

**Sara Rovira Esteva (2010). *Lengua y escritura chinas. Mitos y realidades*. Series: Biblioteca de China Contemporánea, 21. Barcelona: Edicions Bellaterra. 474 pp. 28 € ISBN 972-84-7290-511-5**

*Lengua y escritura chinas. Mitos y realidades* (Chinese language and writing. Myths and realities) is the first book in Spanish that offers a deep and faithful insight into the vast realm of Chinese language and writing. The title itself is already a declaration of the main objective of the book: to uncover the myths around Chinese language and writing which are frequently spread not only among lay people, but also in the academic circles of Sinology.

The book is based on an exhaustive and in-depth literature revision which is complemented by Rovira-Esteva's own experience in the topic. This is one of the assets of the book, since all the references are clearly exposed, carefully discussed and even rebutted in the case of the myths. This reinforces the cohesion of the book and, in this sense, the reader never has the feeling of finding unrelated or disconnected references.

The author relies on a multidisciplinary approach based on historical linguistics, sociolinguistics, applied linguistics, descriptive linguistics, contrastive linguistics, terminology and translation studies to achieve an encyclopedic overview of Chinese language and writing. Through this multidisciplinary approach mainly based on linguistic disciplines, Rovira-Esteva fulfils one of the claims she already stated in a paper in 2006, where she emphasised the lack of research on Chinese linguistics in Spain, as well as the obstacles found by all those starting research on related issues.

The book covers a wide range of topics around Chinese language and writing. All the topics are accurately presented and documented, thus making the publication an indispensable reference book for the study of Chinese. Furthermore, the reader will find a logic progression in the discussion of the topics, starting with more historical questions such as the origin and evolution of Chinese characters or the background for the creation of the oral standard, and concluding with some considerations on the future perspectives for the language. This, again, adds cohesion and coherence to the holistic study of the Chinese language.

*Lengua y escritura chinas* is divided into an introduction, seven parts, four annexes, a glossary and the bibliography. Each part, in turn, is composed by several chapters focusing on the specific topics discussed. The length of the chapters depends on these topics, therefore, some of them are more concise (e.g. chapter 9, on the "Specificities of the development and implementation of standard Chinese in Taiwan, Hong Kong and

Singapore”) while others are lengthier (e.g. chapter 18, on “Chinese and its geolects”).

Part one explores Chinese writing. Its six chapters include all the essential information concerning characters, while they also uncover some myths around Chinese writing, especially the most widespread idea that Chinese is a pictographic language. Therefore, it may be of special interest to Chinese teachers and students, since it offers a clear description of how Chinese writing has evolved into the characters currently in use nowadays.

The second part, “Origins and evolution of standard Chinese”, is divided into three chapters that cover the history and evolution of both the oral and the written standard, as well as the development and implementation of the standard in Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore. Readers will find references to academic and political discussions around linguistic policies in different periods of the Chinese history; a fact that demonstrates the great importance attached to linguistic issues in this Asian country.

The third part deals with different aspects of modern Chinese, starting with a brief panorama of the history of Chinese linguistics where the author demystifies the common assumption that “Chinese does not have grammar”. After this elucidation, Rovira-Esteva discusses the typological description of Chinese as an isolating language and questions the validity of this description resulting from the application of models designed from the perspective of Western languages. In the following chapters, the author offers an overview of the phonology, morpholexics and syntax of modern Chinese, as well as some remarks on its differences from the dialect of Beijing. This part may be of special value to teachers of Chinese as a foreign language, since it answers most of the frequent questions which students usually rise when learning Chinese. In this respect, the concept of Chinese as a discourse-oriented language and the notions of topic and comment stand out as the most realistic approach to understand Chinese sentence patterns.

Part four approaches a controversial issue, especially among Chinese sinologists: the number of languages in China, their status as languages, geolects or dialects and the intelligibility among them. The most important contribution in this part is perhaps the detailed description of the main geolects spoken in China, all of them illustrated with examples of their own specificities. This part comes at a critical moment where spoken exchanges have increased between China and Spain, not only at diplomatic and commercial levels, but also due to immigration and tourism and, therefore, covering situations where the different geolects and dialects may be in use. Hence, interpreters in general, but liaison interpreters in particular, may find this part of great use.

