



STUDIJŲ KOKYBĖS VERTINIMO CENTRAS

**VILNIAUS UNIVERSITETO
PROGRAMOS *AZIJOS STUDIJOS (612U71001)*
VERTINIMO IŠVADOS**

**EVALUATION REPORT
OF *ASIAN STUDIES (612U71001)*
STUDY PROGRAMME
AT VILNIUS UNIVERSITY**

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DUOMENYS APIE ĮVERTINTĄ PROGRAMĄ

Studijų programos pavadinimas	Azijos studijos
Valstybinis kodas	612U71001
Studijų sritis	Humanitariniai mokslai
Studijų kryptis	Regiono kultūros studijos
Studijų programos rūšis	Universitetinės studijos
Studijų pakopa	Pirmoji
Studijų forma (trukmė metais)	Nuolatinė (4)
Studijų programos apimtis kreditais	240
Suteikiamas laipsnis ir (ar) profesinė kvalifikacija	Azijos studijų bakalauras
Studijų programos įregistravimo data	2000 birželio 16 d. Nr. 831

INFORMATION ON EVALUATED STUDY PROGRAMME

Title of the study programme	Asian Studies
State code	612U71001
Study area	Humanities
Study field	Area Studies
Kind of the study programme	University studies
Study Cycle	First
Study mode (length in years)	Full time (4)
Volume of the study programme in credits	240
Degree and (or) professional qualifications awarded	Bachelor of Asian Studies
Date of registration of the study programme	16 June 2000 No.831

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I. INTRODUCTION

The programme in Asian Studies at Vilnius University is the oldest and most diversified Bachelor-level programme in Asian Studies in Lithuania. The programme was originally established and accredited in 2000 to the general field of „Ethnology“ under the name of „Comparative Asian Studies“, but it was reclassified in 2009 as belonging to the field of „Area Studies“, which corresponds better to the approach and contents of the programme. Area Studies is in this context to be understood as a multidisciplinary approach to a selected region, whose geography, history, culture and language(s) are taught in the context of a coherent programme with the aim of developing a comprehensive understanding of the target region.

Geographically, the Vilnius university programme in Asian Studies covers most of the Asian continent, including East Asia (especially China and Japan, but also Korea), South Asia (India and Tibet), and the Near / Middle East (Arabic countries and Turkey). Some parts of the programme, and occasional courses, also touch upon Central and North Asia (Siberia). The programme offers practical language teaching in several Asian and Middle Eastern languages, as well as theory and substance -based courses on Asian cultures and societies.

The programme is a basic first-cycle (BA-level) entity comprising 240 ects and corresponding to four years of full-time study. There is a close relation to the corresponding MA programme in Modern Asian Studies, also at Vilnius University. Both programmes are located at the Centre of Oriental Studies of Vilnius University, and they share a large part of their teaching staff and other resources. They nevertheless remain independent entities, and the students enrolled in the MA programme come also from other backgrounds. There is also less emphasis on language teaching and language skills in the MA programme. Selected parts of the two Asian Studies programmes are offered as a number of specialized minor study programmes in various extra-European topics, including Chinese Studies, Japanese Studies, Indian Studies, Tibetan Studies, Islamic Studies, and African Studies.

It has to be noted that the programme in Asian Studies has some inherent advantages, which raise its importance irrespective of how well it is otherwise managed. For one thing, it functions in the established environment of an old and well-known university with a long history of academic traditions. Secondly, the university is located in the capital city of the country, which naturally attracts the largest possible number of well-qualified students into the programme.

Thirdly, the programme is concerned with Asian Studies, which in the current world is a rapidly rising field of academic enquiry with a significant potential of practical applications. Of course, all of these advantages may also be seen as challenges to which the staff of the programme has to find well-functioning answers. To allow the staff to make all relevant decisions effectively, it seems particularly important to preserve the Centre of Oriental Studies in its current form, that is, as an independent entity within the university.

