



---

## SPOTLIGHT

# Of Sinology and Identity: Pēteris Šmits (1869–1938)

Georgijs DUNAJEVS

University of Würzburg, Germany / The National Library of Latvia, Latvia  
[georgijs.dunajevs@lnb.lv](mailto:georgijs.dunajevs@lnb.lv)

---

The Latvian scholar Pēteris Šmits represents a unique case in the national Sinologies of Europe, having been the only specialist of Chinese and Manchu studies in his home country during his lifetime. Unable to establish a sinological tradition, Šmits is far better known in Latvia for his studies in Baltic languages and folklore. Despite juggling two research careers in parallel, Šmits saw himself primarily as a Sinologist, and his dedication to studying China became the cornerstone of his identity. In this essay, I summarise Šmits' contribution to scholarship on China during the three distinct periods of his life and work, in Beijing (1896–1899), Vladivostok (1899–1920), and Riga (1920–1938). Relying on Šmits' thoughts and views found in his unpublished autobiography and other lesser-known sources, I also contemplate his position as a scholar of China through the various historical periods and regions he lived in, offering a reflection on the issues of cultural and professional alienation, common in the field of Chinese studies.

拉脫維亞學者彼得·施密特（Pēteris Šmits）在歐洲漢學領域中獨樹一幟，曾是拉脫維亞唯一的漢學和滿學專家。由於未能創建漢學機構，他對波羅的海語言和民俗的研究在拉脫維亞更為人知。儘管如此，施密特始終堅守漢學家的身份，對中華文化的深入研究成為其學術生涯的核心。本文回顧了施密特在北京（1896–1899）、海參崴（1899–1920）及裡加（1920–1938）三個階段的學術貢獻，並基於其未公開的自傳和其他資料，探討了他在不同歷史和地域背景下對中國問題的學術立場，並對漢學研究中的文化與專業分隔現象進行了反思。

---

**Keywords:** Pēteris Šmits, Peter Schmidt, Latvia, Oriental Institute, Manchu studies, history of Sinology

**關鍵詞：** 彼得·施密特、拉脫維亞、東方學院、滿洲研究、漢學史

---

Biographic appraisals of academics tend to follow a time-tested formula in which a modern scholar pays homage to a glorious person of the past, a leading figure within the national scholarly tradition in the respective field, whose legacy has been preserved and transmitted via generations of students. But what if there is no tradition to speak of in the first place? Fellow scholars coming from smaller countries may recognise the struggle of appealing to a national “tradition”, where the history of a niche field like Chinese studies often consists of fragmented tales of teachers, journalists, travellers, adventurers, pilgrims, and eccentric aficionados, loosely held together by their sometimes ethereal connection to China (or East Asia) in general. Then there are extreme cases, like that of Pēteris Šmits, who singlehandedly *was* the field of Chinese studies in Latvia for forty years.

Šmits, internationally known under the Germanised form of his name, Peter Schmidt, was a remarkably versatile scholar. Primarily a linguist and ethnographer by training and passion, and a hyperpolyglot, he juggled research in Chinese and Manchu languages with studies of Baltic folklore. Paradoxically, talking about Šmits for the Sinological public poses quite a considerable challenge. The lion’s share of his writing on China was popular rather than academic and aimed at educating the burgeoning Latvian nation. His main contributions to global scholarship doubtlessly lie in Tungus-Manchu linguistics, resulting from his fieldwork among the minor Siberian peoples. Conversely, in terms of physical output, everything else pales in comparison to the dozens of edited volumes of Latvian folk songs and fairy tales that came from his pen. Nevertheless, having extensively studied his persona and work, I will take the liberty of claiming that Šmits indeed saw himself primarily as a Sinologist. This is also how he was popularly perceived back home, with the “Chinese professor” title firmly attached to him throughout his lifetime.

