

Evaluation of Courses: KIN303, KIN304, KIN305

This evaluation report covers courses KIN303, KIN304, and KIN305. These three courses are designed for the same group of students and are all offered in the second semester of the graduate program. Evaluating them together allows for a comparison of similarities and differences as well as an analysis of their interconnections.

The evaluation is primarily based on the following materials: the syllabi of the three courses; classroom teaching PPTs; examination papers and the distribution of grades; student evaluation materials; among others. To facilitate my assessment, Professor Zhao Shouhui kindly provided a detailed email (2025-05-29) explaining the overall design, teaching process, and assessment methods of KIN303, which was extremely helpful. The materials reviewed mainly concern the Spring 2025 teaching, while two instructors also provided selected materials from previous years for KIN303 and KIN304. This has offered a valuable dynamic perspective for reference and comparison, making it possible to trace the development of these courses. In addition, Professor Shang organized a survey among current graduate students regarding the overall evaluation of the MA program, which provided a more comprehensive impression of the program's progress. Furthermore, a video meeting with Professor Shang (2025-08-19) helped clarify several questions that arose during my review process.

KIN 303: Topics in Chinese Sociolinguistics

KIN 303 examines the relationship between the Chinese language and Chinese society, extending further into the sociology of language in the era of globalization, with a particular focus on the use of Chinese in Chinese society. This perspective differs from the traditional label “sociolinguistics” that was used when the course was first established. On this distinction, Professor Zhao, the course instructor, provides clear clarification in his lecture notes, thereby ensuring a more precise arrangement of course content. The primary emphasis of the course is on *Language Planning and Policy* (LPP)—a field in which Professor Zhao specializes.

The course content is broadly divided into two components—practice and theory—roughly equal in weight. The practical component introduces the modernization process of the Chinese language, with substantial and engaging analytical examples and Chinese texts, focusing on historical experiences. The theoretical component emphasizes training students to apply conceptual tools from an international perspective in order to analyze and critically evaluate these historical developments. This division of content is also reflected in the structure of the exam. Such a design underscores the close integration of theory and practice, enabling students both to gain substantive knowledge and to apply theoretical knowledge and methodological skills in interpreting language development and official policies in the context of modern China—a key emphasis in the course syllabus.

In terms of teaching emphasis, the instructor is able to make appropriate adjustments depending on the students' prior knowledge and future professional orientation. For instance, in the 2022 and 2024 academic years, the practical component of language planning was reduced, while greater focus was placed on theoretical analysis, making the teaching more targeted and responsive.

The main teaching methods are lectures and seminars, spanning 12 weeks with a total of 24 contact hours. Learning activities include participation in discussions, student-led discussions, and group assignments. According to Professor Zhao, in the 2024 iteration of the course, classroom interaction between teacher and students increased significantly, and these adjustments were well received by students.

Students are provided with a tailored digital collection of state-of-the-art articles in the field. This includes Professor Zhao's own influential work, *Planning Chinese Characters: Reaction, Evolution or Revolution?* (Zhao, Shouhui, et al., Springer US, 2008). Incorporating the instructor's research into the teaching material not only strengthens the course academically, but also inspires students' interest in the field and their aspirations for scholarly research.

Course assessment consists of a four-hour written examination. The exam has two main sections: (1) concept and term explanation, and (2) open questions—discussion and analysis. Both sections require explanatory and argumentative responses, including terminology and definition explanation, short-answer responses, and essay-style opinion questions. The design ensures that the exam aligns closely with course objectives. In particular, essay questions require

students to demonstrate reasoning and analytical ability by critically comparing and contrasting issues studied in the course—an approach well suited to graduate-level education.

Overall, the exam achieves both breadth and depth, with a balanced level of difficulty. The final results show that approximately three-quarters of the students received good or excellent grades, indicating that the overall academic standard of the student cohort is very high.

