

# Orientation of Chinese Education in Vietnamese Higher Education Institutions Under the Belt and Road Initiative

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**Abstract** - The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) plays an essential role in the development of Chinese-language education worldwide, while opening new avenues for its incorporation across different disciplines. In this regard, Chinese language education in the Vietnamese higher education system developed in response to Vietnamese society's demand for the Chinese language, the growing bilateral relations between Vietnam and China, friendly governmental policies, and the international Chinese language education system. Vietnamese universities have begun implementing integrated training models, in particular at the "Chinese +" and "China Studies" models, in which Chinese language education is integrated and aligned with the nation's economic, cultural, and academic needs. Despite the developments above, numerous challenges remain to be addressed. Curriculum realignment in Chinese language education is the first and most important step toward meeting the labour market needs of Vietnamese society. The education in Chinese must be used to provide specialized training for personnel to teach Vietnamese culture in Chinese. The unadapted, or even insufficiently adapted, learning materials for Vietnamese society must be addressed. The purpose of this study is to identify the orientation and state of Chinese education in universities in Vietnam in the context of BRI, identify the new and emerging trends to understand the BRI structural constraints, and provide some recommendations to align the education of the Vietnamese society in the Chinese language with the education of the Chinese language. The findings are expected to contribute to the primary goal of sustaining and contextually developing the education of the Chinese language in Vietnam.

**Keywords:** Belt and Road Initiative, Chinese Language Education, Vietnamese Higher Education, Chinese+, China Studies, Curriculum Orientation

## I. INTRODUCTION

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) reshape patterns of international cooperation by expanding cultural, educational, and economic ties among member countries. To this end, cross-border communication, knowledge transfer, and workforce utilization depend on the language(s) of the countries involved. Hence, the teaching of Chinese has expanded concomitantly with China's growing economic and geopolitical might. Chinese is now taught in 180 countries and regions, and 81 countries have included Chinese in their

national education systems. This growing trend is closely related to the increasing demand for Chinese language skills in the global education/labour markets (Cao & Chen, 2024). This phenomenon illustrates the ability of languages to facilitate cultural exchange and meet the practical needs of participants in international development programs, including the BRI (Dong, 2020).

Vietnam's unusual historical, geographical, and socio-economic connections with China make it one of the most renowned nations in the world. Language and education in Vietnam, especially the Chinese language, have been taught since Chinese characters became prominent in governance and education. After being taught in Vietnam for several decades, the Chinese language was integrated into the education system as a foreign language and has been taught as such ever since. The education system, as well as the teaching of foreign languages, has been adapted to meet the demands of the Vietnamese education system (Nguyen a, 2012). According to the calls for the teaching of foreign languages and the educational programs, foreign language programs have proliferated in Vietnamese educational institutions since the restoration of the Chinese language teaching program in the early 1990s (Nguyen, c 2022).

The expansion of the recent policy development is multifaceted. Upgrading vocational education policies in Vietnam targets shifts in the educational system toward a more market-oriented education that serves market needs. (Prime Minister of the Government of Vietnam, 2021) Decision 73/NQ-CP emphasizes the need for reforms in vocational education and training and higher education to train multi-skilled workers, who are essential for the country's development and international integration. With the goals of Vietnam's education reforms and the growing focus on teaching and learning Chinese, Chinese is increasingly viewed as a medium for acquiring knowledge and skills across different professions and fields of specialization. Moreover, Chinese is now among the foreign languages taught at the pre-university level as part of the curriculum. This reaffirms its strategic popularity among foreign

languages and its centrality to Vietnamese Educational Planning (Education and Times Reporter, 2021).

With respect to higher education reforms, universities in Vietnam have also embraced more structural changes in the education system by expanding the range of programs in Chinese. Also, relevant research in languages has been conducted (Hang, 2021). Unlike the previous liberal arts and language focus, many programs in China Studies are now multi- and cross-disciplinary, with a focus on skills training to address gaps in the distorted market for these fields. Such gaps and broader socio-economic shifts have created demand among students for Chinese language programs and courses. There is ample evidence that shows the positive socio-economic benefits of Chinese language skills among graduates. Most, especially in business, tourism, education, and translation, earn high wages and hold lucrative jobs (Binh Minh, 2024). The demand for Chinese skills in the market has, of late, been the primary driver of students undertaking Chinese-related programs (Nguyen b, 2024).

