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The current state of Italian language and culture teaching in higher education in China

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In the growing context of economic globalization, trade and exchanges between countries around the world are more and more frequent. This brings about an increasing demands of experts in foreign languages. It has been already 71 years since the University of International Business and Economics (UIBE) in Beijing launched the first Italian language program in 1954. Currently, there are 24 universities and institutes across the country (including Hong Kong and Macao) offer the academic degree related to Italian language and culture. Furthermore, many other universities and higher education institutions provide Italian language courses. This paper briefly reviews the history of teaching Italian language and culture in China. The aim of this study is to provide a comprehensive overview regarding the current state of teaching Italian language and culture within Chinese higher education system. This paper also covers the relevant teachers' educational background, their academic titles and the use of teaching material, etc. In particular, this study sheds some light on the state of teaching the aforementioned subjects in Chinese institutions (universities, institutes, vocational and technical institutes) that provide Italian language and culture as elective, compulsory or minor courses, and the teaching situation to graduate students, which was not thoroughly explored in previous studies. Furthermore, this paper shows the various types of course program, the number of students enrolled and some peculiar difficulties of providing these kinds of courses to Chinese learners.

KEYWORDS

Italian language, teachers' academic titles, course curricula, teachers' difficulties, higher education, Chinese vocational education

1 Introduction

Italian teaching in Higher Education in China has developed from a zero level to a significant one, and has improved along with the constant development of Sino-Italian bilateral relations. A recent noteworthy event occurred in November 2024 (from 7 November to 12 November), when the Italian President of the Republic, Sergio Mattarella, visited China. This was his second visit after 7 years.

On the occasion of State Visit, the "China-Italy University Presidents' Dialogue" ("Dialogo dei Rettori tra le Università cinesi e italiane") took place on 9 November at Peking University, organized by the Ministry of Education of the PRC in collaboration with the Ministry of University and Research of the Italian Republic (MUR—Ministro dell'Università e della Ricerca della Repubblica Italiana) and the CRUI—Conference of Rectors of Italian Universities (Conferenza dei Rettori delle Università italiane). In this conference, six agreements have been signed between Chinese and Italian institutions for the creation of research centers, bilateral high-level training initiatives, and the construction of an international campus. The minister of the Ministry of Education of the PRC, Jinpeng Huai 怀进鹏, subsequently expressed the

hope that Chinese and Italian universities will deepen their scientific collaboration, especially in basic research and in emerging and interdisciplinary sectors.¹

That afternoon Italian President Sergio Mattarella led a delegation to visit Peking University and delivered a *Lectio Magistralis* at Peking University. Mattarella pointed out that universities are important places for cultivating critical thinking and play an indispensable role in the contemporary education system. Mattarella was pleased that the “China-Italy University Presidents’ Dialogue” has been held and said that this dialog was not only an opportunity for academic discussion, but also an occasion for the exchange of ideas between the people of the two countries, and an occasion for joint growth. He hoped that through this dialog, the cooperation between China and Italy in higher education could reach a new level.²

Therefore, it is important to analyze the challenges and opportunities of Italian language and culture teaching in higher education in China. In the last part, the future prospects are examined.

2 Literature review

The Italian language, as a non-generally foreign language, and its cultural teaching started relatively late in China. Due to the limited number of Chinese students learning Italian, there is relatively little literature about the state of teaching in China.

Zhi (2011) conducted a thorough study on the history, the situation, and the development of Italian Language Teaching in China. She divided the development process of Italian teaching in China into four stages: (1) the preparatory stage (1949–1955), (2) the initial stage (1955–1966), (3) the recovery stage after the Cultural Revolution (1970–1978), and (4) the rapid development stage after the Chinese economic reform (1978–2011, the year of publication).³ She analyzed the current situation of Italian language teaching, pointed out the achievements and shortcomings, and gave suggestions for the development of Italian language teaching in China, such as strengthening the training for young teachers and improving teachers’

scientific research capabilities, etc. This was the first attempt to investigate the situation of Italian language teaching in China.

Liu (2017) published a paper titled “The Mutual Promotion and Influence of Foreign Language Teaching and International Relationships—Taking Italian Language Teaching in China and Sino-Italian Relations as an example.” In this thesis, the author divided the development of Sino-Italian relations into six stages: (1) before the fall of the Qing Dynasty (before 1912), (2) from the fall of the Qing Dynasty to the foundation of the PRC (from 1913 to 1949), (3) from the foundation of the PRC to the formal establishment of diplomatic relations between Italy and China (from 1950 to 1970), (4) the initial period of Sino-Italian diplomatic relations (from 1971 to 1985), (5) The period of rapid development of Sino-Italian relations (from 1995 to 2000), and (6) The period of in-depth development of Sino-Italian relations (from 2001 to 2017, the year of publication), the development of Italian language teaching in China has shown different characteristics in different periods, which was directly relative to the closeness of the relationship between the two countries. The author concluded that international relations had a huge impact on language teaching, and under the Belt and Road Initiative, Italian language teaching will have further developments in China.

Li et al. (2019) analyzed the characteristics, challenges, and countermeasures of the China-Italy higher education cooperation and exchange under the background of the Belt and Road Initiative. They stated that the cooperation and exchange of higher education between China and Italy demonstrated the following characteristics: expanding and deepening the cooperation in other fields on the basis of language mutual learning and interoperability; promoting the educational communication between China and Italy through the characteristic projects; taking Confucius Institutes as the platform to promote holistic exchanges and cooperation between the co-organizers. They also pointed out some challenges when deepening development and proposed to carry out some effective strategies such as innovating the course system of comprehensive personnel cultivation according to the requirement of the Belt and Road Initiative, promoting the exchange of college and university students between the two countries, etc.

Liu (2021) published a paper titled “Sino-Italian Language and Education Exchanges: Past and Present.” The author reviewed the history of Sino-Italian exchanges in language and education, particularly the developments in the 21st century, including language teaching, student exchanges, academic exchanges, and new models of exchange. This article finally provided an outlook on Sino-Italian educational cooperation.

In addition, many scholars discussed one aspect of Italian language teaching (such as teaching materials, teaching methods, formation of talents, etc.) For example, Zhang (2018) in her thesis of master degree analyzed the development and characteristics of the didactic textbooks compiled in China for teaching the Italian language and culture; Lu (2019) discussed the cultural introduction to Italian language teaching; Zhang (2019) conducted a study on the Italian language teaching in the framework of cross-cultural communication in the New Media Era; Qin (2019) explored the education model of the qualified Italian language speakers in business context; etc.

The aforementioned literature about the Italian language and culture teaching in higher education in China highlights critical insights into the research in this field. However, until now, no one has conducted a survey on the Italian language and culture teaching

1 See the official website of the Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China at http://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb_zzjg/huodong/202411/t20241109_1161420.html.

2 See the official website of Quirinale at <https://www.quirinale.it/elementi/122871>.

3 The preparatory stage (1949–1954): after the foundation of the PRC in 1949, the country sent a group of young students to study languages abroad with the objective of understanding and communicating with the world, among them were students studying Italian. (2) The initial stage (1954–1966): in 1954, the then-Foreign Trade Institute (the predecessor of UIBE) launched the first Italian language major in China. Before the Cultural Revolution, there were only three universities and institutions offering Italian majors. (3) The recovery stage after the Cultural Revolution (1970–1978): After 1970, the universities and institutions gradually resumed enrolling Italian language students which was interrupted by the Cultural Revolution, and new schools began to offer Italian majors. (4) The rapid development stage after the Chinese economic reform (1978–2011): After the Chinese economic reform, the scale of Italian language teaching began to expand. As of 2011, 14 universities and institutions have opened Italian majors and provided elective, compulsory, or minor courses.

according to different types of higher education institutions. In the presented research, the author will classify the “higher education institutions” into three parts: (1) universities and institutes offering Italian language majors; (2) universities and institutes providing Italian language and culture as elective, compulsory, or minor courses; (3) vocational and technical institutes offering Italian language majors or elective courses. The author will study their teaching situation and existing problems, in order to address comprehensive information about the current state of Italian language and culture teaching in higher education in China.

3 Methodology

This study aims to provide a detailed overview of the current state of Italian language and culture teaching in higher education in China, involving teachers, students, and course curricula, etc. It also discusses teachers’ difficulties in teaching the Italian language and culture, and tries to provide some useful solutions to help solve these challenges. This study combines qualitative and quantitative approaches, utilizing specifically designed questionnaires and interviews to collect data relevant to the research questions, which allows for the efficient collection of data, ensuring the reliability of the conclusions of the paper.

3.1 Inspiration

This study draws inspiration from the work of [Wang and her team members \(2023\)](#) from the Italian Institute of Culture & Cultural Office of the Embassy of the Republic of Italy in Beijing and [Zhang and her team members \(2023\)](#) from Guangdong University of Foreign Studies. The former provided two tables: (1) Table of Chinese universities and institutes offering Italian language majors; (2) Table of Chinese institutions providing other types of Italian language courses. The latter contributed one table which is titled “Survey on the Situation of Italian Language Majors in China,” providing information on the total number of students, the Chinese teachers’ educational background, their academic titles, and their age at 26 universities and institutes.

Among these 26 universities and institutes are 22 universities and institutes offering Italian language majors (except Hebei International Studies University and Hong Kong University), three universities and institutes offering Italian language and culture as elective, compulsory or minor courses, and one vocational and technical institute. From this data, we know that the information related to universities and institutes offering Italian language majors is quite sufficient (22 of 24), but the data about universities and institutes providing Italian language and culture as elective, compulsory, or minor courses (3 of 28) and vocational and technical institutes (1 of 4) are not quite sufficient.

3.2 Interviews and questionnaire design and participants

Since in China, there are only four vocational and technical institutes, the author interviewed four Italian language and culture teachers who worked in these schools (one teacher from each

school) via phone and WeChat to investigate their teaching situation, including their educational background, academic titles, their teaching materials, and the course curricula, etc. As for the teaching situation of universities and institutes providing Italian language and culture as elective, compulsory, or minor courses, the author designed a questionnaire to collect the data. For the universities and institutes offering Italian language majors, there is plenty of information on undergraduate teaching, but less information on graduate teaching from previous studies, so the author designed another questionnaire to collect the data on graduate teaching.

Accordingly, two questionnaires were designed. The first questionnaire is titled “Questionnaire for Universities and Institutes Providing Italian Language and Culture as Elective, Compulsory or Minor Courses” with 19 questions in total. Seventeen questions collected basic information, including the name of the university or institute, the total number of teachers, their educational background and academic titles, the total number of students, teaching materials, etc. The purpose of gathering this data is to construct a comprehensive profile of the teaching situation. Two open-ended questions were included at the end of the questionnaire to explore the challenges encountered by teachers in the process of teaching and research, and to present any ideas that they may wish to add. The second questionnaire is titled “Questionnaire for Universities Nationwide Recruiting Italian-speaking Graduate Students” with 15 questions in total. Eleven questions collected basic information, including the name of the university or institute, specializations for masters’ degrees, peculiarities and qualities of the program, core courses, teaching materials, etc. The objective of collecting this data is to provide an overview regarding the teaching situation. Four open-ended questions at the end of the questionnaire study the difference between teaching undergraduate students and graduate students.

The data collection occurred between 27 May 2024, and 31 July, two questionnaires were created and distributed using “Wenjuanxing,” a popular platform for recruiting survey participants in China. Emails were sent to the Chinese Italian language teachers in the Chinese mainland and Hong Kong, informing them of the survey with the link and QR code included.

24 participants filled out the questionnaire, all of whom were Italian language and culture teachers in higher education universities and institutes. They were from 23 different higher education universities and institutes, notably, Tsinghua University, Nankai University, Beijing Foreign Studies University, Beijing Language and Culture University, etc.

For the universities and institutes that did not fill out the questionnaire, the author obtained the data through telephone interviews and WeChat interviews from the Italian language teachers, heads, or secretaries of associated departments and searched for information on the official websites of universities and institutes, and finally collected the data needed for the research.

3.3 Data collection and analysis

Since the two questionnaires were designed and answered in Chinese, the author classified the data and translated it into English. The questionnaires’ data was presented in a descriptive way. The

author drew some figures and tables to analyze the data and illustrate the results in a coherent way.

3.4 Limitations

Although this research meets the purpose of the study by presenting the current situation of Italian language and culture teaching in higher education in China with survey and statistical results, it lacks depth in analysis and theoretical grounding. This article primarily presents descriptive data without exploring broader implications or offering critical insights.

4 Historical review of Italian language and culture teaching in China

Modern Italian language and culture teaching in China has occurred for more than 70 years. After the foundation of the PRC in 1949, our country began to establish diplomatic relations with some western countries. There were not only relations in the political area, but also cultural and economic exchanges. Indeed, back then, there was an urgent need for a significant number of foreign language translators and interpreters.

In the 1950s, the Chinese Government sent a group of students to the Soviet Union, Italy, and Switzerland to study Italian. Among them were several people who later famous diplomats, such as Mr. Baoshun Chen 陈宝顺 (1936–2023) and Mrs. Yiyuan Shen 沈亦缘 (1937–). Other students later became prominent Italian teachers such as Mrs. Huiru Fei 费慧茹 (1932–) and Mr. Huanbao Wang 王焕宝 (1939–). Some of these teachers also became important translators like Mr. Tongliu Lü 吕同六 (1938–2005) and e Mr. Tianyou Xiao 肖天佑 (1937–), etc.⁴ These pioneers in the study of Italian language and culture laid down a solid foundation for the future development of this field.

In 1954, with the recommendation and help of the then-Ministry of Foreign Trade (nowadays Ministry of Commerce of PRC), the then-Foreign Trade Institute (nowadays University of International Business and Economics—UIBE) launched the first Italian language major in Chinese academia. In charge of the teaching there was Yantang Li 李砚棠 (1939–) who previously studied engineering at Yale University. His Italian language knowledge was mainly due to the language lessons provided by an Italian friend that Prof. Li met at Yale. The first class consisted of only nine students.⁵

Subsequently, in 1960, the then-Beijing Radio Station (nowadays Beijing Radio and Television Station) decided to broadcast radio

programs in Italian. Consequently, a special Italian language major was established at then-affiliated Beijing Radio Institute (nowadays Communication University of China—CUC). In 1962, aiming at the formation of Italian interpreters and translators, another new Italian major was established at the Beijing Institute of Foreign Studies (nowadays Beijing Foreign Studies University—BFSU), affiliated to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of RPC.

During the Cultural Revolution, the Italian language and culture teaching in the aforementioned institutes were discontinued, and it was not until the later years of this period that this kind of programs were gradually resumed. Furthermore, in 1970, Italy and China formally established diplomatic relations. Under the support of Chinese Government, in 1971 BFSU and in 1972 UIBE resumed the enrollment of students in Italian language majors.⁶ In 1972, the Shanghai Institute of Foreign Studies (nowadays Shanghai International Studies University—SISU) also established its own Italian language major.