Šmits’ rich and diverse scholarly legacy deserves to be talked about, but in this brief biographical sketch, I will pay more attention to his persona rather than his academic work. First, the significance of Šmits’ works in various capacities as a Sinologist, Manchurist, and Lettonist has been separately discussed by myself and other scholars.<sup>1</sup> Second, of no less interest are the issues of identity, nationality, and allegiance that Šmits dealt with throughout his lifetime. Having lived through various regimes, from his writings, it appears that his attachment to China and the way of a scholar was the only constant in the rapid political and cultural changes he experienced throughout his life — and became the cornerstone of his self-identity. In spotlighting Pēteris Šmits through his life and oeuvre, I would like to offer a reflection on the issues of cultural and professional alienation that often accompany our work as scholars of China.

## **A Latvian in China**

What could make a late nineteenth-century country boy from the periphery of the Russian Empire crave distant Asian lands? In Pēteris Šmits’ case, the answer is curiosity, boredom, and chance. Born

---

<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., Dunajevs 2021; Walravens 2010; Pakalns 2017.

in Rauna parish, Šmits, in his own words, “developed an affection for Eastern lands from descriptions of China, India, and Egypt” in a school primer (Šmits n.d., 4). His interest in and aptitude for studying foreign languages eventually led him in 1890 to Moscow to study general philology, but for various reasons Šmits found himself disconnected from both studies and the scholarly environment. This was when Šmits came across a newspaper article recounting how the Latvian student Ernsts Dītrihs Kohs (Ernst Dietrich Koch, 1866-1895) deciphered two Chinese inscriptions brought to St. Petersburg by Nikolai Yadrintsev (1842-1894) from the 1889 archaeological expedition to Orkhon in Mongolia. The fact that a fellow countryman – Šmits emphasises this – could pull off such an unusual feat reignited his interest in Asian languages (Šmits n.d., 14-15). In 1891, Šmits transferred to St. Petersburg, where he read Chinese, Manchu, Mongol, and Kalmyk. Upon completing training in 1896, in December of the same year he arrived in Beijing to undergo practice in the Russian embassy in preparation for a professorial career.



Fig. 1. Pēteris Šmits with an unidentified Qing official (National Library of Latvia, Rare Books and Manuscripts Storage, RX18,1,6, 1). This photograph has been previously published with the caption “Visiting the Chinese imperial palace supervisor, 1904, Beijing” (Anon. 1930).

During the following two-and-a-half-year sojourn in Beijing (Fig. 1), Šmits produced the bulk of his career's writings on China. His articles were published in the "progressive" Latvian newspaper *Mājas Viesis* (Home Visitor) and its supplements. In his writings, Šmits embarked on a kind of "educational mission" to expand the cultural horizons of the ordinary Latvian. Some articles retold Šmits' adventures in China, such as meeting the Guangxu Emperor at a New Year's reception, mixed in with narratives of critical points in Chinese history and socio-political commentary. Others concentrated on ethnographic explorations of Chinese culture, values, and beliefs. Those who had read the corpus of his writings would have acquired a basic understanding of Chinese life and history (Dunajevs 2021, 160–167). It is worthy of note that Šmits' first wife Marija (née Jēgere, 1872–1950) also wrote on China and Chinese culture for the same newspaper and later even gave public talks on her experiences in East Asia, which, considering the position of women in Latvian society at the time, was still quite an unusual sight (Dunajevs 2022).

Concurrently, Šmits also introduced the Latvian reader to Chinese literary tradition. Back when he was still a third-year student of the language, Šmits had already published a translation of "Abao" 阿寶 from the *Liaozhai zhiyi* 聊齋誌異, addressing the chinoiserie-like essence of tales commonly peddled as "Chinese" at that time: "We are being told about all sorts of Chings, Changs, and Shens, but hiding underneath these names are merely European protagonists with their views and their passions" (Šmits 1894, 57). Then, in 1898, Šmits produced translations of two of Li Bai's 李白 poems – "Expressing my thoughts upon waking up from a drunken stupor on a spring day" 春日醉起言志, and the second poem from the "Playing Music in the Palace" 宮中行樂詞 cycle – into Latvian (Walravens 2001). Both must count among the first translations from Chinese into one of the smaller national languages in Europe.

