Chinese Program in Focus

# Chinese at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB)

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Received: 28 September, 2021/Accepted: 6 June, 2022/Published: 30 October, 2022

### 1. Overview

Founded in 1968, the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB) is a public, generalist, campus-based university, mainly located in Bellaterra, near the city of Barcelona. It hosts a total of around 40,000 students (2019-18), counting undergraduate degree, master's degree and PhD students. Research is distributed among 57 departments and teaching takes place in 13 faculties/schools. Both the Faculty of Translation and Interpreting and the Department of Translation, Interpreting and East Asian Studies have played a leading role as a hub of teaching, learning, research and dissemination where Chinese language and culture are concerned.

Figure 1
The UAB's Faculty of Translation and Interpreting



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## 2 Chinese in the Faculty of Translation and Interpreting's BA and MA

### **Programmes**

The UAB first introduced Chinese as a second foreign language (a so-called "C language") in its BA programme in Translation and Interpreting in 1988. It was the second university in Spain to offer Chinese, after the University of Granada, which had begun to do so in 1978. Despite Chinese having been taught in tertiary education in Spain for more than 40 years, the country still lacks a degree in Sinology or Chinese Studies, as stated in an earlier paper by Casas-Tost and Rovira-Esteva (2008). However, the degree programmes that offer Chinese language tuition have diversified in recent years, a trend exemplified by the Faculty of Translation and Interpreting.

In the academic year 2000-01, Chinese was included in a specific course in East Asian Studies offered by the Institute of International and Intercultural Studies, which was then converted into a second-cycle course offered jointly by the UAB and Pompeu Fabra University. In 2009-10, both the BA in Translation and Interpreting and the second-cycle course in East Asian Studies became four-year bachelor's degree programmes and were adapted to the European Higher Education Area.

More recently, 2020-21 saw the Faculty of Translation and Interpreting launch a new degree programme offering tuition in Chinese language. Named the degree in Spanish and Chinese Studies: Language, Literature and Culture, it is the first of its kind in Spain and virtually the whole world.<sup>2</sup> Its main feature is the combination of two academic traditions: Spanish philological subjects and intensive training in Chinese language and culture. Its introduction has made the UAB the university with the most varied range of degree-level education in Chinese language and culture in the whole of Spain.

Figure 2
Timeline of the Introduction of Chinese in UAB Study Programmes at BA Level

#### Chinese at the Faculty of Translation and Interpreting of the UAB



At postgraduate level too, the UAB's Faculty of Translation and Interpreting offers the widest range of MA programmes involving Chinese language or Chinese studies in Spain. The Faculty first introduced Chinese at MA level in its former MA in Professional Chinese-Spanish Translation and Interpreting, which was launched in 2004-05 and taught for four consecutive academic years before being phased out in 2009 because of the reform needed for adaptation to the European Higher Education Area. The first MA ever to cover the translation and interpreting of what are two of the world's most widely spoken languages, it included subjects such as audiovisual translation, legal translation, commercial translation, and consecutive interpreting.

In 2013-14, the MA in Translation and Intercultural Studies was launched with two possible language combinations: English-Spanish and Chinese-Spanish. It incorporated some of the content originally included in the previous MA, and currently offers the option of focusing on specialised legal, technical and audiovisual translation or on public service interpreting.

In 2018-19, the UAB launched its official master's degree in Teaching Chinese to Spanish Speakers, Spain's only official master's degree devoted entirely to teaching Chinese, with a markedly profession-

oriented approach. Its creation and implementation constitute an important milestone: it is the only MA programme in the world focusing on the specific needs of Spanish speakers—be they adults or children—who are learning Chinese.<sup>3</sup> In addition to comprehensive training in teaching methodologies, the programme includes a compulsory teaching placement module, with internship opportunities in major Chinese-teaching schools in the Barcelona area. In the second term, students learn about research methodology to help them write a dissertation, which can eventually lead to a PhD programme for those wishing to continue studying.