Since the Chinese economic reform (also known domestically as “Reform and Opening-up Policy”) in 1978, our country has cooperated with European countries (including Italy) in many fields such as economy, trade, science and technology, culture, art, education, tourism. With the strengthen of multilateral exchanges, the demand of foreign language education in our country has increased rapidly. In 1979 or 1980,⁷ Xi’an Conservatory of Music (XACM) launched an Italian Phonetics Course for undergraduate students in the vocal music department as a compulsory course. This was the first time in which a higher education body provided such kind of course in China. In the Beijing Language Institute (nowadays Beijing Language and Culture University—BLCU) from 1983, for many years, prof. Xiuying Zhao 赵秀英 (1945–), taught Italian language to Chinese students who were sent and sponsored by the Chinese government to study in Italy at the MOE Training Center For Overseas Study, a center affiliated to the Ministry of Education of the PRC.⁸ In 1995, the Xi’an Institute of Foreign Studies (nowadays Xi’an International Studies University—XISU) had established the Italian language major within the Department of Tourism, for the purpose of cultivating

6 It was not until 2001, another institute, the CUC resumed the enrollment of students in Italian major until 2001.

7 Professor Ling Zhou 周玲, currently teaching Italian phonetics course at Xi’an Conservatory of Music, suggested this period of time. She is unable to pinpoint a more specific date.

8 Professor Xiuying Zhao 赵秀英 (1945–) after graduation from the Foreign Trade Institute (nowadays UIBE), worked in Beijing Language Institute from 1972. Since 1972 to 1983, she was responsible for teaching Chinese language to Italian bursary students who were sent to China by the Italian government. From 1983, she began to teach Italian language to Chinese students who were sent and sponsored by the Chinese government to study in Italy. The latter students studied at MOE Training Center for Overseas Study (part of the Beijing Language Institute), a center affiliated to the Ministry of Education of the PRC. Only in 2009 BLCU offered the first bachelor’s degree in Italian language study. The following year, considering the success of the undergraduate program, an analogous master degree was established. In 2014, thanks to the efforts of Professor Xiuying Zhao, BLCU and the University of Modena (Italy) began a cooperation related to the doctoral students. This program consists in sending outstanding Chinese students to pursue a PhD at the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia.

4 Lili Zhi, *The History, Current Situation and Development of Italian Language Teaching in China* (our translation), Journal of Hubei TV University [J], December 2011, pp. 115–116. (职莉莉, 中国意大利语教学的历史、现状与发展, 《湖北广播电视大学学报》, 2011年12月, 115至116页。).

5 Qian Zhang, *Analisi dello sviluppo e delle caratteristiche dei manuali redatti in Cina per l’insegnamento dell’italiano*, Thesis of Master Degree of Beijing Foreign Studies University, May 2018, pp. 25–26. (张倩, 中国高校意大利语专业本土基础教材的演进与特点, 北京外国语大学硕士学位论文, 2018年5月, 25至26页。).

Italian-speaking tourist guides to meet the requirements of the local vacation industry, because Xi'an attracts many Italian visitors every year. To sum up, although, during the second half of the 20th century, Italian language and culture teaching started with great difficulty, it was able to obtain also some significant results, laying a foundation of a new generation of teachers and experts.

In the 21st century, China and Italy kept improving their relations. A turning point is 2004, when China and Italy established a comprehensive strategic partnership relationship. After that, more and more Chinese higher education institutions added Italian language and culture in their curricula. In particular, some established Italian language majors; others provided Italian language and cultural courses as elective, minor or compulsory ones.

5 Survey and statistical results about the current state of the Italian language and culture teaching in higher education in China

To provide accurate data, higher education institutions were surveyed. In particular, for the purpose of this enquiry, “higher education institutions” were divided into three parts: (1) universities and institutes offering Italian language majors (both undergraduate and graduate level); (2) universities and institutes providing Italian language and culture as elective, compulsory or minor courses; (3) Vocational and technical institutes (the so-called “da zhuan”) offering Italian language majors or elective courses.⁹

The content of the survey are as follows: (1) a comprehensive list of higher education institutions with Italian language majors (both undergraduate and graduate) and courses of other types (elective, minor or compulsory courses); (2) Analysis of the current teaching situation (including 1. teachers' ranking, academic degree and titles [requirements to be qualified as such]; 2. the type of course program and the teaching materials; 3. the number of students; 4. Types of problems encountered by teachers, etc.).

Through this research, the author tries to present the current situation of Italian language and culture teaching in higher education in China in a comprehensive and objective manner, pointing out the achievements, analyzing the existing problems, and, in the end, providing some suggestions.

5.1 List of higher education institutions offering Italian language majors and Italian courses of different type

5.1.1 List of universities and institutes offering Italian majors (both undergraduate and graduate level)

According to the figures provided by the Italian Institute of Culture & Cultural Office of the Embassy of the Republic of Italy in

Beijing, in China there are currently 24 universities and institutes with Italian language major (bachelor degree), among them only 12 universities and institutes provide a master's degree program (details in Table 1). Moreover, among the latter group, only one university offers an *ad hoc* PhD program.

According to the data, there are currently 24 universities and institutes providing Italian language majors in China. In particular, 15 are universities and 9 are institutes.¹⁰ Among them, the first institute that launched the Italian language Major was the Foreign Trade Institute (nowadays UIBE) in 1954. In 2017, Nankai University (NKU) launched its own Italian language bachelor degree program, becoming the first comprehensive national university that launched the Italian language major. In 2018, Hong Kong University (HKU) started to provide the Italian language major. Since 2021, also Peking University (PKU) has provided the Italian language major. These data show the tendency that Italian language majors became increasingly appealing for high quality comprehensive university.

In addition to this, regarding the master degrees, the situation is a bit more complex due to the presence of different types of programs:

- (1) Regarding the three-year master program in Italian language and literature, the among the first universities that offered one of these was Shanghai Foreign Studies University (SISU) in 1998. After that, UIBE established an *ad hoc* master degree in 2000, Nanjing Normal University (NNU) in 2005, and BFSU in 2007.
- (2) As regards the two-year Italian MTI degree (Master of Translation and Interpreting), Jilin International Studies University (JISU) was the first university that offered one in 2019. After that, UIBE launched its own MTI in 2021, BFSU launched an analogous program during the same year, while the following year Tianjin Foreign Studies University (TFSU) began to recruit MTI students.
- (3) The most recent type of program is related to “Area Studies, some universities (including NKU since 2022, CUC since 2024) began to recruit some master students, who research on some aspects of Italy (such as economy, politics).

¹⁰ It is important to note that under the English name ‘university’ [in Chinese ‘大学’ ‘da xue’] you can find several ‘学院’ ‘xue yuan,’ which means ‘institute’ or ‘college’. Although the official English name is ‘university’ they retain a different Chinese name. Chongqing Institute of Foreign Studies (重庆外语外事学院) is the only one to retain the Chinese name in the translation. The other 8 institutes which are officially called universities in English are: Beijing International Studies University (北京第二外国语学院), Hebei Normal University of Science and Technology (河北科技师范学院), Zhejiang Yuexiu University (浙江越秀外国语学院), Chengdu International Studies University (成都外国语学院), Zhejiang International Studies University (浙江外国语学院), Hebei International Studies University (河北外国语学院), Heilongjiang International University (黑龙江外国语学院) and Guangzhou Maritime University (广州航海学院).

⁹ “da zhuan” institutes 大专院校, refers to a type of institution that provides vocational and technical education. The duration of study is usually 3 years, after graduation the students can obtain a “da zhuan” diploma.

TABLE 1 Chinese universities and institutes offering some type of Italian language majors (as of 07/2024).

	Provinces / autonomous cities	University or institute	Foundation year of the bachelor's degree program	Foundation year of the master's degree program	Foundation year of the PhD program
1	Beijing	对外经济贸易大学 University of International Business and Economics	1954/1972 (resumed)	2000/2021 (MTI)	—
2	Beijing	中国传媒大学 Communication University of China	1960/2001 (resumed)	2024 Area studies	—
3	Beijing	北京外国语大学 Beijing Foreign Studies University	1962/1971	2007 /2021 (MTI)	2012–2015
4	Shanghai	上海外国语大学 Shanghai Foreign Studies University	1972	1998	—
5	Xi'an (Shaanxi)	西安外国语大学 Xi'an International Studies University	1995	2009	—
6	Nanjing (Jiangsu)	南京师范大学 Nanjing Normal University	2001	2005	—
7	Guangzhou (Guangdong)	广东外语外贸大学 Guangdong University of Foreign Studies	2002	2020	—
8	Tianjin	天津外国语大学 Tianjin Foreign Studies University	2005	2012/2022 (MTI)	—
9	Beijing	北京第二外国语学院 Beijing International Studies University	2006	—	—
10	Dalian (Liaoning)	大连外国语大学 Dalian University of Foreign Languages	2006	—	—
11	Chongqing	四川外国语大学 Sichuan International Studies University	2007	2016	2024
12	Qinhuangdao (Hebei)	河北科技师范学院 Hebei Normal University of Science and Technology	2007	—	—
13	Changchun (Jilin)	吉林外国语大学 Jilin International Studies University	2008	2019 (MTI)	—
14	Beijing	北京语言大学 Beijing Language and Culture University	2009	2010	—
15	Shaoxing (Zhejiang)	浙江越秀外国语学院 Zhejiang Yuexiu University	2010	—	—
16	Chongqing	重庆外语外事学院 Chongqing Institute of Foreign Studies	2011	—	—
17	Chengdu (Sichuan)	成都外国语学院 Chengdu International Studies University	2011	—	—

(Continued)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

	Provinces / autonomous cities	University or institute	Foundation year of the bachelor's degree program	Foundation year of the master's degree program	Foundation year of the PhD program
18	Hangzhou (Zhejiang)	浙江外国语学院 Zhejiang International Studies University	2012	—	—
19	Shijiazhuang (Hebei)	河北外国语学院 Hebei International Studies University	2014	—	—
20	Harbin (Heilongjiang)	黑龙江外国语学院 Heilongjiang International University	2016	—	—
21	Tianjin	南开大学 Nankai University	2017	2022 Area Studies	—
22	Hongkong	香港大学 Hong Kong University	2018	—	—
23	Guangzhou (Guangdong)	广州航海学院 Guangzhou Maritime University	2021	—	—
24	Beijing	北京大学 Peking University	2021	—	—

These figures were provided by the Italian Institute of Culture & Cultural Office of the Embassy of the Republic of Italy in Beijing (covering till June 2023). Some data were updated by the author in July 2024.

In summary, until July 2024, 12 universities and institutes of those which founded a relevant bachelor's degree program launched master's degree program related to Italian language.¹¹

Regarding doctoral programs, the first university in China to recruit doctoral students in Italian language and literature was BFSU, Professor Jun Wang 王军 (1952-) [then-director of the Italian Department] was the doctoral supervisor. However, this Ph.D. program only lasted 4 years (2012–2015), there were only four cohorts of candidates for a total of 6 students.¹² This project gave some young scholars the opportunity to improve their academic qualifications.

After 2014, young scholars in China who wanted to pursue a PhD degree can only study abroad. Most of them chose to study in Italian universities, while a few of them pursued their doctoral degree in the United States. In this period, due to the lack of an *ad hoc* PhD

programs available in China, several scholars also made efforts to help Chinese students to start a doctoral degree abroad. For example, the professor Xiuying Zhao 赵秀英 (1945-) from the BLCU, established an informal partnership with the Italian University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, and selected outstanding Chinese students to pursue a PhD in Italy.

On the other hand, commencing in September 2024, Sichuan International Studies University (SISU), under the guidance of Professor Ying Chen 陈英 (the current director of the Italian Language and Culture Department), began to recruit doctoral students, therefore, Italian language students would have again the possibility to pursue this kind of PhD in our country.

Based on the data in the table, two analysis figures were drawn.

Considering the data shown in the Figure 1, most universities and institutes founded the bachelor degree program after 2000, before 2000, only 5 academic institutions provided a relevant bachelor degree program and, within them, only one launched a three-year master degree program.

It is interesting to notice that, according to Figure 1, there were two small peaks in the time periods of 2005–2009 (when 7 higher education institutions founded an *ad hoc* bachelor degree program and 2 launched a three-year master degree program) and 2010–2014 (when 5 among the universities and institutes founded a relevant bachelor degree program and 3 launched a three-year master degree program).

As shown in Figure 2, we can see the provinces and autonomous cities where most higher education institutions providing Italian studies are located in Beijing (6 among universities and institutes offer an *ad hoc* bachelor degree program while 4 of them have master degree program). The second autonomous city with the highest number of relevant programs is Tianjin (2 bachelor degree program and 2 master

¹¹ Within these 12 higher education institutions:

© 3 institutions offer both an MTI and a 3 year master program in Italian language and culture (UIBE, BFSU, TFSU).

© 6 institutions offer only a 3 year master program in Italian language and culture (BLCU, XISU, SISU, NNU, SISU, GDUFS).

© JISU only provides an MTI.

To this group of 10 universities and institutes, we should also mention 2 universities (NKU and CUC) which, although do not have an Italian language and culture *ad hoc* program, launched their master's degree within "Area Studies" which also covers, among other things, some aspects of Italian language and culture.

¹² Among these six students, the two students who received their doctoral degrees the latest passed their thesis discussion in 2020.

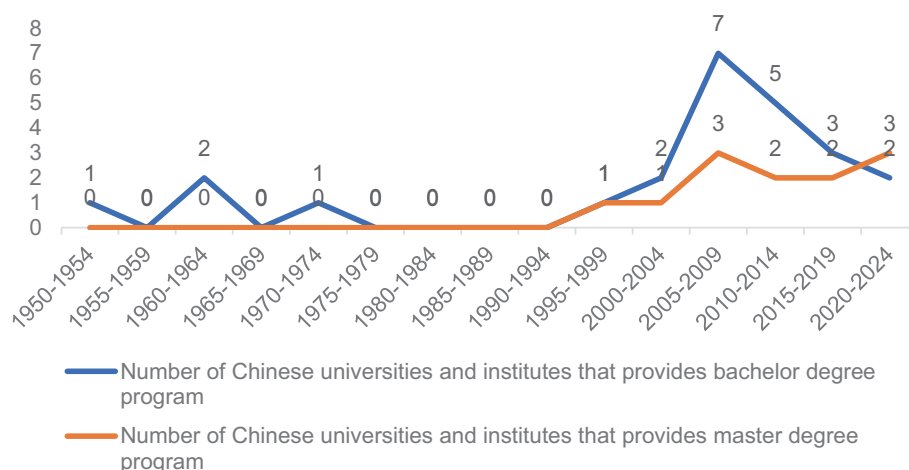


FIGURE 1

Number of Chinese universities and institutes that have been providing bachelor and master degree programs.