In part five the author analyses the “sociolinguistic conditions of the different Chinese communities nowadays.” Specific statistical data about language use and attitudes in China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore are provided and compared, as well as variations of oral and written standard Chinese and transcription systems in use in these communities. The author also expounds on the status of the different languages in use in the aforementioned Chinese communities, especially in terms of diglossia, bilingualism, digraphia and orthography.

Part six examines Chinese in the international context and is divided into two chapters. In chapter 27, the influence of Chinese on its neighbouring languages (i.e. Korean, Japanese and Vietnamese) is explored. This chapter especially answers the question of whether written Japanese and Korean may be understandable for Chinese. Chapter 28 is perhaps one of the most interesting for those working in translation and interpreting activities with the Chinese, as it sheds light onto the interaction between Chinese and Spanish. Rovira-Esteva describes some of the translation strategies adopted for Chinese terms in Spanish and discusses the consequences that specific choices may have. Here, the author is especially critical of the lack of consistency in the transcription of Chinese terms in Spanish texts, particularly in the case of proper names. Finally, she devotes some pages to the explanation of some clues for Spanish students of Chinese as a foreign language.

Part seven concerns different questions related to the application of Chinese in the contexts of science and technology developments. Rovira-Esteva starts this part by demystifying the assumption that Chinese language, because of its writing, may have been an obstacle for the development of abstract concepts. The two following chapters are rather concise and focus on two specific questions: orthography and terminology. From chapter 32 onwards, the reader may find some technical information about codification methods for Chinese characters, indexing methods, IT processing and related issues. The examples and illustrations provided by the author are extremely useful in this part, where despite the technical language required, the reader can easily have a clear idea of the different methods described.

In the epilogue, Rovira-Esteva discusses the challenges Chinese language may have to face in the future. First, the issue of bilingualism (or diglossia) in many Chinese regions, that may need to be further considered and accepted. Second, the need for a more precise standardisation of Chinese, in order to better define its syntax, further simplify its writing and homogenise the creation of neologisms and, particularly, loans from foreign languages. Finally, the impact of globalisation and IT in written and spoken Chinese; an impact that, according to the author, will continue to increase and will determine future

changes in Chinese language and writing.

After these concluding remarks, the reader will still find four annexes. The first annex is a table that includes all the syllables of standard Chinese and their transcription in *pinyin*. The second is a translation of the Law of the People's Republic of China on the Standard Spoken and Written Chinese Language. The third annex presents the basic rules of *pinyin* orthography, whereas the fourth is an extract of the "Criteria for the transcription of titles of publications in Chinese." Throughout the book, Rovira-Esteva states the need for a more systematic and homogeneous application of *pinyin* in the transcription of Chinese, therefore, these two final chapters may become a valuable resource in this endeavour.

A bilingual glossary of the terms mentioned in the book and an extensive list of bibliographical references follow the annexes to close *Lengua y escritura chinas*. Both the glossary and the bibliography have been rigorously compiled and are meticulously presented, thus showing the methodical work undertaken by the author and becoming much more than just part of the formalities of any kind of academic work.

Summing up, the variety of topics covered as well as the approach adopted by Rovira-Esteva undoubtedly increase the potential readers of the book. From the particular point of view of Translation and Interpreting studies it is a major contribution that will be mostly appreciated not only by those working in the field of didactics of Chinese as a foreign language for translators, but also by those doing research in any aspect of Chinese translation, interpreting, linguistic mediation or localisation. The chapters devoted to linguistic variation and to the application of new technologies are just two examples of the kind of information that Translation and Interpreting studies may benefit from.

Rovira-Esteva successfully achieves the objectives stated in the book and offers a truly encyclopaedic approach to Chinese language, since almost every relevant topic has been included. In addition, she is critical at several points, while also providing constructive comments which may be highly appreciated by most readers.

As far as research is concerned, the book establishes a much needed theoretical framework for future investigation in the field of Chinese language and writing. Moreover, the author points out different aspects that could be further explored and raise some questions that will be seminal in the future of the Chinese language, thus highlighting the prospective value of her work.

Last but not least, Rovira-Esteva's book is also a major contribution to the establishment of common terminology in the area of Sinology in Spanish, answering her objective of becoming a prescriptive tool for the

standardisation of many of the terms currently in use. As for the register chosen, the author finds the perfect balance between academic research and popular style, which results in a very readable book even for those lay to the vast domain of Sinology but, nevertheless, interested in the rich field of Chinese language and writing.

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