The UAB has two other MA programmes that include Chinese studies: the EU-China: Culture and Economy MA programme, where students gain general knowledge to better understand socio-economic relations between the EU and China; and the MA in Global Studies in East Asia, where the global influence of East Asia is analysed from cultural, economic, social and linguistic perspectives, among others. Neither programme is exclusively devoted to Chinese studies, but both encompass them as an area of strategic importance where East Asia is concerned.

Figure 3
Timeline of the Introduction of Chinese Language and Chinese Studies in UAB Study Programmes at MA Level

### Chinese at the Faculty of Translation and Interpreting of the UAB



In short, despite a lack of exclusive Sinology or Chinese Studies programmes, the UAB has established itself as the Spanish university with the widest range of training in Chinese language and culture, both at BA level (three programmes at present) and MA level (four programmes at present).

# 3 Approach to Teaching Chinese at Degree Levels

Students of the degree in Translation and Interpreting who choose Chinese as their C language must study it throughout the four-year programme. For the first two years, they focus on the study of the language, while in the third and fourth they combine language and translation classes. Overall, compulsory subjects on Chinese language or translation account for 66 ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) credits.

In this programme, language teaching is aimed at translation. As Berenguer (1999) explains, teaching languages for translation means, among other things, developing greater reading comprehension competency, studying language on the basis of comparison with students' first language, developing cultural competency, and training students to use dictionaries and other reference works. More specifically, according to Casas-Tost and Rovira-Esteva (2008: 187), the programme's Chinese classes place emphasis "on developing students' passive language skills and basic knowledge regarding the use of translation tools and techniques". This approach is applied from the outset, through the use of a textbook based on the teaching method in question: Lengua china para traductores. 学中文做翻译 (2007/2020), co-authored by Helena Casas-Tost, Sara Rovira-Esteva (currently teachers at the Faculty of Translation and Interpreting) and Anne-Hélène Suárez (a former teacher) (see also Rovira-Esteva, 2011).

The emphasis on reading skills does not mean other skills are overlooked; the textbook is complemented by a webpage<sup>4</sup> with listening materials and other exercises for self-learning, as students are expected to study on their own for at least seven to eight hours a week in the first two years.

Students of the degree in East Asian Studies can choose between Chinese and Japanese. If they choose the former, Chinese language subjects are compulsory in the first three years (adding up to 66 ECTS credits) and optional in the fourth, where a further six such subjects (Chinese VII; Chinese VIII; Chinese Text and Context II; Tandem: Oral Chinese Practice; and Chinese Language for Specific Purposes) can be taken provided minimum student numbers are met. It is therefore possible to earn up to 102 ECTS credits through Chinese language subjects. Optional subjects are sometimes unavailable due to insufficient demand, as many students decide to participate in exchange programmes in their third or fourth year and take similar courses while studying abroad, and others prefer non-linguistic subjects for their final year.

The degree in Spanish and Chinese Studies includes compulsory Chinese language subjects worth a total of 78 ECTS credits (distributed over the four years of the programme), plus 24 optional Chinese language subjects. Thus, as in the case of the degree in East Asian Studies, up to 102 ECTS credits can be earned through subjects on the language (including Classical Chinese and Language for Specific Purposes). In addition to purely linguistic subjects, this programme seeks to offer a more holistic approach to Chinese language, literature and culture, and therefore also features a specific subject called Chinese Literature and another called Fundaments for Intercultural Mediation with Chinese.

The approach to language teaching in the East Asian Studies and Spanish and Chinese Studies degree programmes, which share the same learning objectives, is slightly different to that of the degree in Translation and Interpreting, whose students learn Chinese for substantially different purposes. Language learning is more comprehensive in the two former programmes, with greater balance in the development of all skills. That is reflected in the optional subjects available: while "Chinese Text and Context" focuses on reading and writing skills, "Tandem" centres on listening and speaking.