As a continuation to the above, the 'Chinese +' model, which, as the name suggests, 'Chinese + x', where x can be vocational disciplines such as economics, tourism, technology, trade, is determined to respond to the labour market by equipping the graduate with both job skills and a foreign language, a severe need on the market especially with the BRI' initiative workforce requirements' orientation to labour as a tool (not just a component) to development. On the contrary, the 'China' component literacy as in 'China Studies', a discipline, representing holistic integration of the various components (and the components have been forever) of China, to elicit an understanding faintly argued as having moved from 'Sinology', 'China' as a single, with the various disciplines of the social sciences, to a complex China Studies. (Li, 2014) The expectation here is a China in the world and China in the region, and the region in the world, and analytical depth to the social sciences (Xu, 2015).

While both orientations address different educational and societal demands, their presence in Vietnamese higher education challenges curricular design, teaching capacity, and sustainability. Previous studies have identified issues such as overly similar program objectives, inadequate specialized faculty, and a lack of contextualization in written teaching materials (Bouzid & van Vliet, 2024; Nguyen, 2024; Nguyen, 2022). These issues compel a structural consideration of the Chinese language education system and how it may be realigned to better align with the country's policies, the system's capacity within educational institutions, and the academic demands of the workforce.

Given this, the current study examines the focus of Chinese education in Vietnamese higher education institutions as part of the Belt and Road Initiative. By identifying the development trajectories of "Chinese +" and "China Studies" programmes, the current study aims to uncover key underlying factors, assess the extent of available resources, and determine ways to improve the relevance, efficiency, and viability of the teaching of Chinese in Vietnam. (Yan, 2018)

### *Key Contributions:*

- The current study examines student motivation, career aspirations, and perceptions of the curriculum in the context of Chinese language education in Vietnam's higher education system.
- It provides a comparative analysis of the programs in Applied Chinese Language and in China Studies, with an emphasis on the differing institutional contexts and challenges in both.
- The study can broaden understanding of Chinese education policy by linking language instruction to employability and skills through educational programs.
- The study provides evidence to aid in curriculum and policy development regarding the pedagogical implications of foreign language education in the context of the Belt and Road Initiative.

The paper will begin with an introduction that outlines the research background, objectives, and the importance of Chinese education to the Belt and Road Initiative. Then, the literature review will cover existing research on Chinese language teaching, China Studies, and vocationally oriented language education in Vietnam, as well as related fields. (McLelland & Zhao, 2021) Following that will be the methodology, which will address the research design, data sources, sampling strategy, and the methods of analysis used in the study. The following section will cover the results and discussion, including empirical findings on the distribution of programs, students' motivation, career orientation, and the relevance of the curricula. Then the final part of the paper will be the conclusion. The conclusion will summarize the paper's main findings, discuss their importance, and outline possible avenues for further research.

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Research published in scholarly journals and reports on the teaching and learning of Chinese in Vietnam has increased significantly over the last 20 years, reflecting the strategic, economic, and socio-cultural relations between Vietnam and China. The studies on the teaching of Chinese focus mainly on the history of Chinese education in Vietnam, the learning of the Chinese language and curriculum development and reforms, the relations of the curriculum to the labour market, the knowledge of Chinese and the internationalization of Vietnamese education, and the teaching and the BRI (Belt and Road Initiative). (Zong, 2024) These studies serve as a point of departure for understanding current trends and issues in the internationalization of higher education in Vietnam. (Ha Cuong, 2023)

Having initially focused on the structure of the Chinese language teaching programs at Vietnamese universities, initial studies focused on the Vietnamese Sinology programs first. Pham (Phan & Pham, 2023) studied the development of the Chinese language teaching programs at Vietnamese universities. It took several Vietnamese higher education institutions' Chinese-language education to transform from

politically motivated language instruction into English-language education for a marketable, vocational discipline. Chinese language programs began catering to the pressures of globalization and the labor market. However, curriculum change, and specialization were uneven across institutions. Programs' Responsiveness to Globalization. This is the case of Tran et al. (Nghia & Tran, 2020), who conducted a study on the teaching and learning of Chinese. In Vietnam, within the broader framework of globalization. Tran et al. reported increases in student numbers, institutional participation, and program diversification. The same authors, however, pointed out the gaps that still exist between teaching and the profession.

The more recent literature has also started to include reviews of training programs and reforms. Nguyen and Tran (Nguyen & Tran, 2022) studied models of language training with a career focus and argued that training programs that focus on language teaching and ignore career-oriented training are inadequate. They argued that Chinese training should include instruction in business communication, tourism, and other trade-related skills. This argument aligns with different strands of research on the need for greater interdisciplinary in higher education. Supporting this argument, Nguyen (Nguyen b, 2024) studied the Business Chinese offered at a technical university in Vietnam and recognized the language skills proficiency gained, but also the limited scope related to the specialization of the lecturers and the absence of teaching materials adapted to the local context (Allashev et al., 2025).