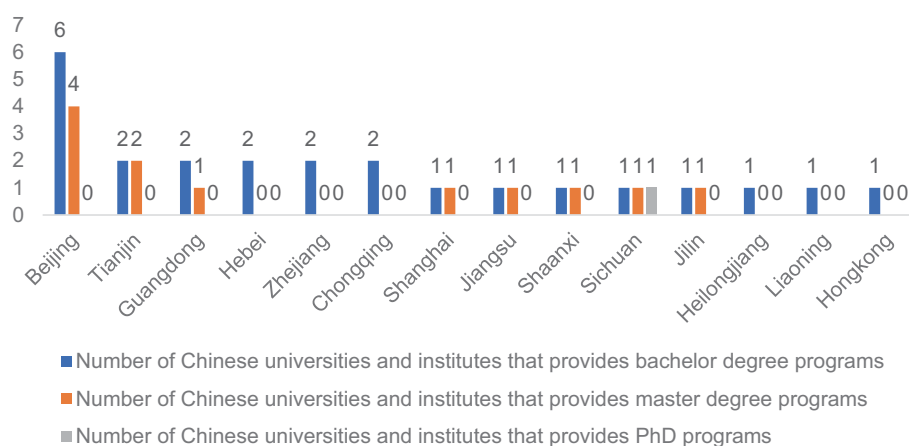


FIGURE 2

Distribution of Chinese universities and institutes that provide bachelor, master and PhD programs.

degree program). This is followed by Guangdong (where you can find 2 bachelor degree program and one master degree program).

In other words, according to the data, Beijing houses 1/4 of all Chinese universities and institutes that provide the bachelor degree program, and 1/3 that have various types of master degree programs. In terms of quantity, Beijing plays a pivotal role in the Italian language and culture teaching in Chinese higher education. Moreover, it is worth mentioning that after Beijing Foreign Studies University stopped its PhD program, since 2024, Sichuan has become the only Chinese province offering an *ad hoc* PhD program.

5.1.2 List of universities and institutes that have been providing Italian language and culture as elective, compulsory or minor courses (including discontinued ones)

According to the statistics provided by the Italian Institute of Culture & Cultural Office of the Embassy of the Republic of Italy in

Beijing, supplemented by our own survey,¹³ in China there are 28 universities and institutes that have been offering or used to offer Italian language and culture as elective, compulsory or minor courses (see Table 2).

According to the data, there are a total of 28 universities and institutes in China (including Hong Kong and Macao) that have been offering, or used to offer, Italian elective, compulsory or minor courses. In particular, those which have a discontinued program are Southwest University (SWU 2018–2019) and East China University of Political Science and Law (ECUPL 2019–2020). Among the 26 universities and institutes in China that are currently offering some

¹³ These figures were provided by the Italian Institute of Culture & Cultural Office of the Embassy of the Republic of Italy in Beijing (covering till June 2023). The author supplemented the data of "Year that opened the Italian language and culture as an elective, minor or compulsory courses" and updated some data in July 2024.

TABLE 2 Chinese universities and institutes that have been providing Italian language and culture as elective, compulsory or minor courses (as of 07/2024, including discontinued ones).

	Provinces/autonomous cities	University or institute	Year when these kinds of courses were opened	Course type (School/department/college/institute/center offering the course)
1	Xi'an (Shaanxi)	西安音乐学院 Xi'an Conservatory	Late 1970s and early 1980s (about 1979, 1980)	Compulsory (Department of Vocal Music)
			2011	(Postgraduate Department)
2	Hongkong	香港大学 University of Hong Kong	1998	Elective (School of Modern Languages and cultures)
3	Hongkong	香港中文大学 The Chinese University of Hong Kong	2004	Elective (Department of Linguistics and Modern Languages)
4	Beijing	中国政法大学 China University of Political Science and Law	2005	Elective (School of Foreign Studies)
5	Beijing	清华大学 Tsinghua University	2005	Elective (Language center)
6	Shanghai	同济大学 Tongji University	2006–2021 (discontinued)	Compulsory for the students in the Double Degree Project with the Politecnico of Turin and University of Bologna (Sino-Italian Campus)
			2022	Elective (School of Foreign Studies)
7	Hongkong	香港恒生大学 The Hang Seng University of Hong Kong	2010	Elective (School of Translation and Foreign Languages)
8	Zhengzhou (Henan)	河南农业大学 Henan Agricultural University	2011	Elective (School of International education)
9	Xiamen (Fujian)	厦门大学 Xiamen University	2015	Elective (College of Foreign Languages and Cultures)
10	Chengdu (Sichuan)	四川师范大学 Sichuan Normal University	2015	Compulsory for the students in the Double Master's Degree Project with IED on Fashion Design (Fashion and Arts Design Institute)
11	Chengdu (Sichuan)	电子科技大学 University of Electronic Science and Technology of China	2016	Elective (School of Foreign Languages)
12	Tianjin	南开大学 Nankai University	2016	Elective (College of foreign languages)
13	Chongqing	西南大学 Southwest University	2018–2019 (discontinued)	Elective (College of International Studies)
14	Xi'an (Shaanxi)	西安石油大学 Xi'an Shiyou University	2019	Elective (School of Foreign Languages)
15	Wenzhou (Zhejiang)	温州大学 Wenzhou University	2019	Elective (College of International Education)
16	Chongqing	重庆医科大学 Chongqing Medical University	2019	Elective (School of Foreign Languages)
17	Guangzhou (Guangdong)	广州大学 Guangzhou University	2019	Elective (College of International Education)
18	Shanghai	华东政法大学 East China University of Political Science and Law	2019–2020 (discontinued)	Elective (Law School)

(Continued)

TABLE 2 (Continued)

	Provinces/autonomous cities	University or institute	Year when these kinds of courses were opened	Course type (School/department/college/institute/center offering the course)
19	Wuhan (Hubei)	中南财经政法大学 Zhongnan University of Economics and Law	2019	Compulsory for the students in the Double Master's Degree Porject with the Sapienza University of Rome/ students with only one master's degree of Sapienza University of Rome (ZUEL-SUR School of Law and Economics)
			2023	Elective (School of Foreign Studies)
20	Beijing	北京化工大学 Beijing University of Chemical Technology	2020	Compulsory for the students in the Double Degree Porject with the University of Genoa on Industrial Design (School of International education)
21	Guangzhou (Guangdong)	华南师范大学 South China Normal University	2020	Elective (International Business College)
22	Shanghai	华东师范大学 East China Normal University	2021	Elective (Department of History)
23	Weifang (Shandong)	潍坊理工学院 Weifang Institute of Technology	2021	Elective (School of Foreign Languages)
24	Guangzhou (Guangdong)	广东外语外贸大学南国商学院 South China Business College Guangdong University of Foreign Studies	2021	Minor (School of Western Languages and Cultures)
25	Beijing	中央音乐学院 Central Conservatory of Music	2022	Elective (School of Basic education)
26	Xi'an (Shaanxi)	西北大学 Northwest University	2023	Compulsory for the students in the Double Degree Porject with the University of Salento on cultural heritage (NWU-Salento School of Cultural Heritage and Arts)
27	Zhengzhou/Kaifeng (Henan)	河南大学 Henan University	2023	Elective (School of Foreign Languages)
28	Wuhan (Hubei)	华中师范大学 Central China Normal University	from September 2025	Elective (cooperation between universities)

These figures were provided by the Italian Institute of Culture & Cultural Office of the Embassy of the Republic of Italy in Beijing.

courses, it is worthy to note that both the University of Hong Kong (HKU) and NKU offer Italian language undergraduate majors as well as some Italian language elective or minor courses. As of July 2024, there are currently 24 universities and institutes that only offer Italian elective, compulsory or minor courses.

Among these 26 universities and institutes, there are 4 that are offering compulsory courses, which are generally schools that have dual degree programs with Italian universities: (1)Sichuan Normal University (SICNU), (2) Zhongnan University of Economics and Law (ZUEL), (3)Beijing University of Chemical Technology (BUCT), e (4) Northwest University (NWU).¹⁴ In addition to this, South China

Business College Guangdong University of Foreign Studies offer just minor courses, which do not count as academic credit. Moreover, this college is currently preparing to open an Italian language and Culture major.

Based on the data in the table, the author also lists the following three analysis figures (Figure 3).

(Italian master degree, since 2019); Law and Economics (double master degree, since 2023). Commencing September 2024, in this school will add another double master program Digital Economics and Law. For all these students in ZUEL-SUR School of Law and Economics, Italian language and Culture is a compulsory course. On the other hand, the School of Foreign Studies of this university also offers Italian language and culture as two different elective courses, which is opened the students from all majors.

14 The situation at Zhongnan University of Economics and Law is a bit more complex: until July 2024, the ZUEL-SUR School of Law and Economics has 3 programs: Comparative and European Law and Cognitive Forensic Sciences

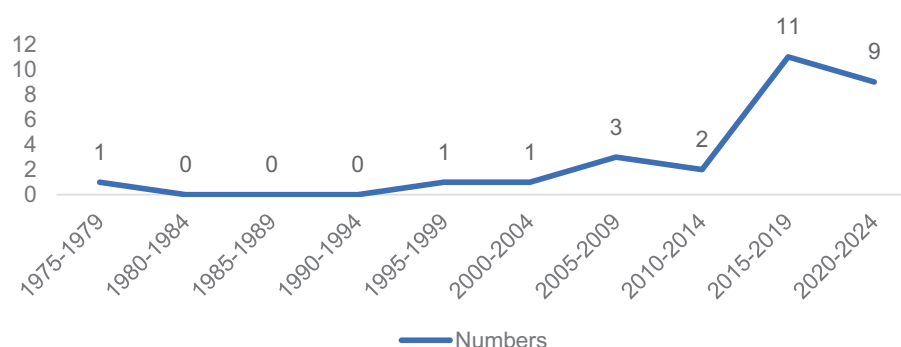


FIGURE 3

Number of Chinese universities and institutes that have been providing Italian language and culture as elective, compulsory or minor courses (including discontinued ones).

Regarding the course establishing timing, in 1979 or 1980, XACM launched an Italian Phonetics Course for undergraduate students in the vocal music department as a compulsory course. After that, HKU (which has been offering an Italian minor course since 1998) and the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK, which opened the Italian minor course in 2004) started their respective courses.

Among the 28 universities and institutes that opened the Italian language and culture as an elective, compulsory or minor courses, 20 launched their courses and programs after 2015 (11 between 2015 and 2019 and the remaining 9 between 2020 and 2024). From these data, it is easy to observe that since 2015, the number of Chinese universities and institutes that opened some kind of Italian language and culture course has sharply increased. It is likely that in the near future more and more Chinese universities and institutes will follow this trend.

As can be seen from Figure 4, the universities and institutes that are offering different kinds of Italian language and culture courses are distributed in 12 provinces and autonomous cities. In particular, the highest number is in Beijing where 4 academic institutions provide different types of courses. On the other hand, Shaanxi, Guangdong and Hong Kong have each 3 higher education institutions providing these types of courses. In conclusion, the number of universities and institutes is more uniformly distributed across China, this is the main difference between the distribution of whole degree programs and courses in the country. Indeed, bachelor and master programs are mainly located in Beijing.

As shown in Figure 5, nearly a half of the universities and institutes that are currently offering various Italian language and culture courses are mainly comprehensive universities (11/26). The other universities which also offer these courses cover many specializations such as normal universities, music conservatories and institutes of technology. This does not necessary mean that the Italian courses provided are strictly related with each university specialization.

In addition, the five universities that offer compulsory Italian language courses have their own specific and, sometimes, unique programs, as shown in Table 3.

Four of these five programs are jointly provided with Italian academic institutions, which have a solid reputation in their respective fields.

5.1.3 List of vocational and technical institutes (“da zhuan”) offering Italian language majors or elective courses

According to the figures provided by the Italian Institute of Culture & Cultural Office of the Embassy of the Republic of Italy in Beijing,¹⁵ in China besides Hebei International Studies University (HISU),¹⁶ there are 4 institutions that provide a three-year Italian language short majors or offer Italian language elective courses (details in Table 4).

It should be noted that HISU has begun to recruit “da zhuan” students in Italian language since 2008. In 2014, 2 years after the aforementioned transformation, it began to recruit Italian-language undergraduate students. Since then, this institute accepts both “da zhuan” students and undergraduate students. Moreover, Hunan College of Foreign Studies (Huwai) has begun to recruit “da zhuan” students in Italian language since 2015. In 2023, it was opened an elective Italian language course for students with “Music Communicology” major. In addition to this, since 2019, Shunde Polytechnic (SDPT) opened an elective Italian language course.

Considering these data, it is clear that an increasing number of Chinese vocational and technical institutes launched their own Italian language majors or opened Italian elective courses. Consequently, we can say that the number of students learning Italian language has been increasing.

To sum up, since the launch of the first Italian language major by the then-Foreign Trade Institute (nowadays UIBE) in Chinese academia in 1954, Italian language and culture teaching has achieved a great development in Chinese higher education system. Nowadays in China there are currently 24 universities and institutes that provide Italian language majors (24 bachelor degrees, among them 12 master degrees and 1 PhD program); there are 26 between universities and institutes that

¹⁵ These figures were provided by the Italian Institute of Culture & Cultural Office of the Embassy of the Republic of Italy in Beijing (covering till June 2023). Some data were updated by the author in July 2024.

¹⁶ In March 2012, the Ministry of Education “upgraded” this institute from the level of “a zhuan” to a regular Institute (see note 6) qualified to confer undergraduate degrees.