Regardless of their degree programme, all students of Chinese at the Faculty of Translation and Interpreting are required to learn to read and write Chinese characters. After the first year of each of the three degree programmes, for instance, students must be able to recognise around 400-450 new characters. They must also be able to identify and know the meaning of radicals (up to 70 in the case of the degree in Translation and Interpreting) and follow stroke order when writing characters. Other important skills, such as cultural and intercultural competences and pragmatic skills, are included as a general aspect in all the Chinese subjects taught.

Figure 4

A Chinese Class at the Faculty of Translation and Interpreting (UAB)



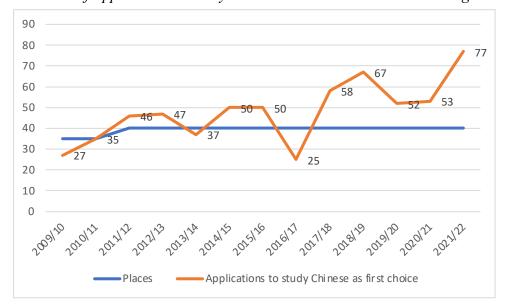
The UAB's Faculty of Translation and Interpreting has signed exchange agreements with more than 15 universities in the Sinosphere. That gives students an excellent opportunity to spend an academic year in China and greatly improve their Chinese in a fully Chinese academic environment.

Equally important for the Faculty has been the support received from the Barcelona Confucius Institute Foundation, established in 2010. The UAB is a member of the board of the Foundation. The Confucius Institute has provided teaching staff for the degree in Spanish and Chinese Studies in recent times, and teaching support staff for the other degrees for several years, as well as teaching materials (textbooks and audiovisual material).

# 4 Students of Chinese-related Programmes

There has been a constant increase in interest in studying Chinese over recent years. Figure 5 shows the number of students who applied to study Chinese as their first choice in the East Asian Studies degree programme in each of the last 13 academic years. Despite a substantial drop in applications for 2016-17, most academic years since 2012 have seen the number of applications received surpass the number of places available, peaking in 2021-22 with 77 applications. The imbalance between applications and places available to study Chinese in the East Asian Studies degree programme was actually one of the reasons behind the creation of the new degree in Spanish and Chinese Studies.

Figure 5
Evolution of Applications to Study Chinese in the East Asian Studies Degree Programme (UAB)



Chinese is also one of the languages for which demand is highest in the degree in Translation and Interpreting, and is usually among the first to run out of places. However, since students do not specify their preferences for C languages when applying to take the degree, records are not as detailed as in the case of the degree in East Asian Studies.

Given the places available in the three degree programmes since 2020-21, up to 115 students can start learning Chinese at the Faculty of Translation and Interpreting every academic year. Most of the students who do so are from Catalonia or other regions of Spain, although there is a stable intake of five to eight students from the Chinese diaspora in Spain each year. While students are not expected to have studied Chinese before, an increasing proportion have already taken courses prior to arriving at the UAB,

a consequence, in part, of the proliferation of opportunities to learn Chinese in language academies or other institutions, and of the establishment of the Barcelona Confucius Institute Foundation.

In the case of the MA programmes, applicants often greatly surpass the number of places available. Applications for the MA in Translation and Intercultural Studies peaked in 2019-20, with 178 applicants for 60 places. The imbalance is even greater in the case of the MA in Teaching Chinese to Spanish Speakers, which offers only 20 places but receives more than a hundred applications every year.

Regarding resources and support facilities for students, the degrees were mainly classroom-based before the COVID-19 pandemic, although a Moodle environment was also used to encourage self-learning and support face-to-face teaching. The UAB is a classroom-based university and, despite the virtual and hybrid modes adopted in the academic years 2019-20 and 2020-21, classroom-based learning has resumed in 2021-22. Students mostly take classes at the Faculty of Translation and Interpreting, where they have access to computer rooms. The Humanities Library has a special section devoted to East Asian Studies, with a major collection of books on Chinese language teaching and learning, linguistics, and literature, among other topics.