Lecturers' capacity, or rather the lack of it, has been reported in the literature more than once. Tuong San (Tuong San, 2023) noted that, with the increase in Vietnamese students' interest in Chinese language programs, Chinese language programs at Vietnamese universities have, however, posed challenges in recruiting and retaining university teachers in Chinese language and related fields. This makes the application of interdisciplinary programs such as "Chinese + Economics" or "Chinese + Tourism" very challenging. Most of the literature notes that the rapid growth in student enrolment, without a corresponding increase in teaching staff, has been the main factor affecting the quality and viability of the programs offered.

Even within theories of the education of the Chinese language, there are competing ideas about language, culture, and international education. Discussion centers on Wang's 2006 work regarding language and understanding, exchanges among people, and how Wang argues that language education is a means of communication, fostering learning and collaboration, and serving cultural and diplomatic purposes (Bouzid & van Vliet, 2024). Wang and Zhao's analyses pertain to the BRI, where Wang argued that education in a particular language is a means to an end, and Zhao argued that the Chinese language should be taught in ways that address the immediate needs of the regions. Wang and Zhao's analyses align with the education of the Chinese language and the advocacy of international collaboration (Mohammadinasab et al., 2014).

Chinese studies which shift from traditional Sinology to modern China Studies, is part of the discussion. Wang 2022 prioritizes the academic and research foci of Chinese Studies programs, which, of course, are interdisciplinary and relevant in the contemporary world. Xu 2021 is a further extension of the history of the Sinology thesis. Xu argues that modern China Studies is the synthesis of history as a discipline and a social science, investigating China as it is today and as it would be in the future. These studies made it possible for the China Studies programs in Vietnam to focus more on politics and economics, culture, regions, and language.

Of late, literature focusing on the "Chinese +" model has flourished. Under the BRI, Zhang et al., (2022) explored nurturing talent as "Chinese plus professional skills" and considered the suggestion of teaching languages alongside other professions. Prof. Yang and Luo (Zhou, 2021) examined the pros and cons of the "Chinese Plus Vocational Skills" education advocacy in Vietnam. Their work uncovered Vietnam's economic synergies and opportunities, as well as its location and geo-economic synergies. In class/integration, design, and faculty resources, and adaptive work in educational systems. This work speaks to the lack of adapted work in educational systems in support of integrated model systems.

Cumulatively, the current research demonstrates that the teaching of Chinese in Vietnam is changing due to globalization, labour-market needs, and international initiatives such as the BRI. Previous research has helped clarify curriculum reform, its relationships to the job market, and the theoretical frameworks that inform it. Still, there is a lack of comparative studies of different training orientations, especially "Chinese +" and studies of China. Furthermore, there is a scarcity of research that systematically examines the extent to which these models coexist in Vietnamese higher education and how they could best be cultivated to satisfy both utilitarian and scholarly needs. These gaps are the focus of the current study, which aims to build on previous research on Chinese education in Vietnam to present a more comprehensive, consolidated, and structured reflection on current configurations and possible futures.

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### *Research Design*

This research examines the influence and progress of Chinese language education within Vietnam's higher education system and the Belt and Road Initiative, using a mixed-methods research design. This method allows the use of qualitative document analysis alongside a quantitative study to assess policy analysis and educational practice within institutions. Mixed methods are helpful in higher education and language-centered studies, where a structural analysis needs to be paired with evidence grounded in students' and institutions' experiences. This study's empirical component uses case study methods and focuses on Hanoi University of Industry, which offers academic programs in Chinese Language and China Studies (Rajendran et al., 2024).

*Conceptual Framework and Research Procedure*

Research Methodology is sequential and interrelates multiple components within the framework, including policy study, data collection, and data analysis. In the framework, the first stage is to review policy documents, institutional materials, and literature to gain a theoretical understanding and outline the context. This stage provides the basis for designing the survey and selecting the analytical variables, including the curriculum orientation, motivation for learning, and career achievements. In the following stage, the data descriptives are analyzed and thematically interpreted.