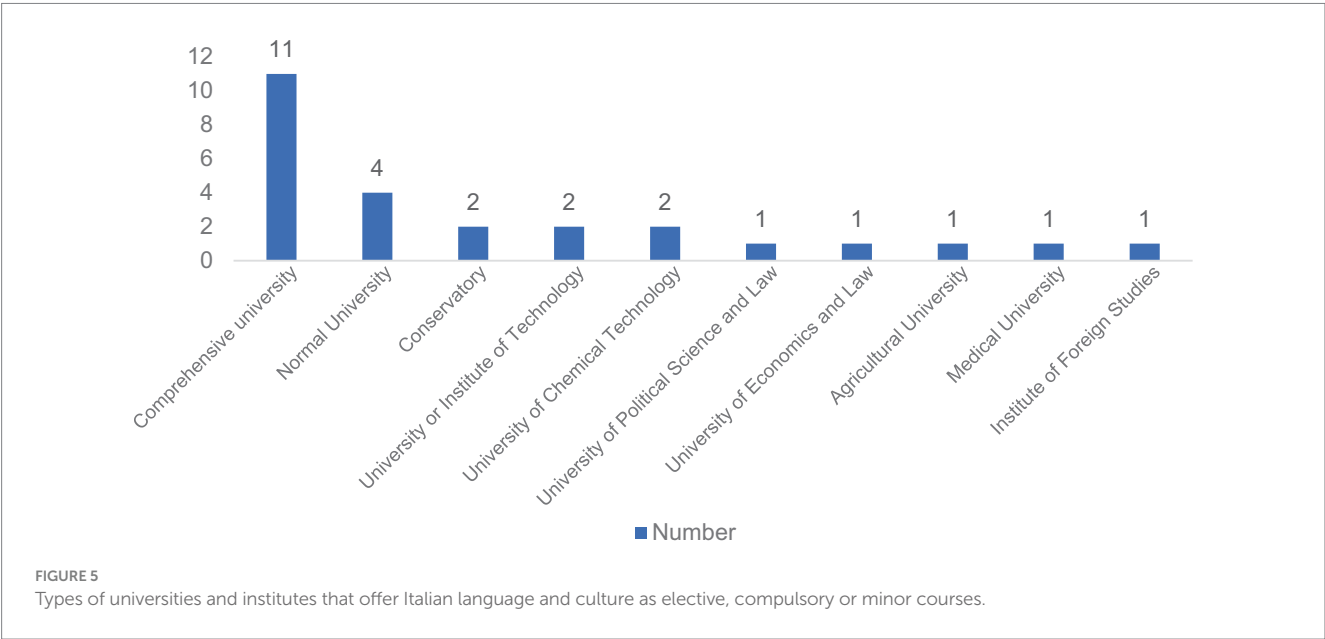
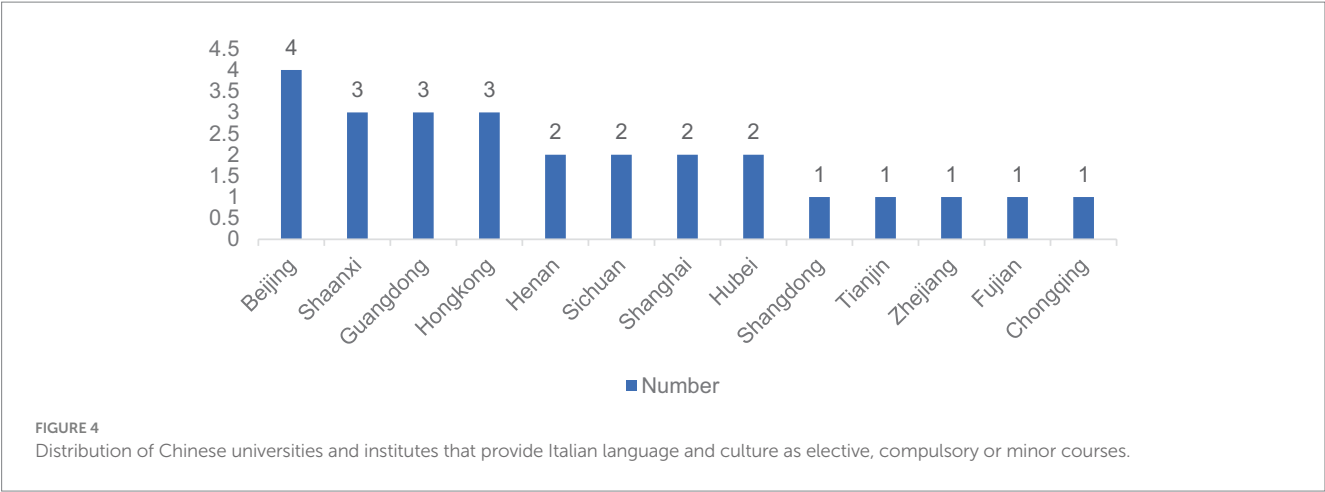


TABLE 3 The programs of the universities that offer compulsory Italian language courses.

Chinese university	Cooperative Italian university	Specialization
西安音乐学院 XACM	None	Vocal music
四川师范大学 SICNU	IED on Fashion Design	Product Design
中南财经政法大学 ZUEL	Sapienza University of Rome	Comparative and European Law
		Cognitive Forensic Sciences
		Law and Economics
		Digital Economics and Law
北京化工大学 BUCT	University of Genoa	Industrial Design
西北大学 NWU	University of Salento	Conservation and restoration of historical and cultural heritage

offer Italian language and culture as elective, mandatory or minor courses (among these universities, HKU and NKU have both Italian language major and elective Italian language courses); there are 4 vocational and technical institutes (“da zhuan”) that offer Italian language and culture major and Italian language elective courses, furthermore, HISU recruits both undergraduate students and “da zhuan” students.

Apart from the three above-mentioned arrangements in the Chinese higher education system, some universities offer Italian language courses to students through other means. For example, Hubei University of Technology (HBUT, 湖北工业大学) in 2012 established an Italian language Center (in 2014 this center was renamed Hubei Italian language Test Center), this center hired Chinese and Italian teachers outside the university to provide Italian language courses for high school students and undergraduate students who wanted to study in Italy. In 2019 The College of Music of Chongqing Normal University (CNU, 重庆师范大学) cooperated with the private institution Yu Hang Education 语航教育 (this training center is also an Italian language Test Center) to teach Italian language to high school students and undergraduate students, laying a language foundation that can help them to study in Italy.

TABLE 4 Chinese vocational and technical institutes (“da zhuan”) offering Italian language majors or elective courses.

	Provinces/autonomous cities	Institution	Opening year of the course	Note
	Shijiazhuang (Hebei)	河北外国语学院 Hebei International Studies University	2008	Three-year program in Italian language
1	Nanchang (Jiangxi)	江西外语外贸职业学院 Jiangxi College of Foreign Studies	2014	Three-year program in Italian language
2	Changsha Liuyang (Hunan)	湖南外国语职业学院 Hunan College of Foreign Studies	2015	Three-year program in Italian language
			2023	Elective course in Italian language: this course is for students with “Music Communicology” major
3	Wenchang (Hainan)	海南外国语职业学院 Hainan College of Foreign Studies	2018	Three-year program in Italian language
4	Shunde (Guangdong)	顺德职业技术学院 Shunde Polytechnic	2019	Elective course in Italian language

These figures were provided by the Italian Institute of Culture & Cultural Office of the Embassy of the Republic of Italy in Beijing.

5.2 Analysis of the current situation of Italian language and culture teaching in China

5.2.1 Teachers’ situation

In the current situation, most of the teachers in the field of Italian language and culture teaching in higher education system are middle-aged or younger teachers, mainly between 30 and 45 years old,¹⁷ who possess higher education background.¹⁸

In fact, according to the data, there are 164 Chinese teachers who teach Italian language and culture in the universities and institutes (including vocational and technical institutes): those above 45 years old are 16 (9.75%); those in the range of 35–45 years old are 74 (45.12%); those who are 30–35 years old are 59 (35.98%); those who are younger than 30 years old are 15 (9.15%). The teachers aged 30–45 account for more than 81% of the total.¹⁹

5.2.1.1 Teachers of universities and institutes offering Italian language majors (both undergraduate and graduate level)

Professor Haihong Zhang and her team members (张海虹)—from the Italian language Department of Guangdong University of Foreign Studies (GDUFS)—conducted a survey on the educational background and academic titles of the relevant Chinese teachers of universities and institutes offering Italian majors (both undergraduate and graduate level) in 2023. The figures are summarized in Table 5.²⁰

According to the data, among the 131 teachers of universities and institutes offering Italian majors (both undergraduate and graduate level): 9 full professors,²¹ 28 associate professors, 75 lecturers, and 19 assistant professors or other (助教及以下). Among the various types of teachers, professors account for 6.92%, associate professors account for 20.76% (“senior academic title”—professors and associate professors account for 27.69% of the total number), and lecturers 57.69% (which means that “intermediate academic title” accounts for 57.69% of the total number).

Regarding geographical distribution, professors and associate professors are mainly concentrated in Beijing, with 4 professors (accounting for 44.44% of the total number),²² and 15 associate professors (accounting for 53.57% of the total). Again, it is clear that

17 According to statistics, there are 164 Chinese teachers who teach Italian language and culture in the universities and institutes (including vocational and technical institutes): 45+ years old are 16 (9.75%); 35–45 years old are 74 (45.12%); 30–35 years old are 59 (35.98%); 30 years old are 15 (9.15%). Most of the teachers are middle-aged and young teachers, the teachers aged 30–45 account for more than 81% of the total.

18 It is important to bear in mind that language teachers’ academic requirements can vary a lot depending on the course, the host institution and the pursuing of a tenure-track position. A detailed explanation of this situation is beyond the purpose of this paper. As a rule of thumb, the reader should consider that nowadays, at least the new teachers working in a university need to hold a relevant PhD. Older university professors might not hold a doctoral degree.

19 These figures were partially extracted from the table provided by Professor Zhang Haihong’s team.

20 These figures were provided by Prof. Zhang Haihong’s team (张海虹) from the Italian language Department of Guangdong University of Foreign Studies in 2023. Some figures were provided by Hebei International Studies University (河北外国语学院) and were updated for this paper in July 2024.

21 In particular, as the data we found show, they are Professor Yujing Zhang 张宇靖 (UIBE); Professor Wen Zheng 文铮 and Professor Jingjing Li 李婧敬 (BFSU); Professor Xiuying Zhao 赵秀英 (BLCU)—re-employed after retirement—; Professor Lin Yang 杨琳 (NKU); Professor Ying Chen 陈英 (SISU); Professor Haihong Zhang 张海虹 (GDUFS); Professor Mi Zhang 张密 (JISU)—re-employed after retirement and Professor Hongbo Luo 罗红波 (HIU)—re-employed after retirement.

22 In particular, Professor Mi Zhang 张密 now works at JISU, she is now retired from UIBE (Beijing); Professor Hongbo Luo 罗红波 currently serves as the director of the Institute of Italian Studies and the director of Italian Department at HIU, she retired from Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (Beijing).

TABLE 5 Teachers' educational background and professional titles of universities and institutes offering Italian language majors (as of 07/2024).

	University or institute	Number of Chinese teachers	Educational background				Academic title			
			Post Doc	Ph.D	Master	Bachelor	Professor	Associate Professor	Lecture	AP or other
1	对外经济贸易大学 UIBE	6	0	5	1	0	1	3	2	0
2	北京外国语大学 BFSU	8	0	6	2	0	2	4	2	0
3	北京语言大学 BLCU	6	0	4	1	1	1	3	2	0
4	中国传媒大学 CUC	3	0	3	0	0	0	3	0	0
5	北京第二外国语学院 BISU	5	0	2	3	0	0	0	5	0
6	北京大学 PKU	2	2	0	0	0	0	2	0	0
7	天津外国语大学 TFSU	6	0	3	3	0	0	1	5	0
8	南开大学 NKU	6	1	5	0	0	1	1	4	0
9	西安外国语大学 XISU	8	0	3	5	0	0	1	7	0
10	河北科技师范学院 HNUST	6	0	1	5	0	0	1	5	0
11	河北外国语学院 HISU	6	0	0	5	1	0	1	3	2
12	黑龙江外国语学院 HIU	4	0	0	2	2	1	0	1	2
13	大连外国语大学 DUFL	6	0	3	3	0	0	2	3	1
14	吉林外国语大学 JISU	6	0	1	4	1	1	1	4	0
15	上海外国语大学 SISU	6	0	0	6	0	0	1	5	0
16	南京师范大学 NNU	5	0	3	2	0	0	1	4	0
17	浙江外国语学院 ZISU	5	0	2	3	0	0	1	4	0
18	浙江越秀外语学院 ZYU	9	0	0	9	0	0	0	3	6
19	四川外国语大学 SISU	6	0	2	4	0	1	0	5	0
20	成都外国语学院 CISU	9	0	0	6	3	0	0	6	3
21	重庆外语外事学院 CIFS	3	0	0	2	1	0	0	1	2

(Continued)

TABLE 5 (Continued)

	University or institute	Number of Chinese teachers	Educational background				Academic title			
			Post Doc	Ph.D	Master	Bachelor	Professor	Associate Professor	Lecture	AP or other
22	广东外语外贸大学 GDUPS	5	0	3	2	0	1	1	2	1
23	广州航海学院 GZMTU	4	0	1	3	0	0	0	2	2
24	香港大学 HKU	0	There are no Chinese teachers, all the relevant teachers are Italian native speakers							
	Total	130	3	47	71	9	9	27	75	19

AP stands for Assistant Professor. “Other” refers to junior positions, adjunct faculty, instructors, etc. These figures were provided by the Prof. Haihong Zhang’s team from GDUPS.

Beijing plays a very important role in Italian language and culture teaching in the country. The reasons for this phenomenon are inevitably related to the large number of relevant universities and institutes (6 in total) located in Beijing, most of which have a long history and a solid reputation in this field.

From the perspective of development through time, compared the most recent data to those of the survey results conducted by Prof. Lili from TFSU in 2010,²³ at the time of the Zhi’s work, in the universities and institutes offering Italian majors (both undergraduate and graduate level), there were in total 73 teachers, of whom 10 were professors (13.7%), 15 associate professors (20.5%), 23 lectures (31.5%), 25 assistant professors or others (34.2%).

In general, after 14 years of development, the number of teachers in the universities and institutes offering Italian majors has expanded a lot, the number of associate professors and lecturers has increased significantly (associate professors from 15 to 27, the lecturers from 23 to 75). On the other hand, the number of assistant professors and other types of teachers has decreased (from 25 to 19).²⁴ Moreover, the percentage of lectures has increased a lot (from 31.5 to 57.69%) and the percentage of assistant professors and other teachers has decreased a lot (from 34.2 to 14.6%). All things considered, the overall quality of the teachers has been improved during these years.

However, there is an occurrence that deserves attention, that is, the decreased number of full professors from 10 to 9 (of whom 3 are retirees) and the consequent decrease in the proportion (from 13.7 to 6.9%). There are two reasons behind this situation: on the one hand, many old professors with rich experience in teaching and research have retired one after another in these years due to age limits; on the other hand, the younger teachers who were able to become full professors are relatively few. Nevertheless, considering that the Italian language teachers are mainly middle-aged and young (about 80% is

between 30 and 45 years old), there is still great potential for promotions in the future.

Regarding teachers’ educational background, there are 3 postdoctoral fellows, 47 doctors, 71 master holders (some of them are currently enrolled in a PhD program), and 9 bachelor holders. The statement that more and more teachers will obtain doctoral degrees in the future is an educated guess, and one that we believe in.

5.2.1.2 Teachers of universities and institutes providing Italian language and culture as elective, compulsory or minor courses

In July 2024, a comprehensive survey was conducted on the academic titles and educational background of Chinese teachers of universities and institutes offering elective, compulsory or minor Italian courses, the figures are as follows in Table 6.