In terms of graduates' careers, some former students of the degree in Translation and Interpreting have become outstanding translators (see also Tor-Carroggio & Rovira-Esteva, 2021). They include Javier Altayó, translator of science fiction novels into Spanish (e.g. Liu Cixin's saga), whose work won the 2017 Kelvin 505 award for the best sci-fi novel translated into Spanish; Maialen Marin-Lacarta, translator of authors such as Mo Yan, Yan Lianke and Shen Congwen, and winner of the 2013 Jokin Zaitegi Prize for her translation into Basque of a work by Mo Yan; and Carla Benet, translator of authors such as Yu Hua and Zhang Ailing, and winner of the 2018 Marcela de Juan Prize for the best translation from Chinese into Catalan. In the case of the degree in East Asian Studies, most alumni go on to work in international commerce, tourism or consultancy services. However, special mention must be made of Noel (苏诺伊),<sup>5</sup> who has become a well-known YouTuber with a channel with more than 30 million subscribers (at the time of writing), via which he mainly uses his excellent Chinese-Spanish bilingual skills to bridge the gap between the two cultures.

# 5 Teaching Staff

The Faculty of Translation and Interpreting has 13 Chinese language and translation teachers at the moment of writing this article. Four of them are full-time tenured lecturers. The non-tenured staff comprise seven part-time adjunct lecturers, a graduate teaching assistant, and a visiting lecturer from the Barcelona Confucius Institute.

Some figures on the education and training of the Chinese language and translation teaching staff follow:

- Seven teachers (54%) have a PhD, in Chinese language or translation in most cases.
- Six teachers are native speakers of Chinese, mainly with an educational background in Spanish Studies.
- Seven teachers are native speakers of Spanish or Catalan, with degrees in Translation and Interpreting (six) or East Asian Studies (one).

The main teaching materials published by the staff include the previously mentioned two-volume textbook *Lengua china para traductores*. 学中文做翻译 (Casas-Tost, Rovira-Esteva & Suárez-Girard, 2007/2020); an introduction to Chinese language and linguistics, *Lengua y escritura chinas: Mitos y realidades* (Rovira-Esteva, 2010); a Spanish-Chinese dictionary (Zhou, 2006); a Catalan-Chinese

dictionary (Zhou, 1999); and two style guides on the use of Chinese terms in Spanish texts (Rovira-Esteva & Casas-Tost, 2015) and in Catalan texts (Casas-Tost & Rovira-Esteva, 2015). Furthermore, one of our colleagues has been involved in writing HSK preparation books (e.g. Ehrenhaus Faimberg; Liao Pan; & Pitarque Ledesma, 2015).

Eight of the teachers have professional experience in translation and interpreting, which is very relevant to the degree in Translation and Interpreting's Chinese translation subjects. While some of them have built up most of their experience in the private sector, others have also worked in the literary field: Sara Rovira-Esteva has translated Gao Xingjian (高行健), Sanmao (三毛), Chun Sue (春树) and Feng Menglong (冯梦龙); Qu Xianghong has co-translated Xu Dishan (许地山), Zhang Ailing (张爱玲) and Yu Hua (余华); M. Carmen Espín has translated Chi Li (池莉) and Xu Xiaobin (徐小斌); Mireia Vargas-Urpí has translated Sanmao (三毛) and Li Ang (李昂); and Leonor Sola has translated Liao Yiwu (廖亦武). Three of the teachers (Helena Casas-Tost, Sara Rovira-Esteva and Zhou Minkang) also have experience in audiovisual translation from Chinese into Catalan or Spanish, either for subtitling or dubbing. Finally, Sara Rovira-Esteva and Mireia Vargas-Urpí are two of the four translators currently accredited by the Catalan government to perform certified translations from Chinese into Catalan.