Šmits' writing from China coincided with the rapid process of nation-building back home, occasionally making him appeal to fellow Latvians to study from the Chinese. The connection was on the surface: Latvians were still predominantly peasants, and China was the world's oldest and largest agrarian empire. Hence, "in certain respects, the Chinese may give us an example," such as being sparing with firewood and moderate in consuming alcohol (Šmits 1898, 1). While Šmits' articles were well received and read, his persona attracted more attention than his subject. During that time, all, especially unusual, exploits by Latvians were noticed and talked about, and although Šmits did not emphasise his ethnic provenance in his articles, his reading public certainly did, turning Šmits into a kind of local hero:

Rauna can be proud of its prominent men, but Pēteris Šmits is the smartest of them all: he alone knows thirty languages. Thirty people [from Rauna] started university, but only three have graduated. Of them, two have gone insane, with only Šmits remaining. Šmits speaks Chinese better than he speaks Latvian. One needs decades to learn it and become a mandarin, but Šmits has accomplished everything in five years. Such is the Latvian brain! (Lapiņš 1928, 506)

As an ethnic Latvian, in the social hierarchy back home, Šmits stood below the Baltic German elites and the Russians, especially after the Russification of the Baltic States under the policies of Alexander III (r. 1881–1894). Moving to China instead allowed Šmits to feel on a par with the other Westerners,

shifting his role from a colonial subject to a representative of colonial authority. Young Šmits did not hide his support for Russia's expansionist ambitions, seeing it (at least on the pages of his articles) as a civilising agent of modernisation and a "benevolent coloniser" whose control over China would leave the ordinary Chinese people much better off compared to either existing Qing power or the profit-seeking Westerners (Dunajevs 2021, 163–164). Nevertheless, in striving for academic excellence, Šmits consciously moved away from the Russian educational agenda, which aimed to create servants of state interests rather than critically-minded scholars. The pre-Boxer Beijing was the meeting place for China scholars of the world, and this is where Šmits became properly exposed to Western scholarship:

[In Beijing] I met excellent specialists in the Chinese language, whose advice has done me more good than the professors' lectures at the university. I established the most friendly rapport with the Austrian Sinologist Erwin von Zach (1872–1942), who was my age and had studied in Leiden under the famed Gustaaf Schlegel (1840–1903). In questions of linguistics, I learned a lot from the Austrian embassy interpreter, later envoy and professor, [Arthur] von Rosthorn (1862–1945), who for some time used to take classes with the eminent English [sic] Sinologist [James] Legge (1815–1897). During my time, the Berlin professor Wilhelm Grube (1855–1908) stayed for almost a year in Peking, and I often got to meet him. Also of help was the German embassy interpreter Emil Krebs (1867–1930), who was a student of the Berlin professor [Carl] Arendt (1838–1902). Aside from that, I was on friendly terms with the American Sinologist and philanthropist [William Alexander Parsons] Martin (1827–1916), French embassy interpreter, later professor [Arnold] Vissière (1858–1930), and future German professors [Alfred] Forke (1867–1944) and Otto Franke (1863–1946). This way, I got to know the opinions of many prominent European Sinologists, from whom I could take a lot for my future education (Šmits n.d., 42–43).

The above words make it clear that despite associations with the Russian school, Šmits primarily modelled his scholarship on the efforts of Western colleagues. Some of these connections, like that with von Zach, would last a lifetime (Walravens 2010, 774–775). More significantly, Martin, who became the inaugural president of the Peking Imperial University, invited Šmits to teach Russian there, with lectures beginning in February 1899. However, his career in Beida was cut short, as after one semester, Šmits was summoned to Vladivostok to teach at the newly founded Oriental Institute.

