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Chinese linguistics in Spain: historical and institutional overview

Abstract

This article provides a historical and institutional overview of Chinese Linguistics in Spain, starting with the pioneer sinologists of the sixteenth century, followed by the advent and evolution of Chinese Studies since the late 1970's, and concluding with a summary of current scholarship.

The beginnings

From its beginnings in the 16th century up to the 18th century, the study of Chinese linguistics in Spain was almost exclusively in the hands of missionaries, who made an important contribution both in quantitative and qualitative terms.

Spanish Franciscan and Dominican missionaries were the first to study the language, ideas, customs and history of China in order to better understand the Chinese and thus more easily convert them to Christianity. It was at that time that Martin de Rada (1533-1578) is believed to have written *Arte y Vocabulario de la Lengua China* [Grammar and Vocabulary of the Chinese Language]- the first work on the Chinese language written in a European language. Juan Cobo (1546-1592) was responsible for the first translation of a Chinese book (Fàn Liběn's 範立本 *Míng Xīn Bǎo Jiàn* 明心寶鑒 [Rich Mirror of the Clear Heart]) into

a European language in 1592. Cobo also wrote *Vocabulario y Arte de la Lengua China* [Vocabulary and Grammar of the Chinese Language] although this book, like others by Francisco Díaz (1606-1646) and Juan Bautista Morales (1597-1664), has not survived the ravages of time. The creation of a romanization system of Mandarin Chinese is attributed to Diego de Pantoja (1571-1618).

Between the 16th and the 18th centuries, Spanish priests undertook the formidable task of compiling dictionaries and glossaries, and writing grammar books. The oldest Chinese grammar preserved to date is the *Arte de la Lengua Mandarina* [Grammar of the Mandarin Language], written by Francisco Varo (1627-1687) in 1682 and published in Guǎngzhōu 廣州 in 1703 - a work of great historical value as it reflects the phonology, syntax and lexicon of the language spoken by 17th century mandarins in Nánjīng 南京 (Breitenbach 2000:xxi).

With the expulsion of missionaries from China in the 18th century and the decline of colonial power in the late 19th century, however, Spain turned its back on Asia.

The advent and evolution of Chinese Studies in Spain

The University of Granada was the first institution in Spain to include Chinese language courses in its Diploma in Translation and Interpreting in 1978, followed ten years later by the Autonomous University of Barcelona (Casas *et al.* 2008a:186-7). Since 2000, the number of undergraduate degrees offering China-related studies in Spain has increased and diversified, providing multidisciplinary programs more closely associated with Social Sciences than

Language and Literature or Translation Studies. As yet there is no degree in Chinese Studies which focuses exclusively on Chinese Language and Literature. Over the past decade, several initiatives have been taken regarding post-graduate courses in East Asian Studies or Translation and Interpreting from Chinese into Spanish, but these aim largely at training students for the professional workplace rather than for academic pursuits. Therefore, we should not expect a substantial increase in academic research output related to Chinese linguistics in the short run.

Current situation of research and publications in Chinese Linguistics

Since the late 1950s, and in particular since 1973 when diplomatic relations between China and Spain which had been broken off in 1950 were resumed, Spanish sinologists and Chinese hispanists have had to work under very difficult conditions.

The literature on Chinese Linguistics in Spain comprises publications in a number of different fields. Martínez' *La Lengua China: Historia, Signo y Contexto: una Aproximación Sociocultural* [The Chinese Language, History, Sign and Context: A Socio-Cultural Approach] (2007), and Rovira-Esteva's rather more academic *Lengua y Escritura Chinas: Mitos y Realidades* [Chinese Language and Writing: Myths and Realities] (2010) provide a general overview of the socio-historical context of the Chinese language. Chinese grammar books for Spanish-speakers include: Marco *et al.* (1998); Xu *et al.* (1997), and Liao *et al.* (2007).

Whilst most Chinese language dictionaries for Spanish speakers have been produced in China, others have been published in Spain, such as Mateos *et al.* (1977, 1987); Zhou (1999, 2006); and Rovira-Esteva's specialized dictionary on measure words (1998).

