

Course Evaluation Report

EAS251 — Bachelor Thesis in China Studies (Spring 2024)

The purpose of this evaluation is to assess the design, delivery, and overall effectiveness of the course EAS251 — Bachelor Thesis in China Studies, offered during the Spring 2024 semester.

Professor Guowen Shang, the course main instructor, provided an extensive and well-structured set of materials, including the course description, reading list, teaching plan, lecture slides, final examination, student feedback, and the instructor's self-evaluation. These resources offered a comprehensive and detailed understanding of the course's objectives, structure, and implementation process.

Furthermore, Professor Shang kindly arranged a dedicated Zoom meeting with me (2025-08-19), during which he addressed several specific questions regarding the course in a clear and thorough manner. The present evaluation is based primarily on the materials and information described above.

1. Overall Course Design

EAS251 is the bachelor thesis course offered in the final semester of the Chinese BA program. In contrast to earlier courses such as KIN101–104, which focus primarily on language and cultural knowledge, this course emphasizes both the development of theoretical literacy and the cultivation of integrated application skills. This dual focus is clearly reflected in the two main objectives stated in the syllabus:

First, to provide students with theoretical knowledge about the Chinese language as well as Chinese culture and society; Second, to train students in critical reading and academic writing, enabling them to critically engage with various academic texts and to produce a bachelor thesis that adheres to academic conventions.

A bachelor thesis is generally regarded as both the culmination and the advancement of undergraduate studies, which makes EAS251 one of the most challenging courses for Chinese BA students. At the same time, the course also places high demands on instructors: they must be able to identify students' weaknesses, determine the key training priorities and appropriate

teaching methods, and offer targeted — even personalized — guidance based on the specific needs of each student.

2. Teaching and Learning Methods

The course consists of two main components: thematic lectures and methodology lectures/seminars. The thematic lectures, delivered by three professors from the Chinese program during the initial stage of the course, are intended to familiarize students with specific research areas and to assist them in identifying research topics for their bachelor theses. The methodology lectures and seminars are designed to introduce students to academic research methods and to provide training in academic writing. This overall structure is well-conceived and closely aligned with the two core training objectives outlined in the syllabus.

Thematic lectures cover a wide range of topics across multiple research fields, including Chinese sociolinguistics, modern Chinese grammar research, Chinese philosophy and intellectual history, as well as discourse analysis theories and methods applied to Chinese studies. These lectures not only provide students with theoretical knowledge of the Chinese language, culture, and society, but also broaden their academic horizons, thereby enabling them to identify research topics of genuine interest.

The lectures are delivered by three professors from the Chinese program, each focusing on areas closely related to their own research expertise. This arrangement ensures both breadth and depth, as the instructors are able to integrate their own research findings into the lectures and convey their passion for scholarly inquiry — an enthusiasm that often inspires students. Furthermore, students who are motivated by these lectures frequently select research areas that align with their supervisors' specializations, which in turn facilitates the supervision process for their theses.

The methodology lectures and seminars, conducted entirely by Professor Shang, are carefully designed in both content and training methods. The reading list includes several classic works on academic writing, such as *The Practice of Social Research*. Key topics covered in these sessions include: identifying and presenting research questions, structuring a bachelor thesis,

conducting a literature review and adopting an academic style, as well as writing the results, discussion, and conclusion sections. Together, these topics span the entire process of academic thesis writing, systematically introducing research methods and comprehensively enhancing students' academic writing skills.

Both the thematic lectures and the methodology lectures/seminars take into account students' practical needs, ensuring strong applicability. For example, the session on “Academic Literature and Library Search” equips students with efficient strategies for locating suitable reference materials. The “General Recommended Titles/Topics” list, along with an overview of past bachelor thesis topics from the Chinese program at the University of Bergen (covering 120 theses from 2013 to 2021), provides students with a concrete understanding of the thesis requirements from the very beginning of the semester. In lectures by Professor Zhao and Professor Shang, exemplary theses from previous cohorts are also shared. Since the authors of these works were once at a similar academic level, they serve to reduce students' sense of intimidation and to inspire new ideas.

The sequence of lectures follows a “theory first, methods later” structure, which matches students' actual learning needs. The early theoretical lectures enable students to identify suitable and personally engaging research topics, while the later “methods” sessions provide practical tools for research and writing, as well as solutions to challenges that may arise during the writing process. Furthermore, the course schedule allocates four hours per week in the initial stage, then reduces to two hours per week later on — a structure that allows students to devote more focused time and energy to thesis writing.