## A westerner in Russia

Šmits' relatively unburdened Beijing life took a completely different turn in the Russian Far East. While he left just in time to avoid the siege of the foreign legations, his productive hours were now spent building a new study programme from scratch. Because of that, for the next twenty years, Šmits' output practically consisted only of study primers, aids, and syllabi for Chinese and Manchu, all of which were published in the institute's bulletin *Izvestija Vostochnago instituta* or as offprints. His best-

known work of this kind is *An Essay on the Mandarin Grammar* (Shmidt 1902), which Šmits defended as his master's (equivalent to a doctoral) thesis in St. Petersburg in 1902.<sup>2</sup> In this long-overdue update on Hyacinth's (1777–1853) Chinese grammar for Russian speakers, Šmits sought inspiration from contemporary Chinese language study books in the West and adopted exercises from them, translating them into Russian.<sup>3</sup> The primer's distinctive characteristic was that it was prefaced by an in-depth essay on comparative linguistics, in which Šmits used his rich linguistic training to contextualise Chinese grammar and vocabulary, often drawing comparisons with Manchu and Tibetan. A later review in the Harbin journal of Orientalists referred to the 1902 edition as “a revolution in our school teaching of the Chinese language” and the 1915 edition as “undoubtedly, the best Chinese language primer in a European language” (Shkurkin 1917, 52). The latter might be an overstatement, but it was indeed a very modern primer for its time – and Šmits still used it to teach Chinese later in Latvia.

In Vladivostok, Šmits attempted to modernise the teaching of Mandarin in line with the standards of teaching adhered to in the best European institutions. However, these intentions would often drown in the sea of mundane listlessness of the Russian imperial bureaucracy or rebound against the wall of spiteful ignorance characteristic of Vladivostok Orientalism. When in 1904 Šmits proposed to visit some of the best European centres of Sinology – namely Berlin, Vienna, Munich, Leipzig, and Leiden – to observe and learn the teaching methods of Western colleagues, on the surface, his application received unanimous approval. But upon arriving in St. Petersburg, where Šmits was to receive the funding for the journey, he met with a refusal from the Minister for Popular Enlightenment, Vladimir Glazov (1848–1920), on the grounds of an anonymous opinion sent to him about the level of Chinese and Manchu philologies in Western Europe. The review included rather contemptuous remarks, such as referring to the teaching of Chinese and Manchu at University of Berlin as “ultra-classical and completely irrelevant to the formulation of this subject at the Oriental Institute” and calling its Seminar for Oriental Languages a “low-level education institution for Sinology, aimed at most rudimentary acquaintance with the language for German merchants and officials” (Šmits n.d., 62–64). At that stage, Šmits realised he was set up by his colleagues at the Oriental Institute, the only possible source of the “anonymous opinion”. Consequently, Šmits was forced to follow the developments in Western Sinology from afar, though he still published on the subject to prove his point (Shmidt 1909).

As time passed, Šmits' experiences with Russia's nightmarish bureaucracy and boorish chauvinism made him increasingly disillusioned. The situation considerably worsened after Russia suffered an impotent loss in the war against Japan (1904–1905), which brought about protests, student strikes, violence, looting, and above all, mass suspicion resulting in the need to look for internal enemies. The Oriental Institute was consistently at the very front in terms of repression against its students, perpetrated by the successive directors, first brothers Aleksej (1851–1920) and Dmitrij Pozdneev (1865–1937), and then Šmits' old colleague from his St. Petersburg student days, Apollinarij Rudakov

---

<sup>2</sup> Second, updated and improved edition, was published by the Oriental Institute in 1915.

<sup>3</sup> Many translation exercises in Šmits' primer are taken from Calvin Wilson Mateer's *Course of Mandarin Lessons, Based on Idiom* (1892), Carl Arendt's *Einführung in die nordchinesische Umgangssprache* (1894), and Léon Wiegier's *Rudiments de parler et de style chinois* (1895).