Figure 6
Covers of Some of the Books Translated from Chinese into Spanish or Catalan by Teaching Staff of the Faculty of Translation and Interpreting



# 6 Research on Chinese Language and Chinese Translation

The Department of Translation, Interpreting and East Asian Studies at the UAB's Faculty of Translation and Interpreting runs the PhD programme in Translation and Intercultural Studies and is home to TXICC, Spain's most active research group in the field of Chinese language and translation. This section provides an overview of the programme and the group in question, two cornerstones of research on Chinese language and translation.

Launched in the early 1990s, the PhD programme in Translation and Intercultural Studies specifically includes a line of research on "East Asian languages and literatures". By the end of 2020, 177 theses had been defended, the first of them being current teacher Zhou Minkang's (1995) comparative study of Chinese and Spanish. Since 2010, 34 theses have focused on Chinese translation, a figure that clearly reflects an increasing interest in Chinese-related topics in the programme.

The TXICC research group<sup>7</sup> was officially established in 2007, with the main aim of promoting research in the field of Chinese-Spanish/Catalan translation and interpreting. More specifically, the group works on the following lines of research:

- Critical discourse analysis on the Chinese language and the Chinese Other
- Teaching Chinese as a foreign language

- Teaching Chinese for specific purposes (language for translators)
- Intercultural communication between the Spanish and Chinese cultures
- Contrastive linguistics between Catalan/Spanish and Chinese
- Chinese to Catalan/Spanish translation and interpreting

The group currently comprises four of the Faculty's teachers, namely Sara Rovira-Esteva (coordinator), Helena Casas-Tost, Qu Xianghong and Mireia Vargas-Urpí, plus external collaborators. Their list of publications is extensive, covering the various lines of research mentioned above, and includes contributions such as Casas-Tost and Rovira-Esteva's (2014, 2018) analysis of the implementation of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages in the case of Chinese; Qu's (2019) pedagogical proposal for non-verbal communication; Rovira-Esteva's (2016) overview of Chinese linguistics in Spain; and Vargas-Urpí's research on public service interpreting between Chinese and Spanish/Catalan (2014, 2018), to name but a few examples.

The group has been involved in three important projects closely related to its main lines of research:

- Translated Chinese cinema in Spain (Casas-Tost et al., 2019-21), an open access database of the Chinese films that have been translated into either Spanish or Catalan and screened in Spain (fig. 7);
- Translated Chinese literature in Spain (Rovira-Esteva et al., 2019-21), an open access database including all the translations of Chinese literary works published in Spain (fig. 8);
- e Chinese Tools (Rovira-Esteva et al. 2021), an open access database of digital resources for teaching and learning Chinese (fig. 9).

Figure 7

Translated Chinese Cinema in Spain (Casas-Tost et al., 2019-21)

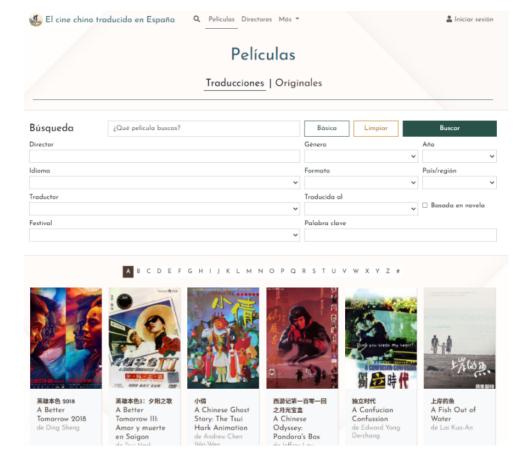


Figure 8
Translated Chinese Literature in Spain (Rovira-Esteva et al., 2019-21)