In the 2023 evaluation, three students (out of a total of four in the class) participated. Overall, the majority of students (66%) reported being satisfied with the course. They noted that the most positive aspects were: some of the topics were very interesting and sparked a desire to learn more; the course provided useful information in the PPTs; and the group discussions and interactive activities during teaching.

KIN304 : Topics in Chinese Literature, Philosophy, Media, and Art

The course KIN304 was first offered in Spring 2023 and for the second time in Spring 2025, both taught by Professor Huiwen Zhang.

The primary objective of the course is to enable students to gain insight into Chinese and global perspectives on emerging social, cultural, and political events. Interaction between native and non-native speakers is encouraged and guided. It is evident that the course has clear learning objectives, broadens students' horizons, and is well-suited for graduate-level study in Chinese.

The course offered a curated selection of state-of-the-art digital readings. The content varied slightly from semester to semester, reflecting developments in the core field and incorporating students' feedback and interests gathered at the beginning of the course. Notably, the course included a rich range of written and audio-visual Chinese materials—such as journal and newspaper articles, book excerpts, film clips, and social media posts—which effectively engaged students' interest.

The main teaching methods include lectures and seminars (12 weeks in total, 24 hours). Students engage in a variety of learning activities, such as preparatory reading, group assignments, oral presentations, and individual research projects. In class, the instructor

frequently adopts innovative pedagogical tools and techniques to help students explore contemporary Chinese culture. For the term paper, the instructor provides individualized supervision, reflecting a commitment to personalized teaching. This form of guidance, also used in other courses such as KIN303, is well suited to graduate-level education and helps students prepare early for the next stage of their studies—thesis writing under close faculty supervision.

Course assessment consists of a supervised term paper in English of about 2,500 words (+/- 10%). The course materials clearly specify the requirements for both content and format. The topic, chosen by the student and approved by the instructor, must be related to the main themes of the course. The paper may take the form of an insightful summary or a critical review of a specific topic, consistent with the course syllabus. In particular, the requirement that “students must familiarize themselves with the rules that apply to the use of sources and citations in the written essay” highlights the course’s emphasis on developing graduate-level academic literacy.

Based on the exam results, in the Spring 2023 semester, the four students in the course received the following grades: 2 A’s, 1 B, and 1 C, reflecting a high level of performance. In the Spring 2025 semester, also with four students, the grades were 1 B, 2 C’s, and 1 D. Compared with the previous cohort, the results showed some decline; however, 75% of the students still achieved a grade of C or above, which can be considered generally satisfactory with a reasonable grade distribution.

As reported in the instructor’s self-evaluation, this course was offered for the first time in the 2023 academic year. In addressing differences in student proficiency, the instructor actively explored and refined teaching methods, continually seeking a balance between course depth and accessibility. By the second offering in 2025, the instructor had developed a more creative and reflective teaching style. Through the use of continuous assignments and mechanisms of collaborative learning with students, the course effectively fostered student development and enhanced overall teaching quality.

According to the overall evaluation of the graduate program in Chinese provided by Professor Shang, students were generally satisfied with KIN304. Some students observed that the

course included a few literary works with limited connection to China, and they felt these materials were somewhat less relevant.

KIN 305: Intercultural Competence

The course was first offered in Spring 2025, taught by Professor Shang. It has clearly defined learning objectives: students gain advanced knowledge on diverse aspects of Chinese culture and social relations and analyze them in relation to their own cultural and societal environments.

The primary instructional materials were provided digitally and include two textbooks—*Exploring Intercultural Communication: Language in Action* by Zhu Hua and *Introducing Language and Intercultural Communication* by Jane Jackson—together with selected chapters from *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Intercultural Communication*. These materials constitute a carefully curated collection of state-of-the-art scholarship in the field, providing a solid foundation and ensuring the academic rigor of the course.