II. PROGRAMME ANALYSIS

1. Programme aims and learning outcomes

Apart from the generic skills required of all university students, the programme in Asian Studies has the aim of giving the students a profound knowledge and understanding of Asian (and other non-European) cultures and languages, with the focus on one selected region and language, depending on the choice of the student. The aims of the programme and the expected learning outcomes are clearly formulated, though it is, of course, difficult to measure exactly the „depth“ of cultural knowledge and understanding that can be obtained during the four years of studies. The goal of proficiency in the selected language is set at level B2.2, which should give the student sufficient skills to use the language in both practical and theoretical situations. Information about the programme’s aims and learning outcomes is publicly available both in printed form and on the university’s website.

By international standards, the objectives of the programme are well-defined and follow the outlines of similar programmes elsewhere. Interviews with the students and graduates of the programme confirm that the learning outcomes correspond to the objectives, especially as far as the practical languages skills are concerned. The programme produces specialists who can well serve the needs of the labour market as well as the society in general. It goes without saying that in a relatively small country like Lithuania, a programme in Asian Studies cannot offer a large amount of diversified teaching, but has to focus on the central aspects of the field and, also, on the special areas of research and competence of the available teaching staff. Even so, the selection of topics and courses offered by this programme is large and diversified enough to satisfy the needs of the students currently enrolled in it.

There are, of course, potential fields of expansion. For instance, African Studies seems to be an area currently emerging in the context of the programme. According to information received during the site visit there has also been discussion about the possibility of dividing the

programme into two parts, the one focusing on the Middle East and South Asia, and the other on the Far East / East Asia. However, it would be wise to consider any major expansion or division of the programme carefully, so that the traditional Asian and Oriental focus would not suffer. As it is, this programme is the only programme carrying on the important line of traditional Orientalistic scholarship in Lithuania, and this function should be preserved even in a situation where other, more practical, objectives are also relevant.

Asian Studies is a field whose global importance is rapidly growing together with the growing relevance of Asian countries, especially China and India. Programmes under the general heading of „Asian Studies“ are offered by many universities in Europe, and it is important that the oldest Lithuanian university also has a programme with this name and approach. The name corresponds well to the objectives and learning outcomes of the programme, and to the international professional requirements and expectations of the field. Judging by the observations made during the site visit, a degree in Asian Studies from Vilnius University is a good guarantee of professional competence in the field.

2. Curriculum design

As far as can be judged from the self-evaluation report and from the information received during the site visit, the programme meets all the relevant legal requirements concerning curriculum design. It seems that the programme has adapted well its contents to the European system of credits (ects), as adopted in 2011, and to the other adjustments made in connection with the parallel introduction of the modular system. According to the self-evaluation report the programme currently offers 63 different modules.

By subject content, the programme comprises (1) generic compulsory, (2) specific compulsory and (3) specific selective modules, and covers in well-balanced proportions language studies (minimum 75 ects), social issues (minimum 15 ects), cultural issues (minimum 15 ects), and study of area-specific religions and philosophies (minimum 15 ects). This corresponds to the structure of similar programmes in other European countries. It is a positive feature of the programme that language studies have a prominent place in the curriculum, and they are also spread in time over the entire programme.

The content of the subjects taught corresponds to the type and level of studies. Of course, the teachers, especially those with research degrees, must to some extent adjust the contents of the

curriculum, and of the individual courses, to their own research interests. This only increases the relevance of the teachers' contribution and allows the latest achievements in the field to be included in the programme. There are differences in the amounts, types, and levels of teaching that the programme can offer on its different fields of specialization. Chinese Studies is particularly well resourced thanks to the presence of the Confucius Institute in the university, while the other specializations lack this type of extra resource.

An interview with the students and an examination of the Bachelor's theses confirms that the learning outcomes correspond to the aims of the programme. Since this is a BA programme, it is understandable the goals have to be rather practical in order to allow the students to find employment after graduation. It is a positive feature of the programme (and of the Lithuanian system, as a whole) that the BA and MA levels are properly separated, with only a minority of the students entering the MA level. For this reason, it is also suitable that the BA programme has been given the length of as many as four years.

The study of Asian languages and cultures normally starts from the zero level, which means that a rather long period of studies is required before functional proficiency can be acquired. It may be noted that among the languages taught in the programme there is also Sanskrit, a classical language. The presence of Sanskrit is, however, well motivated due to its position as the language of classical culture and literature in India, and as an older form of a large number of modern Indian languages, including Hindi/Urdu.