According to the data, among the 26 teachers of universities and institutes that provide elective, compulsory or minor Italian courses: there are only 2 full professors,²⁵ 4 associate professors, 12 lecturers, and 8 assistant professors or other kinds of teachers. Among the teachers, professors account for 7.69%, associate professors account for 15.38% (“senior academic title”)—professors and associate professors account for 23.07% of the total number—, and lecturers 46.15% (i.e., “intermediate academic title”) account for 46.15% of the total. From these data, we can see that the proportion of teachers with senior and intermediate academic titles who teach Italian language as a mere subject is slightly lower than that those who teach Italian in institutions offering Italian majors (“senior professional titles” account for 27.69% of the total number of teachers; “intermediate professional titles” account for 57.69% of the total). Nonetheless, this difference is relatively marginal. In terms of the teachers’ educational background, there is 1 holding a postdoc, 8 doctors, 17 master holders (some of them currently perusing a PhD). It is an educated guess to state that more and more teachers will hold doctoral degrees in the future.

In addition to this, during the investigation, the author also noticed a phenomenon: unlike the institutions that offer Italian majors

23 Lili Zhi, currently serves as the director of the Institute of Italian Studies and the director of Italian Department at HIU, she retired from Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (Beijing).

24 Although an overall picture of the Chinese academia is beyond the purpose of this paper, it is well known that the decreased number of assistant professors and other kinds of teachers, which usually do not hold a PhD, is decreasing in every university.

25 They are Professor LingZhou周玲(XACM)—re-employed after retirement—and Professor LuoJianli Wu吴剑丽(SCNU).

TABLE 6 Chinese universities and institutes offering Italian language and culture an elective, compulsory or minor courses (as of 07/2024).

	University or institute	Number of Chinese teachers	Educational background				Academic title			
			Post Doc	Ph.D	Master	Bachelor	Professor	Associate Professor	Lecture	AP or other
1	清华大学 THU	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0
2	中国政法大学 CUPL	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
3	北京化工大学 BUCT	2	0	0	2	0	0	0	2	0
4	中央音乐学院 CCOM	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0
5	西安音乐学院 XACM	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0
6	西安石油大学 XSYU	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0
7	西北大学 NWU	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
8	潍坊理工学院 WFIT	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0
9	河南农业大学 HAU	0	There are no Chinese teachers, all the relevant teachers are Italian native speakers							
10	河南大学 HENU	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
11	中南财经政法大学ZUEL / 华中师范大学 CCNU	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0
12	四川师范大学 SICNU	5	0	1	4	0	0	0	1	4
13	电子科技大学 UESTC	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0
14	重庆医科大学 CQMU	0	There are no Chinese teachers, all the relevant teachers are Italian native speakers							
15	同济大学 TJU	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0
16	华东师范大学 ECNU	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
17	温州大学 WZU	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
18	厦门大学 XMU	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0
19	广州大学 GU	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
20	华南师范大学 SCNU	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0
21	广东外语外贸大学南国商学院 South China Business College GDUFS	3	0	1	2	0	0	1	0	2

(Continued)

TABLE 6 (Continued)

	University or institute	Number of Chinese teachers	Educational background				Academic title			
			Post Doc	Ph.D	Master	Bachelor	Professor	Associate Professor	Lecture	AP or other
22	香港中文大学 CUHK	0	There are no Chinese teachers, all the relevant teachers are Italian native speakers							
23	香港恒生大学 HSUHK	0	There are no Chinese teachers, all the relevant teachers are Italian native speakers							
	Total	26	1	8	17	0	2	4	11	9

usually have a complete team of teachers,²⁶ institutions that only provide different kinds of courses usually hire few teachers. In particular, 11 of these universities have only one Chinese teacher and no Italian teacher such as Tsinghua University (THU), Tongji University (TJU);²⁷ 4 of these universities have only Italian teachers without any Chinese teacher (HAU, CQMU, CUHK, and HSUHK). Only 8 institutions are equipped with both Chinese and Italian teachers,²⁸ among them the Chinese teacher and Italian teacher from XACM and ZUEL are responsible for different types of courses.²⁹

The lack of Italian teachers means that students in these institutions cannot get good oral training, which will deeply affect their speaking level, daily communication and listening skills. On the other hand, the lack of Chinese teachers means that students may not be able to be guided properly into understanding Italian grammar.³⁰ Anyway, it is suggested that institutions lacking of a complete teaching team are partially understaffed and this has a slightly negative impact on teaching.

26 Ideally, here, a complete team of Italian teachers include both more than one Chinese and Italian native speakers.

27 The 11 universities that have only one Chinese teacher without any Italian teacher are: THU 清华大学, CCOM 中央音乐学院, XSYU 西安石油大学, NWU 西北大学, WFIT 潍坊理工学院, HENU 河南大学, UESTC 电子科技大学, TJU 同济大学, ECNU 华东师范大学, XMU 厦门大学 and GU 广州大学.

28 The 8 universities that have both Chinese teacher and Italian teacher are: CUPL 中国政法大学, BUCT 北京化工大学, XACM 西安音乐学院, ZUEL 中南财经政法大学, SICNU 四川师范大学, WZU 温州大学, SCNU 华南师范大学 and South China Business College GDUFS 广东外语外贸大学南国商学院.

29 Xi'an Conservatory of Music—The Chinese teacher is responsible for the compulsory course "Italian Phonetics" for the undergraduate students in the Vocal Music Department, the Italian teacher is responsible for the elective course "Italian language" for all graduate students; Zhongnan University of Economics and Law—the Chinese teacher is responsible for the elective courses "Italian language and Culture" and "Italian language" for all students, and the Italian teacher is responsible for the compulsory "Italian language" course for graduate students in the ZUEL-SUR School of Law and Economics.

30 It is beyond the purpose of this analysis to explain the differences about teaching Italian language and other foreign languages such as English. In any event, it is important to bear in mind that Italian grammar is more complex and articulated than English one. The lack of a Mandarin native speaker, and the consequent lack of Chinese explanation of the grammar especially to beginners, makes harder and slows down the learning pace.

5.2.1.3 Teachers of vocational and technical institutes ("da zhuan") offering Italian language majors or elective courses

In July 2024, a survey on the educational background and academic titles of Chinese teachers of vocational and technical institutes ("da zhuan") offering Italian language majors or elective courses was conducted, the figures are as follows in Table 7.

According to the data, among the 8 teachers of vocational and technical institutes ("da zhuan"): there are 3 lecturers³¹ and 5 assistant professors and other types of teachers. Teachers with "intermediate academic title" account for 37.5% of the total number. In terms of the teachers' educational background, there are 5 who hold a master degree and 3 who only hold a bachelor degree.

The results of the survey show that there is no professor or associate professor among the teachers of vocational and technical institutes, and no teacher holds a doctoral degree. Therefore, it is evident that these teachers' academic qualifications are below the average. It is worth mentioning that except for Shunde Polytechnic (SDPT, that has no fixed teachers),³² the other three institutions all have a complete teaching team, including both Chinese and Italian teachers.

In conclusion, the group of Italian teachers in China is constantly expanding, more and more young teachers have obtained or are pursuing doctoral degrees to improve their academic qualifications and research capabilities. It is fair to assume that the teaching level will keep improving in the near future.

5.2.2 Course curricula and teaching materials

To recapitulate, for the purpose of this research, we considered three kinds of "higher education institutions": (1) universities and institutes offering Italian language Majors (both undergraduate and graduate level); (2) universities and institutes offering Italian language and culture as elective, compulsory or minor courses; (3) vocational and technical institutes ("da zhuan") offering various types of programs.

31 In 2025, three teachers in Jiangxi College of Foreign Studies will all become lecturers.

32 Shunde Polytechnic hires undergraduate students from GDUFS to teach the elective Italian language course, this course is not offered every year.

TABLE 7 Chinese vocational and technical institutes (“da zhuan”) offering Italian language majors or elective courses (as of 07/2024).

	Institution	Number of Chinese teachers	Educational background				Academic titles			
			Post Doc	Ph.D	Master	Bachelor	Professor	Associate Professor	Lecture	AP or other
1	江西外语外贸职业学院 JUFLIT	3	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	3
2	湖南外国语职业学院 HUWAI	2	0	0	1	1	0	0	2	0
3	海南外国语职业学院 HNCFS	3	0	0	1	2	0	0	1	2
4	顺德职业技术学院 SDPT	0	Only temporary teacher							
	Total	8	0	0	5	3	0	0	3	5

5.2.2.1 Course curricula and teaching materials of universities and institutes offering Italian language majors (both undergraduate and graduate level)

5.2.2.1.1 Course curricula and teaching materials for undergraduate students

These are the programs with a longest tradition in China, consequently they follow a kind of relatively well-established pattern. These courses can ensure that students master the basic skills of Italian language listening, speaking, reading and writing abilities.

As a way of example, we can refer to the core courses of the Italian language undergraduate program of NKU formulated in September 2022 (Table 8).

As we can see from the table above, these courses can be divided into two categories: core courses and complementary courses:

(1) Core courses:

First year: “Italian language basics (elementary level)” series of courses (grammar, listening, speaking and comprehensive courses, etc.);

Second year: “Italian language basics (intermediate level)” series of courses (grammar, listening, speaking, reading, writing and comprehensive courses, etc.);

Third and fourth years: “Advanced Italian language” series of courses (grammar, writing, translation, interpretation and comprehensive courses, etc.).

(2) Complementary courses:

A Brief Introduction of Italy, A brief introduction of Italian literature, Business Italian language, Italian for Tourism, etc.

The core courses focus on cultivating students’ foreign language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing, translation, etc.), which weight for the majority of the program. The complementary courses focus on increasing students’ knowledge of Italian culture and in other uses of language for specific purposes such like economics, business, tourism, academic research, etc.

Different universities and institutes also have slightly different curricula for their equivalent respective programs: for example, the

UIBE also provides subjects such as international business negotiations in Italian, Italian business correspondence, etc.

Considering that undergraduate freshmen in China have, usually, no previous Italian knowledge,³³ all universities and institutes put their emphasis on grammar teaching and basic foundation of the language skills.

Teaching materials

At present, there are many Italian textbooks available in China depending on the course type. Consequently, teachers can flexibly choose teaching materials.

Regarding basic courses of language skills: the most frequently used textbooks are *Studiamo l’italiano all’università* (We study Italian at the University [our translation] 大学意大利语教程) and *Nuovissimo Progetto Italiano* (Brand New Italian Project [our translation] 新视线意大利语). Other popular alternatives are, as a way of example, *Corso intensivo d’italiano* (Intensive Italian course 速成意大利语) and *Ciao!* (Hello! 你好!意大利语). Some of these textbooks are directly written by Chinese scholars, while others are popular overseas textbooks translated and edited by Chinese professors.

In addition, there are many textbooks that can be used for teaching Italian for specific purposes such as: (1) business and economics teaching materials,³⁴ (2) Italian literature teaching

33 Differently from English language learning, students learn Italian directly during thier higher education studies for the very first time.

34 *Laboratorio dell’Italiano Commerciale* (Italian Commercial Laboratories 经贸意大利语口语), *Articoli di economia e commercio in italiano* (Articles on economics and commerce in Italian 意大利语经贸文章选读), *Discorsi economico-commerciali italiano-cinese, cinese-italiano* (Italian-Chinese, Chinese-Italian economic-commercial discourses 意大利语经贸口译), *Corrispondenza Commerciale e Testi Autentici* (Commercial Correspondence and Authentic Texts 意大利语经贸应用文), etc.

TABLE 8 Core courses of Italian language undergraduate program.

Semester	Course name	Credits
First year: First Semester	基础意大利语4-1 (Italian language basics 4-1)	8
	意大利语视听说3-1 (Multimedia-based Italian listening and speaking course 3-1)	1
	意大利国家概况2-1 (A brief introduction of Italy 2-1)	2
	意大利文学概论 (A brief introduction of Italian literature)	2
First year: Second Semester	基础意大利语4-2 (Italian language basics 4-2)	8
	意大利语视听说3-2 (Multimedia-based Italian listening and speaking course 3-2)	1
	意大利语口语3-1 (Italian conversation 3-1)	1
	意大利国家概况2-2 (A brief introduction of Italy 2-2)	2
Second year: Third Semester	基础意大利语4-3 (Italian language basics 4-3)	8
	意大利语视听说3-3 (Multimedia-based Italian listening and speaking course 3-3)	1
	意大利语口语3-2 (Italian conversation 3-2)	1
	意大利语阅读4-1 (Italian Reading 4-1)	1
	意大利语基础语法 (Basic Italian Grammar)	2
Second year: Forth Semester	基础意大利语4-4 (Italian language basics 4-4)	8
	意大利语口语3-3 (Italian conversation 3-3)	1
	意大利语阅读4-2 (Italian Reading 4-2)	1
	意大利研究 (Italian Studies)	2
Third year: Fifth Semester	高级意大利语3-1 (Advanced Italian language 4-3)	6
	意大利语阅读4-3 (Italian Reading 4-3)	1
	意大利语写作2-1 (Italian Writing 2-1)	1
	意汉笔译 (Italian-Chinese for written translations)	2
	经贸意大利语 (Business Italian language)	2
	意大利语报刊选读 (Selected readings from Italian press and periodicals)	2
	旅游意大利语 (Italian for Tourism)	1
Third year: Sixth Semester	高级意大利语3-2 (Advanced Italian language 3-2)	6
	意大利语阅读4-4 (Italian Reading 4-4)	1
	意大利语写作2-2 (Italian Writing 2-2)	1
	汉意笔译 (Chinese-Italian for written translations)	2
	意汉口译 (Italian-Chinese for interpreters)	1
	意大利语测试 (Italian language test)	1
	对外意大利语教学 (Teaching Italian as a Foreign Language)	2
	中国文化(意语)(Chinese Culture in Italian language)	2
Fourth year: Seventh Semester	高级意大利语3-3 (Advanced Italian language 3-3)	6
	汉意口译 (Chinese-Italian for interpreters)	1
	中国与意语国家关系 (Relations between China and Italian-speaking countries)	1
Fourth year: Eighth Semester	意大利语电影欣赏 (Introductions to Italian movies)	1
	毕业论文 (Dissertation)	4

Major: Italian language; Subject: Literature; Duration: 4 years; Academic Degree: Bachelor of Literature. Italian language undergraduate program study plan of Nankai University as formulated in 2022 (2022南开大学意大利语专业培养方案): <https://sfs.nankai.edu.cn/2022/0901/c7260a471035/page.htm>.

TABLE 9 Course curricula of universities and institutes that offer graduate courses.