(1871–1949). Years later, Šmits remembered the management of the day-to-day affairs of the institute with little fondness:

Above all, [the three directors] lacked the characteristics of good administrators and scholars. However, the worst was that they all suffered from a kind of ill vanity that is not far off malice. They looked for troublemakers, opponents, and enemies with great enthusiasm, even passion. Since perhaps twenty per cent of all Russian students belonged to the [party of] social democrats or at least were their sympathisers, it was impossible to find those directly harmful and eliminate them from the student ranks, thereby establishing control over the others. The more harshly were enemies sought out, the more difficult it was to keep within the confines of justice, and the stronger became the students' protests. Now if all directors committed the same error, it appears the regime itself was promoting such employees. The highest administration strove to foster leaders who attempted to demonstrate sycophancy and obsequiousness everywhere, glorified the "Russian cause", and sharply condemned the troublemakers. But such lip-service providers, with the nature of slaves, are typically enormous egoists, incapable of leading any serious work (Šmits n.d., 104–105).

Reading Šmits' unfinished autobiography gives the feeling that afterwards, he was merely plodding through with little hope for things to improve. This slump in morale was also reflected in his work, as in the 1910s Šmits produced much less output. The events of 1917 made Šmits' situation in Vladivostok even more precarious, as can be gleaned from the letters he sent to Berthold Laufer (1874–1934) in Chicago. Immediately in the aftermath of the Bolshevik Revolution, Šmits wrote that "our proletarians do not want any sinologists" (Walravens 1982, 179). With the Oriental Institute going bankrupt, and fearing for his life, Šmits frantically tried relying on Laufer to get himself a position at Columbia University but conceded that "pretendants [sic] of such a post must be masters of the English language, orators, men of the high life or celebrities. I, as a poor Russian professor, have no of these qualities and do not wait for a favorable reply" (Ibid., 180). Despite acknowledging this, the inability to attain the post left Šmits rather bitter and heartbroken. In the final letter before departure to Riga, he wrote:

Although I must leave the far east and the sinology, but I shall continue my Chinese and Manchu studies too. In the Oriental Institute I had 5–50 dollars salary for one month, while the workmen earned 50–100 dollars. Notwithstanding the American government spent millions of dollars for the rich workmen, but not one cent for the starving learned men. The Americans seem to prefer the bolshevism to the science. I return as a poor man to my native place, but am glad that I could leave the "free" Russia (Ibid., 182).

In all fairness, this was not the only option open to Šmits. When offered a position at the Russo-Chinese bank in Beijing earlier, Šmits rejected it, writing to his brother-in-law in a letter, "could you imagine me without my books, seated among bank directors, who are completely alien to me, and for whom my interests are just as alien?" (Freibergs n.d., 2). Whether intentionally or not, Šmits'



dedication to Chinese studies and a scholar's lifestyle place his figure very much in line with the Confucian tradition of learning.



Fig. 2. Pēteris Šmits (centre table, frontmost) at a dinner reception during the 17th International Congress of Orientalists, Oxford, August 1928 (National Library of Latvia, Rare Books and Manuscripts Storage, RX18,1,6, 8).

### **An alien back home**

Unwelcome in Communist Russia but unable to move to a prestigious institution in the West, Šmits made the most logical choice of returning home to the now independent Latvia, where in 1920 he started teaching at the newly established University of Latvia. Although he primarily taught general subjects like linguistics and folklore research to the students of Baltic philology, the advantage of being back in Europe was that Šmits could finally reconnect with his Orientalist colleagues in the West. In Latvia, he moved further away from pure Sinology, instead concentrating on the intersection of Chinese and Manchu linguistics and publishing the lifetime results of studying the minor Tungus-Manchu languages (Schmidt 1923a, 1923b, 1928a, 1928b). In general, Šmits was very fond of the Manchu language and continuously advocated for the importance of studying it for Sinologists even after Manchu lost its status as the language of the Empire. At the 17th International Congress of Orientalists in Oxford in 1928 (Fig. 2), Šmits was a discussant for Erich Hauer's (1878–1936) paper titled “Why the Sinologue Should Study Manchu” (International Congress of Orientalists 1929, 66–



67).<sup>4</sup> It is quite symbolic that Šmits' last major work was "Chinese Elements in Manchu", which became his only article published in a renowned Western scholarly journal (Schmidt 1932-1933).