Works on different aspects of Chinese writing are rare, though mention should be made of contributions by Fadón (2001, 2005), Lu (2008), Marco *et al.* (2000) and Relinque (2005), dealing with its historical evolution, calligraphy, semantic analysis of radicals, as well as writing as a mirror of women's position in Chinese society.

Very few studies specifically address issues related to phonetics and phonology. Of these, Álvarez (2000), Cortés (2006, 2009), Fisac (1985), and Julià-Muné (2009) mostly present contrastive studies of Mandarin and Spanish or Catalan, and Wang (2007) compares the phonological systems of Spanish and Taiwanese.

Studies on Chinese morphology include Casas's, comparative study of onomatopoeia in Chinese and Spanish (2008a); Lu (2003), Cheng (2008) and Li (2010) study the particle /e; Marco (1988a) and Rovira-Esteva (2007a, 2007b, 2008) focus on different aspects of measure words; Marco (1988b) studies the resultative aspect; while Marco *et al.* (1991, 1992) describe the morphology of Mandarin.

As far as studies on Chinese syntax are concerned are worthy of note the following contributions: Fisac (1993) offers an analysis of Chinese simple sentences, Lu (1995, 1997) analyses null-subject and personal pronoun

omission in Spanish and Chinese, Marco (1987, 1989, 1999) studies sentence structure as well as passive and transitive constructions, Querol (2010) presents a study on the syntax of lexical nominalization, and Wang (2005) tries to find Chinese equivalents for the Spanish relative pronoun *que*.

Although relatively few texts have been translated from Chinese in Spain when compared with other neighboring countries, Translation Studies is a well-established academic discipline. Bonilla (2001), Casas (2010), Casas *et al.* (2008b), Ciruela (2004, 2010), García-Noblejas (2008), Golden (1996), Lu *et al.* (2009), Ramírez (1999, 2004), Rovira (2005, 2007, 2009), Rovira *et al.* (2000), Vargas Urpi (2011a) and Zhi (2006), amongst others, have made significant contributions to the field. Arbillaga (2003) provides a comprehensive overview of texts that have been translated from Chinese up to the early 21st century.

Studies on discourse analysis are few and far between and mostly deal with issues related to community interpreting for Chinese immigrants (Raga *et al.* 1999, Raga 2009 and Vargas Urpi 2010, 2011b, 2011b). Casas *et al.* (2008c, 2009) analyze orientalist discourse in the description of the Chinese language. Cuadrado (2000, 2002), Garayzábal *et al.* (2006), Prosser (2006, 2008) and Querol (2009) focus on the socio-linguistics of Chinese.

Finally, to complete this overview of the literature in Chinese Linguistics in Spain, we should include publications within the field of teaching Chinese as a foreign language. Fachal (2008), Fisac (2008), Lee (2008), Zhang Nian (2008), and Zhou (2008, 2010) address general issues of Chinese language teaching whilst other authors deal with more specific aspects such as learning how to

write in Chinese (Ciruela 2007, Legaz 2007, Chin 2010, Zhang Zheng Quan 2008), the Chinese verb system (Casas 2007 and 2008b), task-based learning (Chen 2008), the use of new technologies (Chin 2008) and adapting Chinese language proficiency levels to the requirements of the European Framework of Reference for Languages (Marco 2008, Casas *et al.* in press).

Concluding remarks

As distinct from the United States or other European countries, there is no long-established tradition of Chinese Studies in Spain. The absence of research groups in Chinese Linguistics has meant that publications are often the result of individual effort and usually show little continuity. Moreover, since no specialist journals exist in the field, the findings of research have often been published in books and journals that are not readily accessible. It is therefore paradoxical that Spaniards, who were pioneers both in the systematic study of the Chinese language and its dissemination in Europe, are no longer to be found at the forefront of the field.

It is to be hoped, however, that the steady increase in East Asian Studies courses on offer in universities in Spain will stimulate research in Chinese Linguistics in the medium term.

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