Three teaching methods were adopted in the 12-week course: traditional lectures, and two innovative approaches—flipped classroom lectures (FC) and student-led discussions (SLD). In the flipped classroom format, students assumed the role of instructors by preparing and delivering entire lectures. In the student-led discussions, students acted as facilitators, guiding the introduction, inquiry, analysis, and summary of the assigned readings (chapters from the Handbook). Practice demonstrated that these two approaches greatly enhanced students' initiative and engagement, yielded positive teaching outcomes, and received highly favorable evaluations from the students.

Similar to KIN303 and KIN304, the KIN305 course was primarily taught by professor from the Chinese program. What set KIN305 apart, however, was the inclusion of a guest lecture by Dr. Xia Zhang, who presented her latest research in a talk entitled “*Politeness and Relation Management in the Global Workplace: A Study of Carlsberg Employees’ Role-Plays in Global English Across China, Denmark, and England.*” This innovative arrangement not only enriched the diversity of the classroom experience but also broadened the horizons of graduate students in

the Chinese program, providing them with valuable exposure to cutting-edge research in the field of intercultural communication.

It is worth noting that the course KIN305 made extensive use of examples from Chinese communication practices to illustrate key concepts in the broad field of intercultural communication. This approach allowed the course to retain its distinctive identity as part of the “Chinese Studies” program. Moreover, these practically relevant case studies not only captured students’ attention but also deepened their interest in the field.

As for assessment, students were required to conduct independent research on a self-chosen topic within the overall framework of the course and present their projects orally in class to engage in peer discussions. For a postgraduate course that emphasizes the application of theory to practice, this mode of assessment is highly appropriate. In addition, the assessment explicitly requires students to follow the conventions of academic writing and to demonstrate both descriptive and explanatory adequacy in their papers—an approach that clearly fosters the development of advanced research skills and lays a solid foundation for thesis writing. In total, three students successfully completed the final exam (a term paper based on the aforementioned independent research) in May 2025. Two students received an A, and one received a B, reflecting the high quality of teaching in this course.

A total of four students were enrolled in this course, all of whom participated in the course evaluation. Therefore, the collected feedback provides a relatively comprehensive reflection of their views on the course. Overall, the students expressed a high level of satisfaction with both the teaching and the course content. They considered the course objectives to be clear and the instruction to be well organized. The seminars, flipped-classroom activities, and student-led discussions were particularly highlighted as having a positive impact on their learning outcomes. In addition, the students generally felt that the classroom atmosphere was relaxed and enjoyable, the teaching was clear and effective, and the instructor successfully stimulated their learning interest. In terms of improvement, some students suggested incorporating more examples in Chinese.

Conclusions and comments

In the second semester of the graduate program, some courses had been offered multiple times and benefited from extensive teaching experience, while others (such as KIN305) were introduced for the first time with successful innovations in teaching methods. Overall, all three courses were conducted at a consistently high level of quality. These courses not only broadened students' academic horizons but also placed strong emphasis on cultivating critical thinking skills. In addition, they highlighted the importance of independent research projects, structured academic writing, and active participation in scholarly discussions, thereby laying a solid foundation for the subsequent thesis work. Among the instructors responsible for these courses, what students valued most was their passion for their fields, as well as their approachability and supportiveness. Students reported that interacting with such deeply knowledgeable experts in their respective disciplines proved to be immensely rewarding.

In both individual course evaluations and the overall program review, some students indicated a desire for the graduate curriculum to provide more extensive Chinese language training. A review of the current course materials shows that each class already makes a concerted effort to incorporate examples related to China and the Chinese language, thereby integrating theoretical frameworks with China-specific contexts. Nevertheless, in future offerings, it may be worthwhile to include additional language-focused components. For instance, KIN304 could introduce structured reading exercises with Chinese texts, while KIN305 might incorporate some oral practice activities designed to enhance intercultural competence through a Chinese–Norwegian comparative perspective. Such enhancements would further strengthen the program's capacity to meet graduate students' academic needs in engaging with the core linguistic and cultural dimensions of Chinese Studies.

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