3. Staff

According to the self-evaluation report, the programme in Asian Studies has had in the years 2008-2012 a staff of 2 professors, 12 associate professors (docents), 10 lecturers with a doctoral degree, 25 other lecturers, and 5 assistants. The student/teacher ratio is given as 7.5:1 This information is, however, somewhat misleading, as many of the teachers are not permanently or full-time employed, and most of them are also involved in other programmes, especially in the MA programme of Modern Asian Studies. Many of the teachers listed have also been present in the programme only during some years. When properly calculated, the number of teachers is much smaller, and the teacher/student ratio much less favourable, but still sufficient.

Even so, the programme obviously has all the resources it can get under the current circumstances, and it can be well maintained in its present state. The legal requirements concerning the

number and type of teachers and supervisors are met, and the learning outcomes can be obtained. Half of the staff have been permanent during the last few years, and most teachers appear committed to continue in the programme. Interviews with the teachers confirm that the current staff is professionally highly competent and can secure the sustainability of the programme also in the coming years. For practical language teaching, a sufficient number of native-speaking teachers has normally been available, though these teachers tend to change often and are not always full-time employees of the programme. They also tend to lack research interests and focus only on practical language teaching.

The research-active part of the staff is regularly producing research results with international relevance. Since this is BA programme, it can be expected that not all of the teachers are research-oriented. On the other hand, since many of the staff are also involved in the MA programme (as well as in PhD supervising activities), the intensity and international visibility of the research produced by the staff could be even higher than it is today. As it is, many of the research results of the staff members are published in Lithuanian (or in Russian), and not necessarily in internationally well-known series. This may be a matter of time, as a younger generation of Asianists and Orientalists is only emerging in Lithuania. It would also be important to attract more international visiting researchers to the programme. Currently, foreign teachers are present mainly among the native-speaking language instructors.

The role of the Confucius Institute seems to be positive, as it significantly increases the resources available for Chinese language teaching. Some caution is, however, always in place with Confucius institutes, as they also function as outlets for propagating the official political views of P.R. China. It is important that the local staff and the university leadership keep the Confucius Institute within the limits of activity in which it is supposed to be engaged.

4. Facilities and learning resources

The main facilities of the programme are located in the main campus of Vilnius University, with only the Confucius Institute having a separate location. There are separate teaching rooms for Chinese, Japanese and Hindi, as well as a number of other rooms with altogether c. 300 sitting places. Apart from the facilities of the Confucius Institute, the Hindi Room has also received external support. Almost all rooms have modern technological equipment (audiovisual teaching, internet connection), and two rooms are specially equipped for use as language laboratories (headphones). It should be remembered, however, that computers as such, or modern technology in general, cannot compensate for other teaching qualities. The most important resource that a

programme, especially in the humanities and social sciences, can have, is a competent, committed, inspiring and sufficiently diversified teaching staff.

The students have access to the specialized Oriental Reading Room of the university library. The Reading Room has over 11,000 books and almost 1,000 journal items, many of which have been received thanks to recent private donations. Also, thanks to the age of Vilnius University, the library contains occasional older sources, including book collections and manuscripts. Since 2008, the Centre of Oriental Studies has temporarily housed an important Oriental collection belonging to the National Library. In recent years, the resources of books and journals on Asia have grown in a positive way, and the staff and the students have also access to a considerable number of electronic databases.

Although the library resources may be judged to be adequate, and the library premises are excellent, it is clear that an even larger collection of especially modern literature on Asia would be desirable in a country's only Centre of Oriental Studies. This is obviously a question of financial investments, and it is clear that the available limited financial resources should be concentrated on acquiring books and journals on those areas and fields that are in most urgent need of additions. According to information from the staff, literature on the Middle East and Central Asia is particularly scarce in the current collections, which is why acquisitions are for the moment concentrated on these regions.

While the students apparently have all the practical facilities that can be afforded by the university, they still occasionally need the personal help of the teachers in order to be able to acquire the literature they need. For the distribution of otherwise unavailable books, the Moodle system could be considered. Another problem raised in the self-evaluation report is the lack of individual working space for the staff. This may also affect the students, who would benefit of a possibility of consulting the teachers in properly equipped staff working rooms. There are on-going plans to amend this problem, but more should be done.