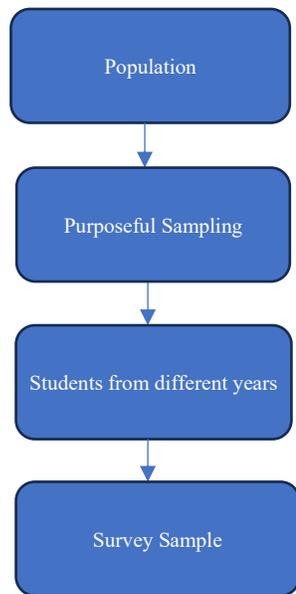


Fig. 1 Sampling Procedure for Survey Participants

Fig. 1 presents the conceptual research framework and study flow, outlining the timing of the relationships among documentary analysis, survey design and data collection, data analysis, and finding interpretation methods. The objective of Fig. 1 is to visually present the research activities and help the reader better understand the methodology. It is not a computational/predictive model and will instead act as an explanatory fig to the method description in the text.

*Documentary Research*

Document research will then serve as the qualitative foundation for the study. Policy documents issued by the Government of Vietnam and the Ministry of Education and Training were reviewed to formulate the strategic directions, legal documents, and policy priorities for foreign and Chinese language education. At the university level, a review of publicly available records, such as curricula, program descriptions, and training objectives, sought to determine the structure and placement of Chinese Language and China Studies programs across various higher education institutions. (Wang, 2018) Moreover, journal articles, conference proceedings, and dissertations were reviewed to situate the Vietnamese experience in the context of the Chinese language education in other parts of the world and the region. The documents were subjected to qualitative

content analysis to determine themes of curriculum orientation, integration across disciplines, and institutional barriers.

*Survey Design and Data Collection*

To analyze student perspectives on Chinese language education, quantitative components of the study relied on a pre-prepared questionnaire. The questionnaire included, but was not limited to, demographic information, reasons for choosing a Chinese-related major, program orientation preferences, perceptions of curriculum content, career aspirations, and expected salaries after graduating. A combination of yes/no questions and restricted open-ended questions was used to facilitate descriptive statistics while allowing study participants to expand on the crux of the matter. The researchers used a mix of digital and face-to-face methods to collect information, which ensured precision and comprehensive answers.

*Sampling and Participants*

The Chinese Language and China Studies programs at Hanoi University of Industry provided the study's population, as surveys of students and alums are conducted regularly. Students and alums are surveyed to assess academic learning and initial work experience. The study received 738 responses, with 126 students majoring in Sinology and 612 in the Chinese Language programs. The respondents and the sample population's academic profiles follow the usual trends within language study programs. Purposeful sampling was applied to have a balanced academic level and program orientation across respondents.

*Data Analysis*

Documentary data and open-ended survey responses were analyzed thematically. The benefits, barriers, structure, and orientation of the curriculum about Chinese language education were analyzed using pattern coding of the qualitative data. Quantitative responses were analyzed using frequencies, percentages, and averages. Motivation, program, career, and income expectations were analyzed to categorize each variable for easier analysis. The purpose of the study is to explore and identify trends and patterns, not to draw causal inferences or engage in predictive analysis.

*Ethical Considerations*

Several ethical considerations were taken into account for the research. Participation in the survey was voluntary, and respondents were informed of the study's nature and academic relevance before data collection. Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured by the absence of personal data in the dataset, and the collected data would be used solely for research purposes.

#### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

##### *Student Enrolment and Program Distribution*

Although Chinese Language programs outnumber China Studies (Sinology) programs at Hanoi University of Industry, the survey results suggest an over-concentration of enrollments in Chinese Language programs. Of the 738 valid responses, 612 were registered in Chinese Language programs, and 126 were in Sinology. This suggests that, as students were situated in programs with a high degree of theoretical application, they were more inclined to choose programs with a greater emphasis on practical, skill-building applications. Across the entire UK higher education industry, students as a cohort are prioritizing applications aligned with the dominant employment trends in Vietnam.

TABLE I DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS BY PROGRAM TYPE

Program Type	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Chinese Language	612	82.93
China Studies (Sinology)	126	17.07
Total	738	100.00

Respondents were enrolled in programs in Chinese Language and China Studies (Sinology) in various ways, as shown in Table I. From the results, it can be derived that a large portion of the sample were respondents from Chinese Language programs, making the sample as a whole of such respondents

more than 80%. On the other hand, there were fewer respondents in China Studies programs. The results depict one of the ways students prefer and consider more useful programs, which are also more strategically relevant to the labor market. The results also reflect an evident structural discrepancy between China Studies and Chinese Language programs: the former is more of an academic regional studies program, while the latter is more of a professionally driven training program. Discussion-wise, these results corroborate the idea that Vietnamese higher education institutions are predominantly employment-oriented training providers rather than academic institutions. The lower number of respondents in Sinology suggests that China Studies programs need to be more interdisciplinary, with clearer career pathways and greater institutional support to enable students to enroll.

