinese culture, history, and literature, combining original sources in Classical Chinese and Modern Standard Chinese with research works in Western languages.

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