5. Study process and student assessment

Admission to the Asian Studies programme is highly competitive and is based on a formula calculated from the results acquired by the applicants in the state maturity exams. The formula itself could be disputed, as it seems to give an unproportionately high significance to results in the history exam. It might be better to base it on the general mean score of all subjects, including natural sciences and mathematics, though this is a matter of policy. In any case, many topics in

modern Asian Studies are intimately connected with issues related to natural sciences, while mathematical methods are an important source of data processing relevant to many types of research. It would also be important to try to attract students with a diversified knowledge of European languages, including also German, French, Russian, and others. Discussions with the students and graduates showed that the programme is fully functional in English, which may be seen as an important asset in the Lithuanian context.

There are some differences between the admission levels required for the different area-specific specializations. As in many countries today, competition seems to be highest into Japanese Studies, while relatively few new students come to Indian or Middle Eastern Studies. It might be wise to try to change this trend by reducing somewhat the number of new Japanese-major students and increasing the number of those students who specialize in Indian / South Asian Studies. Chinese studies is another field whose volume sooner or later will have to be expanded from what it is today. It may be anticipated that citizens with a basic knowledge of either Chinese or Japanese will in the future be produced by the school system, as well as by other public and private language schools, which is why the option of a teacher's career will be increasingly relevant to the graduates of the programme.

The organization of the study process corresponds to the objectives of the programme, and the students are processed in annual contingents, which facilitates their graduation. The relatively high drop-out rate is probably typical of this type of studies, but it may be noted that it is larger in those specializations that have very few students. A sufficiently large number of students studying together seems to be a prerequisite for the successful completion of the programme. The students are also encouraged to participate in extra-curricular activities, though the level of activity does not seem to be particularly high. This may be typical of students majoring in Asian Studies, who often prefer to focus on their academic curricula (or on their extra-curricular work) rather than on non-academic (and non-work) activities. The amount of social support provided by the institution seems to be fully adequate, and the students describe their relationship to the teacher as exceptionally positive.

A general problem for Asian Studies programmes in many countries is the insufficient availability of student mobility opportunities. It should be taken for granted that a student majoring in Asian Studies should have the possibility of staying and studying a sufficiently long period - a minimum of one semester - in the target country of his/her studies. This can only be organized by establishing a sufficient number of bilateral exchange agreements and scholarships

both at the level of universities and the state level. Although most students in the programme manage to organize for themselves a period of study in their target country, there are still occasional problems connected with both financial (as in the case of Japan) and practical (as in the case of India and the Arabic countries) factors.

The course / module descriptions are clear and state the goals and methods of each entity in an easily accessible form. The amount of contact teaching and the estimated number of independent work hours is well balanced and follows the norms given from above. The assessment of the students' performance is adequate and transparent. The relatively high competition into the programme guarantees a sufficient number of motivated and talented students, which is also reflected by the fact that the final theses get a very high average grade (9 out of 10). The topics of the final theses are variegated and intellectually challenging, and many - perhaps most - theses are impressive pieces of scholarship.

Information on the post-graduation professional activities of the graduates has been gathered with the help of a questionnaire in 2013. The survey includes also the MA graduates from the programme of Modern Asian Studies and shows that a majority of the graduates use their acquired professional knowledge and skills in their work. This was not fully confirmed by information received from the graduates, for there are still some who work in positions not corresponding to their degree and qualifications. A considerable proportion of the graduates (30 per cent) have found employment abroad, including Lithuanian embassies in Asia. The initial salary levels are highest for those students who have majored in Chinese, Japanese or Turkish Studies. In the long run it remains to be seen how many graduates in Japanese Studies a relatively small country like Lithuania can employ. One would rather hope that more emphasis be given to Chinese Studies, which is a more rapidly growing field.

6. Programme management

The quality of the programme is internally supervised by a committee comprising representatives of different levels of teachers and students, as well as an external stakeholder. The decisions of the committee are implemented by the administrative structures of the Centre of Oriental Studies. The Deputy Director of Studies is the person who offers all the required bureaucratic information. The system looks coherent and stable. Altogether, the internal quality assurance seems to function well, though the time period monitored so far is too short to allow definitive conclusions to be made. It also seems that the staff members are actively engaged in improving

the quality of the programme, as far as this is possible within the limits of the available personal and financial resources.