	University or institute	Specializations	Peculiarities and qualities of the program	Core courses
1	对外经济贸易大学 (UIBE)	European Language and Literature	Business Italian language and area studies	高级意大利语 Italian language in the advanced level, 中意关系Sino-Italian relations, 意大利经济研究Italian Economic Studies, 政治研究Political Studies, etc.
		MTI Interpretation	Interpreting	同声传译基础和应用Fundamentals and applications of simultaneous interpretation, 交替传译基础和应用Fundamentals and applications of consecutive interpretation, 中意语言文化对比研究 Comparative study of Chinese and Italian languages and cultures, etc.
2	北京外国语大学 (BFSU)	European Language and Literature	Culture and literature and area studies	中世纪与文艺复兴名家名著研读Study of famous works and authors of medieval and Renaissance Period, 意大利十八、十九世纪名家名著研读, Study of famous Italian works and authors from the 18th and 19th centuries, 意大利当代文学Contemporary Italian Literature, 翻译与跨文化研究 Translation and Intercultural Studies, 中意文化交流史History of Cultural Exchange between China and Italy, 意大利语语言学 Italian Linguistics, 意大利语高级写作与修辞 Advanced Italian Writing and Rhetoric, 社会学概论Introduction to Sociology, 中国文学意大利语翻译Translation about Chinese literary works, etc.
		MTI Interpretation	Interpreting	翻译理论与实践Translation Theory and Practice, 双向口译基础Basics of Chinese-Italian and Italian-Chinese Interpretation, Italian Rhetoric and Writing, 交替传译 Consecutive Interpretation, 同声传译 Simultaneous Interpretation, etc.
3	北京语言大学 (BLCU)	European Language and Literature	Translation, literature, history and Italian culture	翻译理论与实践Translation theory and practice, 意大利文化简史A brief history of Italian culture, 意大利现代文学Modern and Contemporary Italian literature, 中意文化交流史A history of cultural exchanges between China and Italy, 拉丁语 Latin, 中世纪与文艺复兴时期文学研读 Study of famous works and authors of medieval and Renaissance Period, etc.
4	天津外国语大学 (TFSU)	European Language and Literature	Applied linguistics	意大利语社会语言学Italian sociolinguistics, 现代意大利语音系学Modern Italian phonology Study, 现代意大利语语言学 Modern Italian linguistics, 意大利语言简史 A brief history of the Italian language, etc.
		MTI Translation	Translation Practice	商务笔译Business translation, 汉意文化对比 Chinese-Italian cultural comparison, etc.

(Continued)

TABLE 9 (Continued)

	University or institute	Specializations	Peculiarities and qualities of the program	Core courses
5	西安外国语大学 (XISU)	European Language and Literature	Literature, translation, Socialism.	意大利社会与国情 Italian society and national conditions, 意大利文学作品翻译 Translation of Italian literary works, 现当代意大利文学 Modern and Contemporary Italian Literature, 中国文学在意大利的发展 The Study of Chinese literature in Italy, 中国特色社会主义翻译研究 Research of translation about Socialism with Chinese characteristics, 意大利文化遗产修复与保存 Restoration and preservation of Italian cultural heritage, 意大利文学概论及批评方法 Introduction to Italian Literature and Critical Methods, etc.
6	吉林外国语大学 (JISU)	MTI Interpretation	Double degree, Interpretation and translation.	交传和同传 Consecutive and Simultaneous Interpretation, 高级阅读与翻译 Advanced Reading and Translation, 笔译和口译理论与实践 Theory and Practice of Translation and Interpretation, 法律翻译 Legal Translation, 语言学 Linguistics, 战后经济 Italian Post-war economy, etc.
7	上海外国语大学 (SISU)	European Language and Literature	Translation, writing	意大利语翻译理论与实践 Italian Translation Theory and Practice, 意大利语写作 Italian writing, 意大利文化 Italian culture, etc.
8	南京师范大学 (NNU)	European Language and Literature	Linguistics	意大利文学 Italian Literature, 意大利语语言学导论 Introduction to Italian Linguistics, etc.
9	四川外国语大学 (SISU)	European Language and Literature	Literary translation	意汉笔译 Italian-Chinese translation, 意大利现当代文学 Italian modern and contemporary literature, etc.
10	广东外语外贸大学 (GDUFS)	European Language and Literature	Multiple specializations	意大利文学导论 Introduction to Italian Literature, 意大利社会与文化 Italian Society and Culture, 欧洲移民研究 European Immigration Studies, etc.
11	中国传媒大学 (CUC)	Area studies	Area studies	跨文化交际 Intercultural Communication, 意大利媒体产业 Italian Media Industry, etc.
12	南开大学 (NKU)	Area studies	Area studies	国别和区域研究导论 Introduction to Area Studies, 中意跨文化交际 Sino-Italian Intercultural Communication, 意大利语文献导读 Introduction to Professional Italian Literature, 中国文化在意大利 Chinese Culture in Italy, 意大利政治政党 Italian Politics and Political parties, 战后意大利经济 Post-war Italian Economy, etc.

TABLE 10 Course curricula of universities and institutes providing Italian language and culture as elective, compulsory or minor courses.

	University or institute	Courses	Course duration: number of semesters	Course hours / each semester	Credit	CEFRLevel
1	清华大学 THU	意大利语1 Italian language 1	1/each semester x 1 (Semester Autumn-Winter)	64/each semester	4	A1
			1/each semester x1 (Semester Spring-Summer)	64/each semester	4	A1
		意大利语2 Italian language 2	1/each semester x 1 (Autumn-Winter)	64/each semester	4	A2
			1/each semester x1 (Spring-Summer)	64/each semester	4	A2
		意大利语3 Italian language 3	1/each semester x1 (Autumn-Winter)	32/each semester	2	B1
		意大利语4 Italian language 4	—	—	—	—
2	中国政法大学 CUPL	大学意大利语 Italian language at university	1/each semester x 4	192 (48/each semester x4)	12	B1
		初级意大利语 Elementary Italian language	1/each semester x2	96 (48/each semester x2)	6	A2
		意大利语 Italian language	1/each semester x2	96 (48/each semester x2)	6	A2
		研究生意大利语 Italian language for graduate students	1/each semester x3	96 (48/each semester x2)	6	A2
		法律意大利语 Legal Italian	1/each semester x1	48 (48/each semester)	3	A2-B1
3	中央音乐学院 CCOM	初级意大利语 Italian language (elementary level)	1/each semester x1 (Spring-Summer)	32/each semester	2	below A1
		意大利语基础 Italian language basics	1/each semester x2	64 (32/each semester x2)	4	A1-A2
		意大利语精读 Comprehensive Italian	1/each semester x2	64 (32/each semester x2)	4	A1-A2
		意大利语 Italian language	1/each semester x2	64 (32/each semester x2)	4	A1-A2
		意大利语第二外语 Italian as a second foreign language	1/each semester x2	64 (32/each semester x2)	4	A1-A2
4	南开大学 NKU	二外意大利语 Italian as a second foreign language	1/each semester x 1 (Autumn-Winter)	64 (32/each semester x2)	4	A1-A2
			1/each semester x 1 (Spring-Summer)			
		初级意大利语(上) Italian language (elementary level) 1	1/each semester x1 (Autumn-Winter)	32	2	below A1
		初级意大利语(下) Italian language (elementary level) 2	1/each semester x1 (Spring-Summer)	32	2	A1-A2

(Continued)

TABLE 10 (Continued)

	University or institute	Courses	Course duration: number of semesters	Course hours / each semester	Credit	CEFRLevel
5	西安音乐学院 XACM	意大利语语音 Italian Phonetics	1/each semester x2	64	4	A1
		意大利语 Italian language	1/each semester x2	64	4	A1-A2
6	西安石油大学 XSYU	分方向第二外语意大利语 Italian as a second foreign language	1/each semester x1 (Spring–Summer)	64/each semester	2	below A1
		英语专业第二外语 Italian as a second foreign language for English major students	1/each semester x4	128 (32/each semester x4)	8	A1-A2
7	西北大学 NWU	第二外语 (意大利语) Italian as a second foreign language	1/each semester x3	108 (36/each semester x3)	6	A2-B1
		意大利语实践 Italian language Practice	1/each semester x3	108 (36/each semester x3)	6	A2-B1
8	河南大学 HAU	意大利文化 Italian Culture	1/each semester x1 (Autumn–Winter)	32/each semester	2	below A1
			1/each semester x1 (Spring–Summer)	32/each semester	2	below A1
9	中南财经政法大学 ZUEL	意大利语语言与文化(上) Italian Language and Culture (1)	1/each semester x1 (Autumn–Winter)	32/each semester	2	below A1
		意大利语语言与文化(下) Italian Language and Culture (2)	1/each semester x1 (Spring–Summer)	32/each semester	2	A1-A2
		意大利语二外(研究生)(上) Italian as a second foreign language (for graduate students) (1)	1/each semester x1 (Autumn–Winter)	32/each semester	2	below A1
		意大利语二外(研究生)(下) Italian as a second foreign language (for graduate students) (2)	1/each semester x1 (Spring–Summer)	32/each semester	2	A1-A2
		意大利语(单证班) Italian language (for single-degree program students)	1/each semester x2	96 (48/each semester x2)	6	A1-A2
		意大利语(双学位) Italian language (for double-degree program students)	1/each semester x3	96 (32/each semester x3)	6	A1-A2
10	电子科技大学 UESTC	意大利语言与文化 Italian Language and Culture	1/each semester x1 (Autumn–Winter)	32/each semester	2	below A1
			1/each semester x1 (Spring–Summer)	32/each semester	2	below A1
		基础意大利语 Italian language basics	1/each semester x1 (Spring–Summer)	32/each semester	2	below A1

(Continued)

TABLE 10 (Continued)

	University or institute	Courses	Course duration: number of semesters	Course hours / each semester	Credit	CEFRLevel
11	同济大学 TJU	意大利语(上) Italian language (1)	1/each semester x1 (Autumn-Winter)	68/each semester	4	A1
			1/each semester x1 (Spring-Summer)	68/each semester	4	
		意大利语(下) Italian language (2)	1/each semester x1 (Spring-Summer)	68/each semester	4	A2
12	华东师范大学 ECNU	意大利语言文化入门 Introduction to Italian Language and Culture	1/each semester x1 (Autumn-Winter)	36/each semester	2	below A1
		意大利语言文化 Italian Language and Culture	1/each semester x1 (Autumn-Winter)	36/each semester	2	below A1
13	温州大学 WZU	意大利语 Italian Language	1/each semester x1 (Autumn-Winter)	32/each semester	2	below A1
14	厦门大学 XMU	基础意大利语 Italian language basics	1/each semester x1 (Autumn-Winter)	32/each semester	2	below A1
			1/each semester x1 (Spring-Summer)			
		意大利国家概况 A brief introduction of Italy	1/each semester x1 (Autumn-Winter)	32/each semester	2	below A1
			1/each semester x1 (Spring-Summer)			
		意大利语第二外国语 Italian as a second foreign language	1/each semester x1 (Autumn-Winter)	32/each semester	2	below A1
			1/each semester x1 (Spring-Summer)			
15	广东外语外贸大学 南国商学院 South China Business College GDUFS	基础意大利语 Italian language basics	1/each semester x3	128/each semester	—	A2
		意大利语视听说 Multimedia-based Italian listening and speaking course	1/each semester x3	32/each semester	—	A2

materials;³⁵ (3) Italian history teaching materials;³⁶ (4) Italian cultural teaching materials.³⁷ In addition to this, there are also a corpus of *ad hoc* teaching material compiled by various teachers for their respective courses that, although is available to the student and the relevant staff, is largely unpublished.

35 *Antologia Italiana* (Italian anthology 意大利文学选集), *Pagine di scrittori italiani contemporanei* (Pages of contemporary Italian writers 意大利当代文学选读), *I lineamenti della lettura italiana e la lettura delle pagine dei celebri scrittori italiani* (The features of Italian reading and the reading of the pages of famous Italian writers意大利文学简史及名著选读), etc.

36 For example, although only in Chinese: *A Concise History of Italy* [our translation] (意大利文化简史).

37 For example, although only in Chinese: *A Brief Introduction to Italian Culture* [our translation] (意大利文化概况).

In general, there is plenty of undergraduate textbooks, and students can use these textbooks by themselves to improve their Italian language skills and expand their relevant knowledge.

5.2.2.1.2 Course curricula and teaching materials for graduate students

The 12 universities and institutes that offer graduate courses have four different specializations: (1) European Language and Literature 欧洲语言文学 (three-year program), (2) Italian-Chinese and Chinese-Italian Interpretation 意大利语口译 (MTI, two-year program), (3) Italian-Chinese and Chinese-Italian Translation 意大利语笔译 (MTI, two-year program), and (4) Area studies (three-year program). Each university and institute has its own teaching peculiarities and qualities, so their core courses are partially different, as summarized in Table 9.

Teaching materials

Since the courses and the peculiarities of each program are different, teachers, apart from material compiled by themselves,

TABLE 11 Course changes of universities and institutes providing Italian language and culture as elective, compulsory or minor courses.

1	清华大学 THU	In 2019, the elective courses Italian language 1 and Italian language 2 changed from 2 credits to 4 credits.
2	中国政法大学 CUPL	In 2019, the course “Italian language at university” was added to the original courses.
3	南开大学 NKU	After opening “Italian as a second foreign language” to all undergraduate students in the College of Foreign Languages in 2016, the “Italian language (elementary level)” course was opened to the all undergraduate students in 2023.
4	西安音乐学院XACM	Since the “Italian language” elective course was launched in the graduate school in 2011, at a certain point a compulsory course was added. The latter is now discontinued.
5	西安石油大学 XSYU	After the “Italian as second foreign language” elective course was launched in School of Foreign languages in 2019, in 2020 it was added another elective course for English major students.
6	中南财经政法大学ZUEL	Elective courses: the School of Foreign Studies has offered an “Italian language and culture (1)” course to all the undergraduate students in 2023. In 2024 it was added a second course of “Italian language and culture (2).” “Italian language” compulsory courses of the School of Economics and Law within the curricula of the following programs: ● “Comparative and European Law” (established in 2019) ● “Cognitive Forensic Sciences” (established in 2019) ● “Law and Economics” (established in 2023) — Double degree ● “Digital Economics and Law” (established in 2024) —Double degree
7	电子科技大学UESTC	After the elective course “Italian language and culture” was launched in 2016, in 2022 was added another elective course “Italian language (elementary level)” for students not in the School of Foreign languages.
8	西南大学 SWU	An elective course about Italian language was offered during 2018–2019, but the course was later discontinued.
9	同济大学 TJU	From 2006–2021, Sino-Italian Campus offered a compulsory course related to Italian language to students enrolled in the double degree programs with the Università di Bologna and the Politecnico di Torino, these programs were discontinued in 2021. Since 2022 School of Foreign Studies launched an Italian language elective course available to all the undergraduate students of TJU.
10	华东政法大学ECUPL	An elective course regarding to Italian language was offered during 2019–2020, but the course was later discontinued.
11	华东师范大学 ECNU	After the elective course “A brief introduction of Italian language and culture” was launched to the undergraduate students in 2016, in 2022 was added another elective course “Italian language and culture” for graduate students.
12	温州大学 WZU	“Italian language” was an elective course from 2019 to 2020; and it became a compulsory course from 2020 to 2022; then it has returned back into an elective course since 2023.
13	厦门大学 XMU	Two elective courses “Italian language (elementary level)” and “A brief introduction of Italy” were launched to undergraduate students in 2015, in 2016 a new elective course entitled “Italian as second foreign language” was added.

usually choose domestic and foreign textbooks according to the content of their own courses and their preferences.³⁸

In the questionnaire, many teachers also highlighted that some graduate-student courses lack *ad hoc* textbooks. These subjects include: “Italian Art History,” “Italian Modern and Contemporary Literature,” “Business Translation,” “Comparison of Chinese and Italian Culture,” “Italian-Chinese and Chinese-Italian Translation Practice,” “Writing,” etc.