##### *Motivation for Choosing Chinese-Related Programs*

Analysis of student motivation shows that employment prospects are the most influential factor driving enrolment in Chinese-related programs. Many respondents reported that anticipated job opportunities and income potential were the primary reasons for selecting their major, followed by interest in Chinese culture and language. Academic interest alone was cited by a smaller proportion of students, particularly among Chinese Language majors.

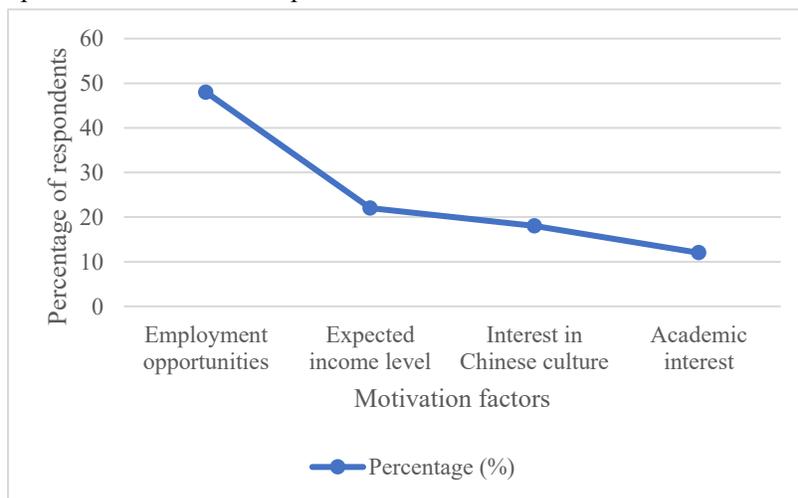


Fig. 2 Student Motivations for Choosing Chinese-Related Programs

According to Fig. 2, while students are motivated to select a Chinese-related educational program for multiple reasons, three first-order reasons dominate: job availability, pay level, and cultural interest. In the first-order reasons, the students demonstrate a clear shift in outlook toward more pragmatic, outcome-oriented choices. Students of Chinese education have begun to think more in terms of translating the Chinese language into employment opportunities and competitiveness in the job market, rather than the culture and academic scholarship of the Chinese language.

Such a result points to a significant shift in students' orientation from the academic learning domain to fields of

study aligned with the labor market, as evidenced by the education of the Chinese language in Vietnam. This trend supports the expansion of the idea of "Chinese +" in which the educational curriculum integrates China's language with other branches of education, with a clear emphasis on vocational and professional training.

##### *Career Orientation and Employment Expectations*

The results further indicate that students' career aspirations are closely aligned with applied professional sectors. Most respondents expressed interest in careers related to translation, international trade, tourism, education, and

business services. A smaller proportion of Sinology students indicated interest in academic or research-oriented careers. This contrast underscores the functional differentiation between the Chinese Language and China Studies programs.

TABLE II PREFERRED EMPLOYMENT SECTORS OF RESPONDENTS

Employment Sector	Percentage (%)
International trade & business	32
Translation and interpretation	24
Tourism and hospitality	18
Education and training	15
Research and policy-related work	11
Total	100

Table II illustrates the sectors of employment respondents wish to work in after graduation. The data indicates the most significant interest in International Business and Trade, followed by interpretation and translation services. Interest in careers in tourism, education, and research was also noted; these were smaller in relative proportion, but still statistically significant. Such distribution attests to the students' applied expectations in their future careers. It underscores the need to

provide opportunities to develop skills beyond the basic competencies offered by Chinese language programs.

In terms of discussion, these data suggest that, within the parameters of language and Chinese studies, the Chinese language programs are better aligned with the needs of the labour market than the China studies programs. While these programs generate significant knowledge about the region, as China studies is an interdisciplinary field, the employment outcomes associated with these programs appear quite scarce in Vietnam. Such a scenario tends to disincentivise students from enrolling in, or even seriously considering, academically driven programs, as the value of these programs often lies in the long term.

*Salary Expectations and Economic Incentives*

Graduates' employment choices are influenced by the salaries respondents expected to earn as graduates. A majority expected graduate salaries for new graduates, notably, Chinese Language majors. A trade or business with an international focus had much higher expectations.