The regular rounds of external evaluation and accreditation provide a natural opportunity to review and, as far as is necessary, revise the programme every few years. Since the last round of evaluation and accreditation in 2006, the adoption of the Bologna system and other administrative reforms have required a revision of many details in the programme. It would not be rational to increase the current level of monitoring, as all administrative and accreditative activities have also the adverse effect of consuming work time and diminishing the amount of time available for teaching and research activities.

Since 2009, the quality improvement of the programme has been supported by the regular collecting of students' feedback at the end of each semester. The Centre for Study Quality management of the university reports the survey results to the teachers and administration. Surveys have also been conducted among the teaching staff, alumni and external stakeholders. All these surveys were started rather recently, and they have already yielded a number of very good suggestions, for instance, concerning the possibilities of increasing the mobility of the students to their target countries.

External stakeholders are positively involved in the quality assurance system. It might, however, be useful to increase their active role in those aspects of the programme that are concerned with its practical objectives, especially with the post-graduation employment of the graduates. The main challenge seems to be the „marketing“ of the graduates in Asian Studies to private companies in the fields of trading and manufacturing. As is it, most of the external stakeholders represent the public sector or private cultural enterprises.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

1.
Retain the status quo in the administrative structure of the Centre of Oriental Studies.
2.
Increase resources that are required to keep the library collection on Asia up to date.
3.
Consider possibilities of increasing access to student mobility to the target countries.
4.
As far as is possible, increase academic exchange with other centres of Asian Studies.
5.
Investigate possibilities of “marketing” graduates to the private commercial sector.

IV. SUMMARY

In all respects, this is an excellent programme. In general, it may be said that the curriculum is as good as can be achieved in the conditions of a relatively small country with a short history of modern independence, with still somewhat limited resources, and with a rather short tradition in many branches of Oriental Studies. Although programmes in Asian Studies are also being introduced at other universities in Lithuania, the one at Vilnius University should be seen as the principal national programme of both traditional Oriental Studies and of contemporary Asian Studies. This is the only programme in the country that covers all regions of Asia from the Middle East to East Asia. It is also internationalized in the sense that all teachers and students have communicative skills in international languages.

The staff of this programme is highly competent and committed, and the students have an exceptionally positive attitude to their field of study and to their academic environment. The programme also gets a positive review from the external stakeholders and employers. The material circumstances and facilities of the programme may be judged to be very good, partly thanks to the surrounding old university milieu. The library resources are also satisfactory thanks to generous private donations. However, because of the obvious national importance of this programme, it would be important to increase the financial resources available for the acquisition of the most recent academic literature on Asia.

It may be noted that part of the success of this programme is connected with the fact that it is administered in the context of a sufficiently compact and focused entity, that of the Centre of Oriental Studies. This Centre should be seen as one of the key institutions of Vilnius University in the general field of humanities, and it would be important to preserve its status as an independent entity, and to provide it with as favourable a material and financial base as is possible. More resources would also be required to guarantee the mobility of both the teachers and the students, especially since studies and research pertaining to Asia often requires relatively long periods of stay and fieldwork in the target countries. With the help and understanding of the university central administration these goals can certainly be reached.

V. GENERAL ASSESSMENT

The study programme *Asian studies* (state code – 612U71001) at Vilnius University is given positive evaluation.

Study programme assessment in points by evaluation areas.

No.	Evaluation Area	Evaluation Area in Points*
1.	Programme aims and learning outcomes	4
2.	Curriculum design	4
3.	Staff	4
4.	Material resources	4
5.	Study process and assessment (student admission, study process student support, achievement assessment)	4
6.	Programme management (programme administration, internal quality assurance)	4
	Total:	24

*1 (unsatisfactory) - there are essential shortcomings that must be eliminated;

2 (satisfactory) - meets the established minimum requirements, needs improvement;

3 (good) - the field develops systematically, has distinctive features;

4 (very good) - the field is exceptionally good.

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