38 Examples of textbooks include: “Capire la Cina contemporanea” Series (“Understanding Contemporary China”理解当代中国), *Prima lezione di sociolinguistica* (Berruto, Gaetano. Laterza Editore, 2004), *Manuale di fonetica* (Leoni F. A. & Maturi, P. Carocci Editore, 2018), *Elementi di linguistica italiana* (Gallo, Daniele. Gruppo Editoriale Viator, 2020), *Breve storia della lingua italiana* (Morgana, Silvia. Carocci Editore, 2009), *La comunicazione interculturale nell’era digitale* (Giaccardi, Chiara. Il Mulino Editore, 2012), etc.

5.2.2.2 Course curricula and teaching materials of universities and institutes providing Italian language and culture as elective, compulsory or minor courses

For universities and institutes that provide Italian elective, compulsory or minor courses, each school has its own tailored program, which varies greatly. Thanks to a questionnaire results, information about 15 universities and institutes were collected. The relevant data are reported in Table 10.

Compared with universities and institutes that offer Italian majors, those that offer other types of courses have shorter ones (most courses last only 1 semester, and the longest one lasts for 4 semesters). After completing these courses, most students can only reach the elementary level (from very beginner to A2). However, a part of students cannot reach even A1 level due to the limited study time. On the other hand, a limited number of students who take some relevant elective courses (such as THU-Italian language 3, CUPL-Italian language at university) can reach the intermediate level B1 and, in few cases (attending

TABLE 12 Students' number of universities and institutes offering Italian majors (both undergraduate and graduate level).

	University or institute	Undergraduate students' number		Graduate students' number	
		Number of classes	Students' number per class	Number of subjects	Students' number per subject
1	对外经济贸易大学 UIBE	1/each year	20–25	2/each year	Master 3 MTI 5
2	北京外国语大学 BFSU	1/each year	about 25	2/each year	Master 2–5 MTI 6–10
3	北京语言大学 BLCU	1/each year	about 20	1/each year	3–4
4	中国传媒大学 CUC	1/each year	16	1/each year	1
5	北京第二外国语学院 BISU	1/each year	24	—	
6	北京大学 PKU	1 student cohort enrolled every four years	15	—	
7	天津外国语大学 TFSU	1/each year	22	2/each year	Master about 3 MTI about 3
8	南开大学 NKU	1/each year	15	1/each year	1
9	西安外国语大学 XISU	1/each year	about 25	1/each year	1–4
10	河北科技师范学院 HNUST	1/each year	35	—	
11	河北外国语学院 HISU	1/each year	about 30	—	
12	黑龙江外国语学院 HIU	1/each year	20–25	—	
13	大连外国语大学 DUFL	1/each year	28	—	
14	吉林外国语大学 JISU	1/each year	about 30	1/each year	about 4
15	上海外国语大学 SISU	1/each year	about 18	1/each year	1–2
16	南京师范大学 NNU	1/each year	15–25	1/each year	1–4
17	浙江外国语学院 ZISU	3/each year	20 20 (international cooperation program) 20 (international cooperation program)	—	
18	浙江越秀外语学院 ZYSU	2/each year	about 20 about 20	—	
19	四川外国语大学 SISU	1/each year	about 25	1/each year	about 3
20	成都外国语学院 CISU	1–2/each year	about 30–60	—	
21	重庆外语外事学院 CIFS	1/each year	24	—	

(Continued)

TABLE 12 (Continued)

	University or institute	Undergraduate students' number		Graduate students' number	
		Number of classes	Students' number per class	Number of subjects	Students' number per subject
22	广东外语外贸大学 GDUFS	1/each year	28	1/each year	2–5
23	广州航海学院 GZMTU	1/each year	25	—	
24	香港大学 UKU	Unspecified			

These figures were provided by Professor Haihong Zhang's team from GDUFS.

courses such as SICNU-Italian language about product design), even B2.³⁹

In addition to this, unlike the Italian language majors, which have basically stable curricula, the elective, compulsory or minor courses were often amended. For example, the following universities have experienced curricula changes (Table 11).

As can be seen from the table above, for universities and institutes that offer Italian elective, compulsory and minor courses, there are often some changes, such as canceling courses, adding new courses for different groups of students (undergraduate or graduate students), transforming the type of courses (from elective to compulsory, or vice versa), increasing or decreasing course hours (credit change), etc.

Teaching materials

Compared with the rich and diverse teaching materials for Italian majors, institutions offering different kinds of Italian language and culture courses face the challenge of the lack of suitable teaching material.

Most teachers use the textbooks *Studiamo l'italiano all'università* and *Nuovissimo Progetto Italiano* that are designed for Italian major students. However, these two textbooks are not suitable for the students of elective, compulsory and minor courses because they are tailored for longer courses.

Moreover, at the very beginning of Italian courses, teachers have to spend a lot of time to explain the pronunciation rules, so some teachers also use the textbooks such as *Guida alla lingua italiana* (Guide to the Italian language [our translation] 意大利语入门) and *Fonetica italiana* (Italian phonetics[our translation] 意大利语语音快速突破).

Besides, teachers will also choose other teaching textbooks, such as *Il corso in italiano* (The course in Italian [our translation] 走遍意大利), *Corso intensivo d'italiano* (Intensive Italian course [our translation] 速成意大利语), *Italian language from zero* [our translation] (零起点意大利语), etc. Furthermore, as usual, teachers also prepare and arrange *ad hoc* teaching material by themselves.

It is worth mentioning that Professor Ling Zhou周玲 of HACM,—when she taught the compulsory course “Italian Phonetics” for

undergraduate students of the vocal music department—used her musical knowledge and wrote the textbook *La pronuncia italiana* (Italian Pronunciation [our translation] 意大利语语音). To sum up, it is an urgent issue to publish suitable textbooks for elective, compulsory and minor courses of Italian.

5.2.2.3 Course curricula and teaching materials of vocational and technical institutes (“da zhuan”) offering Italian language majors or elective courses

The Italian language major in vocational and technical institutes belongs to the “applied foreign language major” (应用外语专业), compared with the Italian language major in the universities and institutes, the teaching methodology and curricula setting are different.

Regarding the program duration, the vocational and technical institutes are all “three-year programs,” so they are 1 year shorter than the traditional “four-year programs” of universities and institutes. Regarding to programs' content, the vocational and technical institutes are more practical and business oriented. Taking the Italian language major in the Hunan College of Foreign Studies (Huwai) as an example, the professional training goal is to “cultivate cross-border e-commerce Italian language speakers.” The course program is “Basics of Italian language plus professional knowledge of cross-border e-commerce.”

The main courses are as follows: Italian language basics (基础意大利语), Multimedia-based Italian listening and speaking course (意大利语视听听说), Multimedia-based Business Italian listening and speaking course (商务意大利语视听听说), Spoken Italian in the workplace (职场意大利语口语), Business Italian language (商务意大利语), Business Correspondence in Italian (商务意大利语函电), Business Italian Translation Practice (商务意大利语翻译实务), International Business Management (Bilingual) (国际商务管理—双语), Cross-border E-Commerce practice (跨境电子商务实务), Cross-border e-commerce operation and marketing (跨境电商运营与推广), etc. In short, from the name of the subjects, it is clear that this kind of programs pays more attention to the “practicality” and rules out courses about Italian literature, history, etc.

Teaching materials:

Regarding the textbooks, teachers also use *Studiamo l'italiano all'università*, *Nuovissimo Progetto Italiano* and *Il corso in italiano*; in other courses teachers use textbooks such as *Corrispondenza Commerciale e Testi Autentici* (Commercial Correspondence and Authentic Texts [our translation] 意大利语经贸应用文), *Affare fatto! Corso d'italiano aziendale* (Deal! Business Italian course [our

39 Cheng Si, *Project-oriented Reform and Practice of Italian Teaching in Design*, The Science Education Article Collects[J], October 2021, p. 191. (程思, 课题导向的设计学类意大利语教学改革与实践, 《科教文化》, 2021年10月, 第191页。).

TABLE 13 Students' number of universities and institutes providing Italian language and culture as elective, compulsory or minor courses.

	University or Institute	Courses	Students choosing elective, compulsory or minor courses	Course duration: number of semesters	Students' number / per classes	Number of classes	Students' number
1	清华大学 THU	Italian language 1	all students (undergraduate plus graduate)	1/each semester x 1 (Semester Autumn-Winter)	about 35	2	about 70
				1/each semester x1 (Semester Spring-Summer)	about 35	2	about 70
		Italian language 2		1/each semester x 1 (Autumn-Winter)	about 15	1	about15
				1/each semester x1 (Spring-Summer)	about 15	1	about15
		Italian language 3		1/each semester x1 (Autumn-Winter)	15–20	1	15–20
		Italian language 4		—	—		
2	中国政法大学 CUPL	Italian language at university	only undergraduate students	1/each semester x 4	about 20	1	about 20
		Elementary Italian language	only undergraduate students	1/each semester x2	about 20	1	about 20
		Italian language	only undergraduate students of School of Foreign Studies	1/each semester x2	about 20	1	about 20
		Italian language for graduate students	only graduate students	1/each semester x3	about 20	1	about 20
		Legal Italian	graduate students of Law	1/each semester x1	about 20	1	about 20
3	中央音乐学院 CCOM	Italian language (elementary level)	only undergraduate students	1/each semester x1 (Spring-Summer)	20	1	20
		Italian language basics		1/each semester x2	20	1	20
		Comprehensive Italian		1/each semester x2	20	1	20
		Italian language		1/each semester x2	20	1	20
		Italian as a second foreign language		1/each semester x2	20	1	20
4	南开大学 NKU	Italian as a second foreign language	only undergraduate students of School of Foreign Studies	1/each semester x2	20–30	1–2	40–60
		Italian language (elementary level) 1	only undergraduate students	1/each semester x1 (Autumn-Winter)	10–30	2	20–60
		Italian language (elementary level) 2	only undergraduate students	1/each semester x1 (Spring-Summer)	10–30	2	20–60
5	西安音乐学院 XACM	Italian Phonetics	only undergraduate students of Department of Vocal Music	1/each semester x2	about 50	1	about 50
		Italian language	only graduate students	1/each semester x2	about 80	1	about 50

(Continued)

TABLE 13 (Continued)

	University or Institute	Courses	Students choosing elective, compulsory or minor courses	Course duration: number of semesters	Students' number / per classes	Number of classes	Students' number
6	西安石油大学 XSYU	Italian as a second foreign language	only undergraduate students of School of Foreign Languages	1/each semester x1 (Spring–Summer)	about 25	1	about 25
		Italian as a second foreign language for English major students	only graduate students of English major	1/each semester x4	about 20	1	about 20
7	西北大学 NWU	Italian as a second foreign language	only undergraduate students of School of Foreign Studies	1/each semester x3	1	1	1
		Italian language Practice		1/each semester x3			
8	河南大学 HENU	Italian Culture	only undergraduate students	1/each semester x1 (Autumn–Winter)	about 20	2	about 40
				1/each semester x1 (Spring–Summer)	about 20	2	about 40
9	中南财经政法大学 ZUEL	Italian Language and Culture (1)	only undergraduate students	1/each semester x 1 (Autumn–Winter)	100	2	200
		Italian Language and Culture (2)		1/each semester x1 (Spring–Summer)	100	2	200
		Italian as a second foreign language (for graduate students) (1)	only graduate students	1/each semester x1 (Autumn–Winter)	3–10	1	3–10
		Italian as a second foreign language (for graduate students) (2)		1/each semester x1 (Spring–Summer)	2–3	1	2–3
		Italian language (for single-degree program students)	Zuel-Sur School of Law and Economics: students of Comparative and European Law and of Cognitive Forensic Sciences	1/each semester x2	30–40	2	60–80
		Italian language (for double-degree program students)	Zuel-Sur School of Law and Economics: students of Law and Economics	1/each semester x3	20–30	1	20–30
10	电子科技大学 UESTC	Italian Language and Culture	only undergraduate students	1/each semester x1 (Autumn–Winter)	30	1	30
				1/each semester x1 (Spring–Summer)	30	1	30
		Italian language basics	only undergraduate students not in the School of Foreign Languages	1/each semester x1 (Spring–Summer)	40	3	120

(Continued)

TABLE 13 (Continued)

	University or Institute	Courses	Students choosing elective, compulsory or minor courses	Course duration: number of semesters	Students' number / per classes	Number of classes	Students' number
11	同济大学 TJU	Italian language (1)	only undergraduate students	1/each semester x1 (Autumn-Winter)	20-30	1	20-30
				1/each semester x1 (Spring-Summer)	20-30	1	20-30
		Italian language (2)		1/each semester x1 (Spring-Summer)	10	1	10
12	华东师范大学 ECNU	Introduction to Italian Language and Culture	only undergraduate students	1/each semester x1 (Autumn-Winter)	about 10	1	about 10
		Italian Language and Culture	only graduate students	1/each semester x1 (Autumn-Winter)	—(from September 2025)		
13	温州大学 WZU	Italian Language	only graduate students of College of International Education	1/each semester x1	1	19	19
14	厦门大学 XMU	Italian language basics	only undergraduate students	1/each semester x1 (Autumn-Winter)	30	4	120
				1/each semester x1 (Spring-Summer)	30	4	120
		A brief introduction of Italy		1/each semester x1 (Autumn-Winter)	30	2	60
				1/each semester x1 (Spring-Summer)	30	2	60
		Italian as a second foreign language	only graduate students	1/each semester x1 (Autumn-Winter)	about 20	1-2	about 20-40
				1/each semester x1 (Spring-Summer)	about 20	1-2	about 20-40
15	广东外语外贸大学 南国商学院 South China Business College GDUFS	Italian language basics	only undergraduate students	1/each semester x3		1	10
		Multimedia-based Italian listening and speaking course		1/each semester x3			

translation]新视线商务意大利语初级教程) as teaching materials, as well as some teaching material collected by the teachers themselves.⁴⁰

40 It is worthy to mention that those textbooks were not written for students from vocational education. Consequently, the content is often unsuitable and the teachers have to select the parts that can be somehow adapted to their courses.