However, Šmits' return to Riga did not prove to be as satisfactory as he had probably expected it to be, and the appellation of "Chinese professor" turned from one of admiration to ridicule. Šmits' preaching to the Latvian public of conservative ideas of a virtuous life inspired by Confucian values was not in line with the young country's radically Western-oriented nation-state construction agenda. Equally irksome was Šmits' "excessive" tolerance of the Russian language, so when he published a brief article protesting against the renaming of streets named after Russian historical figures, a local satirical magazine drew a caricature of him dressed like a Qing dynasty official but hugging the bust of Russian general Alexander Suvorov (Anon. 1923, 131). His views attracted an even harsher reaction when Šmits published a collection of ethnographic essays (Šmits 1923), criticising, among other things, Latvian school primers and comparing them unfavourably to Chinese ones. The review of the work was particularly vitriolic:

If only the professor had made a single reference to the European cultural nations! [But no] - to him, China is at the forefront of everything... It is evident we are not dealing with a scholar but with a charlatan of science and a pitiful propagandist of reactionism under the guise of a scholar. What role could such a Chinese professor have in the development of our new spiritual culture? (Juniors 1924, 260).

Adding to his woes was that Šmits' other major field of expertise - Baltic philology and folklore studies - was a domain oversaturated with "homegrown" scholars, some of whom evidently viewed Šmits' presence there as a threat to their authority. Thus, Šmits frequently found himself on the receiving end of his colleagues' unpleasantness. Feeling unjustly targeted, Šmits consoled himself by liaising with Western scholars or meeting the occasional Chinese businessman or traveller, with whom he connected much better than with his fellow countrymen (Šauruma 1962, 5-7).

Šmits was, therefore, in a weird position. Openly acknowledged by his peers as Latvia's internationally distinguished scholar (Blese 1932, 262), his expertise was not in demand back home. While he still offered Chinese language and history as elective courses at the university, and people eagerly attended his public lectures, it is safe to say that the interbellum Latvian society viewed these as hobby subjects. Knowing this, Šmits catered to the casual reader. In 1936, he published a non-scholarly collection of "Chinese fairy tales" aimed chiefly at young people (Šmits 1936). The tales in the volume, "taken both from books and people's stories" and quite heavily edited, leave their identification difficult, if at all possible, though a few can still be easily recognised: "Lapsa" (The Fox) is *Liaozhai zhiyi's* "Yingning" 嬰寧, and "Sievas uzticība" (A Wife's Trustworthiness) is the story of Zhuangzi testing his wife from *Jingu qiguan* 今古奇觀. Presumably, to avoid further criticism, Šmits decided to "dispense with things that would be incomprehensible or even unpleasant for the Europeans" (Ibid., 149), but, because of that, the collection has aged poorly.

---

<sup>4</sup> Hauer's paper was published in 1930 in the *Journal of the North China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* Vol. LXI, 156-164.

With Šmits' death in 1938, Sinology in Latvia ceased to exist. In hindsight, even if he had had students following in his footsteps, nothing would have come of it: during the years of Soviet occupation, the teaching of Asian languages in Latvia was not allowed, and the next generations of Latvian specialists on Asia would be educated in Moscow or St. Petersburg (Ivbulis 2012, 8). In the meantime, Šmits' achievements in Chinese and Manchu studies were largely forgotten, with him being remembered chiefly as an editor of collections of folk songs and fairy tales. Only after the restoration of independence, with the establishment of study programmes in East Asian languages, did Šmits' name reappear again in connection with his exploits in China and the Russian Far East.