Fig. 3 Expected Monthly Salary Ranges After Graduation

Fig. 3 shows respondents expected monthly salary ranges after graduation. Many students predicted their salaries would be higher than the national average for new graduates, especially in the mid- to upper salary range. These expectations stem from students' perception of the ability to speak a second language as a valuable skill. The fig. also underscores the role of money in shaping students' educational choices. This fig. reinforces the employment orientation of respondents in the Chinese Language Programs.

Most respondents stated that, in Chinese language programs, economic incentives shift the educational focus more towards. The increase in salary expectations reflects this. The expectation of a high salary also indicates an increase in the value placed on the ability to speak Chinese. It also explains the rise in demand for more integrated applied training models. It justifies the economic and professional skill training of Chinese language education for the Belt and Road Initiative.

*Evaluation of Curriculum Orientation*

How relevant the current curriculum was to employment was another question asked of respondents. Most Chinese Language students believed their curriculum aligned with the No employment needs gap. Sinology students reported diverse opinions towards it. The difference was contrasted between the two programs. The difference explained how the two programs were structured differently in terms of curriculum design and teaching focus.

TABLE III STUDENT EVALUATION OF CURRICULUM RELEVANCE

Evaluation Level	Percentage (%)
Highly relevant	28
Moderately relevant	42
Slightly relevant	20
Not relevant	10
Total	100

As shown in Table III, most student evaluations indicate that their curriculum is, at a minimum, relevant to what they will do after graduation. This makes sense, as these students will not have completed their degree if curriculum gaps have not been addressed through training that meets basic industry standards. However, a sizeable proportion of students report that the relevance of their school training to their future work is minimal. This suggests a training gap at the school, leading students to feel that their curriculum is not adequately preparing them for the workforce. Because of respondent variance, there is room for improvement, as students think that their curriculum is not preparing them as well as it should. More industry partnerships and training in niche, definable skills will close this student perception gap.

From the data, applied language programs achieve moderate success in addressing workforce needs during curriculum development. However, there is still considerable work to be done in designing classes that connect industry needs, are skill-based, and are interdisciplinary. This is the central area of concern within China Studies programs. This is particularly difficult if they are not willing to reduce the academic weight of the curriculum to make more room for skills to be embedded.

#### *Implications for “Chinese +” and China Studies Models*

Altogether, the findings suggest that there is greater institutional and student interest in the “Chinese +” model than in traditional China Studies. The combination of learning a foreign language and acquiring other in-demand skills has a positive effect on students' career prospects. Employment and workforce issues, as well as China's education policies, are more focused on integration than on other activities. This is likely to marginalize the field of China Studies further and, therefore, the development of more sophisticated analytical and policy skills regarding China and Vietnam.

Given the results, a more complex response is warranted. The Chinese Language programs need to deepen their integration with the professions; China Studies programs need to establish more explicit career pathways and be more interdisciplinary, policy-oriented, and collaborative. This would provide a unique opportunity for Vietnamese higher education institutions to address immediate market needs while also focusing on strategically crucial long-term knowledge creation, as outlined in the Belt and Road Initiative.

## V. CONCLUSION

The focus of this piece of research is the changes in the Vietnamese higher education system regarding the teaching of the Chinese language in the context of the Belt and Road Initiative, with an emphasis on the design of courses on the Chinese language, the reasons students choose Chinese as a foreign language, and what type of jobs students want after studying Chinese. Using a combination of documentary research and surveys conducted with students at the

University of Industry in Hanoi, this research found a growing tendency towards a more practical, employment-oriented Chinese language education. In contrast, more academically oriented China Studies programs are much less prevalent. This research shows that students choose a course based on their predicted employment opportunities and salaries in that field, underscoring the demand for education models that are professionally integrated and also focus on the Chinese language. At the same time, this research shows a lack of clarity about the curriculum's applicability to students' future jobs, especially in China Studies. This study aims to incorporate evidence into the ongoing debate regarding the need to meet the demands of the Chinese language education system economically and academically.

#### *Future Work*

Further research may enhance the generalizability of the findings by conducting comparative studies across different universities and regions in Vietnam. Tracking graduates' career paths would help future studies assess the effectiveness of Chinese language and China studies programs over a longer period. Moreover, future research could examine employers' viewpoints better to evaluate the alignment between curricula and industry demand. Greater attention to incorporating cross-disciplinary and digital skills within “Chinese +” frameworks would also help improve the relevance and sustainability of programs.

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