In addition to the main lectures and seminars conducted by the instructors, the course concludes with two final seminars consisting of oral presentation sessions. In these sessions, students present their research projects and receive valuable feedback from both the instructors and their peers. This component not only helps to foster critical thinking, but also forms an integral part of students' academic training. Notably, the seminars are scheduled on April 29 and May 6, while the thesis submission deadline is June 3 — an interval of approximately four

weeks. This arrangement allows students ample time to incorporate the feedback they receive, refine their work, and ultimately enhance the quality of their theses.

3. Compulsory Assignments

The compulsory assignments for this course include two supervision meetings during the process of writing the term paper, as well as an oral presentation on the bachelor's thesis. Advance notices for these activities are posted on the learning platform, outlining clear deadlines and detailed content requirements. For instance, students must submit a draft of their term paper prior to each supervision meeting to ensure that the guidance provided is focused and effective. Correspondence records between the instructor and students suggest that this approach to communication is both effective and well-received, a view further supported by the course evaluation results.

4. Assessment and Results

The main assessment for this course is a supervised bachelor's thesis of approximately 5,000 words on a self-chosen topic.

Clear evaluation criteria are outlined in the *Sensorveiledning Bacheloroppgave i kinesisk EAS251*, which specifies that the thesis must constitute an independent work of 5,000 words ($\pm 10\%$), with a clearly defined research question and active, critical engagement with source materials. These requirements are closely aligned with the course's training objectives and are both reasonable and feasible in terms of word count.

According to data provided by Professor Shang, a total of 13 bachelor's theses were submitted this semester. For a Chinese program at a Nordic university, this is an impressive output. The topics selected were diverse, with most falling into three main areas: the characteristics of the Chinese language and writing system, aspects of Chinese social development, and cross-cultural comparisons. It is evident that the course lectures played a constructive role in guiding students toward these topics, many of which align with the research expertise of their supervisors — a factor that facilitates in-depth and effective supervision. The final grading distribution was as follows: three students received an A, four a B, three a C, two a D, and one an F. Overall, approximately 77% of the class (10 out of 13 students) achieved

a grade of C or higher, indicating a generally strong level of performance. Based on my own review of the theses, I find the grades to be objective and fair.

5. Student Evaluation

A total of six students (out of 13) completed the course evaluation. The results indicate that a majority of students (84%) were generally pleased with the course.

The lecture component also received positive feedback from most respondents (84%). Some reported that their initial concerns at the beginning of the course were completely alleviated, and that they gained substantial benefits from both the “theoretical topics on Chinese” and the “academic writing methods” sections. Regarding the experience of writing a bachelor’s thesis, most students (67% “very much” + 17% “quite a lot”) felt they had benefited greatly. They not only found producing academic work enjoyable but also expressed increased confidence in working with and using Chinese at an advanced level.

Notably, an overwhelming majority agreed that “the teachers were excellent, and the tasks given were achievable.” Satisfaction with thesis supervision was particularly high (84% “very satisfied”), with students commenting that the instructors “gave me very useful advice and I learned a lot I did not previously know,” and that “the supervision was very helpful.” As for suggestions for improvement, some students expressed the wish to receive academic writing training prior to enrolling in the thesis course.

6. Conclusions and Comments

The overall quality of this course is very high. Its design is well-structured, with a clear focus on the training objectives outlined in the syllabus. A variety of teaching methods are employed, and thesis supervision is highly targeted. Both the pass rate and the overall quality of the theses are commendable, reflecting the instructors’ extensive experience in course design and implementation.

In the course evaluations, some students reported that, due to the limited academic training provided in earlier Chinese courses, they found academic writing particularly challenging. They expressed a desire to receive training in academic writing prior to the Bachelor’s thesis course. The course coordinator is well aware of this issue and has planned to adjust the curriculum by

introducing more components in Chinese language study, thereby giving students greater exposure to academic literature reading and essay writing. This adjustment would better prepare them for the demands of Bachelor's thesis writing. In my view, offering thesis-writing training at an earlier stage is both objectively necessary and practically feasible. Such training could possibly be integrated into earlier courses, such as Kin 100: Chinese Language, Culture, and Society.

Regarding the use of source material, the “*Sensorveiledning Bacheloroppgave i kinesisk (EAS251)*” clearly state that active use of Chinese-language sources will be regarded favorably. For a Bachelor's thesis in Chinese studies, this requirement is both necessary and entirely reasonable. In future course descriptions (or even syllabi), it might be advisable to make the expectations more explicit—for example, by requiring that a certain number or proportion of references be in Chinese.

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