5.2.3 Students' number

5.2.3.1 Students' number of universities and institutes offering Italian majors (both undergraduate and graduate level)

According to the figures provided by Professor Haihong Zhang's team from GDUFS in 2023, the student numbers of universities and institutes offering Italian majors are as follows (Table 12).

According to the data, there are about 600 undergraduate and 50 graduate students of Italian related majors graduate each year. In general, these students have a solid foundation of Italian language and are

TABLE 14 Students' number of vocational and technical institutes ("da zhuan") offering Italian language majors or elective courses.

	Institution	Students' number		Note
		Number of classes	Students' number per class	
	河北外国语学院 HFSU	1/each year	about 20	three-year program in Italian language
1	江西外语外贸职业学院 JUFLIT	1/each year	about 20	three-year program in Italian language
2	湖南外国语职业学院 HUWAI	1/each year	4–14	three-year program in Italian language
		4/each year	elective course 40–45 (all 160–180)	Music-Communication major students' elective course
3	海南外国语职业学院 HNCFS	1/each year	10	three-year program in Italian language
4	顺德职业技术学院 SDPT	1/each year	elective course about 40	English major students' elective course [Course not offered every year]

considered reaching B2 or C1 of Italian CEFR level.⁴¹ Thanks to the hard work of several generations of Italian teachers, now there are a large number of Italian speakers that work in many fields in our country, such as government, foreign trade, education, tourism, media, etc. In recent years, with the increasing demand of the society for qualified experts such as “foreign language plus another major,” more and more Italian language graduates choose to go abroad or to other universities to continue to broaden their horizons, enrich their knowledge in other fields such as law, economy, music, etc. and strive to become an employee with a better overall preparation. In conclusion, these students can use their language advantages in various fields to make their own contribution to further develop of our country.

5.2.3.2 Students' number of universities and institutes providing Italian language and culture as elective, compulsory or minor courses

Different institutions have different programs for elective, compulsory or minor courses that tend to change (such as adding classes, canceling courses, etc.) quite often. Furthermore, the number of students taking the same course fluctuates each year consequently it is difficult to interpret the data and find consistent patterns through time.

The data collected through a questionnaire from a sample of 15 universities or institutes are reported in Table 13.

According to the data of 15 universities and institutes that completed the aforementioned questionnaire, there are about 2,000 students who choose the Italian language as elective, compulsory or minor course each year. Therefore, we can infer that in the 26 institutions in China, the students should reach the average number of 3,500 unit (the range is between 3,000–4,000 students).

Students who take these kinds of courses are in the so-called “major plus foreign language.” This means that their major may virtually be any of those available (from physics to music, from law to medicine, etc.). In fact, the underlying principle is that learning

Italian language can equip them with other skills outside of the domain of their chosen profession.

However, since the course hours are usually very few, students cannot reach a high proficiency level. The realistic expectation is that the majority of them can only reach the elementary level (A1, A2), and only a few can achieve the intermediate level (B1, B2). In the later stage, if students want to go to Italy to continue their studies, they often need to study by themselves Italian language independently from the university courses that are provided.

In any case, there is no doubt that the opening of these kind of courses is somehow beneficial. Indeed, the aforementioned courses have greatly increased the number of students that learn Italian language and are interested in Italian culture.

5.2.3.3 Students' number of vocational and technical institutes ("da zhuan") offering Italian language majors or elective courses

According to the data collected for this paper, the number of students in vocational and technical institutes are as follows (Table 14).

According to the data, each year, there are about 60 students graduating in an Italian language major and around 200 students choosing elective courses in this kind of institutes. The students' number is relatively lower than those choosing more traditional academic education in the equivalent field. On the one hand, the number of alumni of “da zhuan” institutions amounts to the vast majority of the Italian-speaking employees in the e-commerce field. On the other hand, the elective courses offered by these institutions can give students the opportunity to learn Italian language and culture.

5.2.4 Difficulties encountered by teachers and some of their solutions

Teachers usually encounter various difficulties in the process of teaching and research. Some problems are normally solved through their own efforts, but some problems are not directly related to their teaching skills. It goes without saying, that different groups of teachers encounter different problems. The following sections will explore in detail the kind of issues faced according to the kind of higher-learning institution type.

41 Undergraduate students are assumed to reach B2 level of Italian and graduate students are assumed to reach the C1 level.

TABLE 15 Typical difficulties (and their solutions) related to universities and institutes offering Italian majors (both undergraduate and graduate level).

	Difficulties	Solutions
(1) Teaching to undergraduate students		
1	The teaching at the same time Italian language basic knowledge and subjects using Italian as a medium.	Teachers should first explain the language rules and then teach more advanced courses that involve other types of knowledge such as literature, applied linguistic, etc.
2	There are large differences in language ability among senior students (third-year students and fourth-year students).	Teachers need to consider the different abilities of students and grade the language according to the actual level of the students.
3	Due to the limitations in language skills, the undergraduate students are unable to carry out many research tasks.	No solution suggested.
4	Students are uncertain about their future employment after studying the Italian language, and this brings about a lack of study motivation toward some students.	Provide courses unrelated to their majors to increase the prospective graduates employability within the “language plus major” training model.
5	Lack of a Chinese unified examination process of Italian language skills such as French, Japanese, etc.	Establishing some form of unified and authoritative level examination.
(2) Teaching to graduate students		
1	The courses requires more theoretical and abstract knowledge.	Teachers, independently from their academic qualifications, should have a solid and comprehensive knowledge or have conducted a significant research in a relevant area. Furthermore, teachers should spend an adequate time in class preparation to make the topics more palatable to students.
2	In some cases, the course content is “fossilized.” For example, teachers simply base their courses on what they learned during their master and PhD with little or no modification. Consequently, some content is unsuitable to equip students with the necessary skills required by the job market.	No solution suggested.
3	Each teacher has his or her own teaching styles and specialization, and they may lack of cooperation.	Cooperation should be encouraged and improved.
4	Lack of appropriate textbooks for some courses, such as “Italian Writing” and “Italian-Chinese and Chinese-Italian Translation and Interpretation.” Teachers should also pay attention to the date of publication of the textbook, sometimes the content is outdated or obsolete.	Teachers collect the relevant material by themselves and/or write their own teaching textbooks.
5	Some universities or institutes lack of master supervisors, in some cases only 1–2 supervisors for the whole student cohort.	No solution suggested.
6	The language level of students may vary a lot, and some graduate students do not have a proper foundation in Italian language.	Try to help students in need after classes, providing mentoring or other kinds of activities.
7	Most students are fluent in Italian, but they have insufficient knowledge about other relevant subjects (such as sociology, linguistics, etc.).	Teachers provides beforehand, or whenever deemed necessary, extra-reading materials to students in need to help them to catch up with their lack of knowledge.
8	Graduate students have different research interests, and it is difficult to satisfy everyone during the teaching.	Increase the number of courses and the staff diverse specializations to help the students choose what they prefer.
9	Graduate students are researcher neophytes, and their independent research capabilities need improvement.	Teachers need to focus on cultivating students’ research skills.
10	Many universities and institutes are facing the problem of a lower number of graduate students. This may be due to the lack of attractiveness of Italian graduate majors and the future job prospects.	No solution suggested.
(3) Italian scholars’ research issues		
1	It is difficult for teachers to balance teaching and research: the number of teaching hours may be too high, the ancillary administrative tasks are time-consuming, leaving little or no time for research. Teachers often catch up with research during holidays, or tend to work overtime during weekdays.	No solution suggested.

(Continued)

TABLE 15 (Continued)

	Difficulties	Solutions
2	Teachers have difficulty in publishing articles: the relevant target journals are very few, and the competition for publication in well-respected journals is fierce. Consequently, teachers keep trying to submit articles.	Some scholar can cooperate with other organizations to improve the number of relevant journals
3	It is difficult for teachers to apply for provincial and national research project grants. Therefore, teachers keep trying to apply projects.	No solution suggested.
4	Some teachers do not know much about the research methods due to lack of professional training and learning.	No solution suggested.
5	Some teachers think that their research is not advanced and not deep enough.	Teachers should keep try to find more suitable topics.
6	Teachers do not have enough research funding.	No solution suggested.
7	Limited availability of electronic academic materials in Italian than in other languages such as English or French.	No solution suggested.
8	Teachers need to face problems such as poor information channels, difficult communication with the administrative staff, and unfair resource distribution, etc.	No solution suggested.

TABLE 16 Typical difficulties (and their solutions) related to universities and institutes providing Italian language and culture as elective, compulsory or minor courses.

	Difficulties	Solutions
1	Lack of appropriate textbooks for elective, compulsory, and minor courses.	Teachers should be encouraged to write and publish ad hoc textbooks for such courses.
2	In many cases there is only one teacher, who is not part of a teaching team, consequently, he has little or no possibility to discuss some peculiar issues with scholars teaching similar subjects in that institution.	No solution suggested.
3	Many universities and institutes do not have any Italian native as a teacher, the consequence is that students' oral proficiency is lower than how it could be.	No solution suggested.
4	The workload of teachers is too heavy, and one teacher has to be responsible for all relevant matters.	No solution suggested.
5	Some courses are difficult to teach: teachers need to combine Italian language with students' majors such as music or industrial design.	(1) The universities and institutes could hire teachers who graduated from this major and can speak Italian language; (2) Teachers who graduated from the Italian language major should gain some professional vocabulary and knowledge to teach the students.
6	It is not always possible for a university to start a new course according to the wishes of the Italian teachers. This may also be due to their professional titles and years of work experience.	No solution suggested.
7	The course hours are insufficient preventing students from reaching a sufficient language level.	No solution suggested.
8	Some students have little or no interest about learning Italian language. Indeed, some of them underestimate the importance of the course and are reluctant to devote their time and energy to study it.	Teachers should provide more engaging classes, and increase the quality of the course.
9	Italian grammar is relatively complex and students have some difficulties related to remember grammar rules.	(1) The teacher should simplify the grammar rules and other contents; (2) The teacher should teach at a suitable slow pace and avoid concentrating too much contents in one single class.
10	Students can hardly speak, and they have poor oral and communication skills.	Teachers should communicate with students in every class helping them to consolidate their grammar through simple dialogs.
11	Students rarely review the content and practice the language after class, and some of them even refuse to do the relevant homework.	Teachers should recapitulate the content of the previous lessons in every class.
12	Some teachers have too few students enrolled in their courses. This brings about the risk of course cancelation. Furthermore, this can also cause problems with some in-class activities like group activities.	No solution suggested.
13	Some teachers have too many students in their classes, in some cases even more than 100. Consequently, the teacher-students interaction is severely limited.	Dividing the course into two or more classes

TABLE 17 Typical difficulties (and their solutions) related to vocational and technical institutes (“da zhuan”) offering Italian language majors or elective courses.

	Difficulties	Solutions
1	Lack of teaching material: most of the Italian textbooks on the market are tailored for students enrolled in Italian majors provided by universities and institutes. However, since students in vocational and technical institutes have different kind of interests and abilities, some of the content of traditional textbooks is too academic and theoretical for them.	(1) Teachers need to select some content from the textbooks which are appropriate for the students’ level and needs. (2) Teachers could write and publish textbooks suitable for these students.
2	Students who choose Italian language as an elective course may be reluctant to cope with huge workload, and may be very passive learners.	Teachers could add some interactive activities during the lessons such as dictation, question-and-answer sessions which can make classes more palatable.
3	It is difficult to improve the professional title of the teachers.	Teachers can hardly publish papers or obtain some projects above the provincial level, so they have to achieve results through other means, such as participating in teaching competitions, or guiding students to participate in some ad hoc competitions.
4	Teachers, especially because they do not hold doctoral degrees, have not received a solid education related research and do not know how to improve their research abilities.	Teachers can only try their best to apply for some school-level projects, through which they can exercise and improve their research capabilities.

5.2.4.1 Typical difficulties (and their solutions) related to universities and institutes offering Italian majors (both undergraduate and graduate level)

One of the questionnaires submitted for our research dealt with problems and some solutions provided by the staff teaching in universities and institutes offering Italian majors (both undergraduate and graduate level), the results are shown in Table 15.

Teachers themselves should work hard to improve their teaching and research abilities, but many of these problems cannot be solved by teachers alone. Indeed, some problems—such as “insufficient enrollment of graduate students,” “poor information channels, difficult communication with the administrative staff, unfair resource distribution,” etc.—need to be solved from the university level or even the social level.

5.2.4.2 Typical difficulties (and their solutions) related to universities and institutes providing Italian language and culture as elective, compulsory or minor courses

In terms of teaching, the difficulties and problems encountered by teachers of these kinds of courses are different from those of teachers of Italian language majors. Problems and solutions can be summarized as follows in Table 16.

Regarding academic research questions, the problems faced by teachers of this kind of courses are almost identical to those faced by teachers of Italian language major.

5.2.4.3 Typical difficulties (and their solutions) related to vocational and technical institutes (“da zhuan”) offering Italian language majors or elective courses

Teachers in vocational and technical institutes face their own peculiar problems and try to provide *ad hoc* solutions. The questionnaire’s results are shown in Table 17.

To sum up, in terms of research, both teachers from universities or institutes, and teachers from vocational and technical institutes are faced with the problems of difficulty in publishing articles, difficulty

in applying for research projects, and the urgent need to improve their own research abilities.

6 Conclusion

In general, over the past 70 years, Italian language and culture teaching has gone through a great process of development. Thanks to the support of the Chinese Government, of the Italian Embassy in China⁴² and the efforts of generations of Italianists and scholars remarkable results have been achieved. Among the 24 universities and institutes that are offering Italian majors, 11 are listed as “national first-class majors”: BFSU, BLCU, UIBE, XISU, SISU, TFSU, SISU, GDUF, NKU, DUFL, PKU; four are listed as “provincial first-class majors”: CUC, HNUST, JISU, BISU; and 2 are listed as “school first-class majors”: CISU, ZISU. Furthermore, an increasing number of universities and institutes are offering Italian language as elective, compulsory and minor courses, and more and more vocational and technical institutes are offering Italian language majors or elective courses.

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⁴² The Italian Embassy in China has organized a variety of activities, including various forms of teacher training programs, a variety of language and cultural activities, and the supply of abroad information and consulting services.

Conflict of interest

The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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Supplementary material

The Supplementary material for this article can be found online at: <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/feduc.2025.1466508/full#supplementary-material>

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