## Conclusion

Šmits' rich legacy is divided across various fields and languages, so to most he would be known in only one capacity. Given his twenty-year contribution to the development of Asian studies in Vladivostok, he is claimed by Russian Sinology as a part of their academic tradition. The internationally accessible part of his work – in German and English – makes him far more recognised in the West as a scholar of Tungus-Manchu languages. In Latvia, however, his work in Baltic ethnography and folklore takes precedence over the above, though recently there have been more efforts to assess his significance from a more holistic perspective. In commemoration of his UNESCO-endorsed 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2019, the University of Latvia and the National Library of Latvia held events dedicated to his life and work.<sup>5</sup> There is also the physical legacy: Šmits donated his private library, which included a medium-sized collection of Chinese and Manchu blockprints and lithographs, to the university library not long before his death,<sup>6</sup> while the national library preserves a moderate collection of manuscripts that belonged to him and his former students in Vladivostok.<sup>7</sup>

Šmits' life story also provides valuable material for understanding the discourse on identity during his time. Born an ethnic Latvian in a culturally German-dominated region but on the fringes of the Russian Empire whose subject he was, Šmits repeatedly found himself as the Other to the superior socio-cultural group: first, a social minority in his place of birth, then too Western-oriented in Russia, finally too "Oriental" in independent Latvia. Šmits' self-identification as primarily a scholar, specifically a scholar of China, over ethnic and national dividing lines was at odds with the political realities of the time which demanded that the individual should side with the nationalist agenda of the ruling power.

---

<sup>5</sup> The former resulted in the publication of a collective monograph (in Latvian and English): *Profesors Pēteris Šmits: no Raunas līdz Pekinai*, edited by Māriete Saviča. Riga: LU, 2020.

<sup>6</sup> A full catalogue of the books was prepared by Jeļena Staburova and Konstantin Yakhontov in the early 1990s but never officially published. For the list of Manchu books, see Yakhontov 1993.

<sup>7</sup> Pēteris Šmits fonds (RX18), Rare Books and Manuscripts Storage, National Library of Latvia. It contains Šmits' notebooks and handwritten dictionaries of Tungus-Manchu languages, course materials from both Vladivostok and Riga, as well as personal documents, letters, and photographs. The more interesting materials in Chinese pertaining to the ethnography of Western China (Gansu and Qinghai) were ostensibly authored or collected by a student of the Oriental Institute.

Because of that, throughout his life, Šmits struggled to connect with peers outside the domains of Chinese and Asian studies.

Šmits was a man of his time but not of his place, with circumstances preventing him from reaching his full potential. Even then, he managed to achieve international renown other Latvian scholars could only have dreamed of. Eventually, for the Latvian mentality with its constant urge to seek external validation, Šmits became a paragon of the “Latvians can too” attitude, as he has remained to this day. There have also been attempts to turn Šmits into a progenitor of a non-existent local tradition of Asian studies, which he clearly was not. Instead, let us remember Šmits for who he was: a brilliant and versatile researcher, whose dedication to the scholarship of China once put Latvia on the Sinological map of Europe.

## Bibliography

- Anon. 1923. “Ķīniska merakla.” *Svari* No. 17, 131.
- Anon. 1930. “Prof. P. Schmita dzīve un darbs.” *Atpūta* No. 269, 26.
- Blese, Ernests. 1932. [Review of P. Schmidt. “Chinesische Elemente im Mandschu”]. *Izglītības Ministrijas Mēnešraksts* No. 3, 260–262.
- Dunajevs, Georgijs. 2021. “From Orientalist to Scholar of Asia: Pēteris Šmits’ Writings on China for *Mājas Viesis*, 1897–1899”. In *Latvijas Nacionālās bibliotēkas Zinātniskie raksti* Vol. 7 (XXVII), 152–171.
- Dunajevs, Georgijs. 2022. “(Not Just Another) Professor’s Wife: Marija Šmite, Female Writing, and Western Women in China at the Turn of the Twentieth Century”. In *Latvijas Nacionālās bibliotēkas Zinātniskie raksti* Vol. 10 (XXX), 60–91.
- Freibergs, Jānis. n.d. *Biogrāfiski materiāli par P. Šmitu*. RXA295,31. Rare Book and Manuscript Storage (RBMS) of the National Library of Latvia (NLL).
- International Congress of Orientalists. 1929. *Proceedings of the Seventeenth International Congress of Orientalists, Oxford, 1928*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Ivbulis, Viktors. 2012. “Divdesmit grūta darba gadi”. *Latvijas Universitātes raksti* Vol. 779, 7–12.
- Juniors. 1924. “Ķīnas profesors kā ‘etnogrāfs’.” *Domas* No. 3, 258–260.
- Lapiņš, J. 1928. “Zinātnieks dzimtenē.” *Burtnieks* No. 6, 505–509.
- Pakalns, Guntis. 2017. “Pēteris Šmits (1869–1938).” In *Latvian Folkloristics in the Interwar Period*, edited by Dace Bula, 184–196. Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia.
- Schmidt, Peter. 1923a. “The Language of the Negidals.” *Latvijas Augstskolas raksti* Vol. 5, 3–38.
- Schmidt, Peter. 1923b. “The Language of the Olchas.” *Latvijas Universitātes raksti* Vol. 8, 229–288.

- Schmidt, Peter. 1928a. "The Language of the Oroches." *Latvijas Universitātes raksti* Vol. 17, 17-62.
- Schmidt, Peter. 1928b. "The Language of the Samagirs." *Latvijas Universitātes raksti* Vol. 19, 219-249.
- Schmidt, Peter. 1932-1933. "Chinesische Elemente im Mandschu." *Asia Major* Vol. 7, 573-628; Vol. 8, 233-276, 353-436.
- [Shkurkin, Pavel]. 1917. "Bibliografija." *Vestnik Azii* Vol. 40, No. 4, 52.
- Shmidt, Petr Petrovich. 1902. *Opyt mandarinskoj grammatiki s tekstami dlja uprazhnenij*. Vladivostok: Sushhinskij i Ko.
- Shmidt, Petr Petrovich. 1909. *Izuchenie Kitaja za graniceju*. Vladivostok: Vostochnij institut.
- Šauruma, Maija. 1962. *Valodnieks Pēteris Šmits: Maijas Šaurumas dz. Vītolas atmiņu pieraksts*. Recorded by Jānis Zemzaris. RX18,3,1. RBMS of the NLL.
- Šmits, Pēteris. 1894. "Ķīniešu stāsti." "*Mājas Viesi*" *Literāriskais Pielikums* No. 15, 57.
- Šmits, Pēteris. 1898. "Uz kalniem". *Mājas Viesi* No. 46, 1.
- Šmits, Pēteris. 1923. *Etnogrāfisku rakstu krājums*. Rīga: Izglītības ministrija.
- Šmits, Pēteris. 1936. *Ķīniešu pasakas*. Rīga: Valters un Rapa.
- Šmits, Pēteris. n.d. *Mana autobiogrāfija*. RXA295,30. RBMS of the NLL.
- Walravens, Hartmut. 1982. "Peter Schmidt, Ostasienwissenschaftler, Linguist und Folklorist." *Florilegia Manjurica in Memoriam Walter Fuchs*, edited by Michael Weiers and Giovanni Stary, 106-185. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz.
- Walravens, Hartmut. 2001. "Die ersten Übersetzungen chinesischer Lyrik ins Lettische." *Mitteilungsblatt (Deutsche China-Gesellschaft)* No. 1, 36-39.
- Walravens, Hartmut. 2010. "Pēteris Šmits as a Manchu and Chinese Expert: His Relations with Berthold Laufer and Erwin von Zach." In *Miscellanea Asiatica: Mélanges en l'honneur de Françoise Aubin*, edited by Denise Aigle et al., 765-779. Sankt Augustin: Institut Monumenta Serica.
- Yakhontov, Konstantin S. 1993. "Manchu Blockprints and Manuscripts in Riga (The Peter Schmidt's Collection)". *Peterburgskoe vostokovedenie* Vol. 4, 281-305.