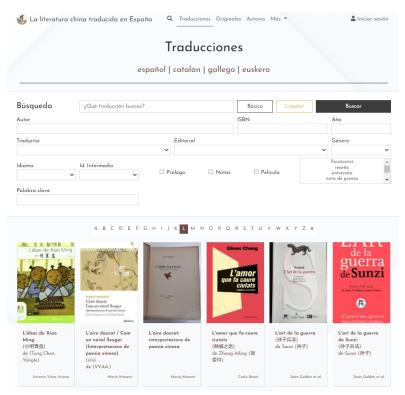


Figure 9
e-Chinese Tools (Rovira-Esteva et al., 2021)



The databases of Chinese cinema and literature are excellent resources for research on the circulation and reception of Chinese cultural products in Spain (Casas-Tost, Rovira-Esteva & Vargas-Urpí, 2020), as well as for studies about translation trends and methods (Tor-Carroggio & Rovira-Esteva, 2021; Casas-Tost & Rovira-Esteva, 2019). e-Chinese Tools, which is still a work in progress at the time of writing, is more directly related to the need to adapt our teaching methods to new learning environments and to students born in the digital era. Despite their differences, the three databases are alike in that they provide a substantial amount of data that can be used for research purposes, and that they are closely related to the Chinese language and translation subjects taught at the Faculty of Translation and Interpreting. That reflects one of the aims of the group: to bridge the gap between research and teaching practice.

Last but not least, TXICC is very active in terms of knowledge transfer. In addition to sharing general information via a Twitter account (@TXICC), the group has published a series of interviews with Chinese-Spanish/Catalan literary translators on a YouTube channel (Tor-Carroggio & Rovira-Esteva, 2021). Furthermore, thanks to the support of the Faculty of Translation and Interpreting and the Barcelona Confucius Institute Foundation, the group organises the Marcela de Juan translation prize for the best literary translations from Chinese into Spanish or Catalan (fig. 10), and has also held round tables and presentations about Chinese literature and translation (fig. 11).

Figure 10
Picture from the Ceremony at Which the first Marcela de Juan Prize was Awarded to Alicia Relinque for her Translation of Tang Xianzu's (1617) Mudan Ting (牡丹亭). CC: Fundació Institut Confuci de Barcelona



Figure 11

Presentation of the Chinese cinema and literature databases at the Barcelona Confucius Institute's headquarters. CC: Fundació Institut Confuci de Barcelona



# 7 Concluding Remarks

This article has summarised the past and present of Chinese studies at the UAB's Faculty of Translation and Interpreting. There are, of course, challenges that will need to be tackled in the future, such as further exploring the potential of online training, creating other short study programmes (e.g. in Chinese-Spanish conference interpreting), and extending cooperation on training to other universities. Nevertheless, the UAB is already a benchmark for others in the field of Chinese studies in Spain, as can be seen in its intense teaching, research and dissemination activity in relation to Chinese language and culture.

#### Notes

- 1. Students admitted to the Translation and Interpreting degree programme have to choose an A language (Catalan or Spanish), which is deemed their mother tongue; a B language (English, French or German), deemed their first foreign language, in which they must already be competent (CEFR level B2 is the minimum requirement); and a C language, their second foreign language, which they will learn from scratch. The C languages currently available are Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese and Russian.
- 2. There are similar degree programmes in the UK, such as the BA (Hons) in Spanish Studies with Chinese offered by Lancashire University. The main difference is that the UAB's degree in Spanish and Chinese Studies is aimed at students with a native level of Spanish, whereas Lancashire University's BA programme is aimed at students who speak Spanish as a second language.
- 3. Comillas Pontifical University offers a master's degree in Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language to Children, focusing specifically on children's needs.
- 4. http://sad.uab.es/xuezhongwen/index.php
- 5. https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC9B2hhZj5B3s3qP\_94YybiA/featured
- 6. For a full list of the programme's completed theses, see https://pagines.uab.cat/doctorat-traduccio/en/content/theses-completed-date-viva
- 7. For more information, see https://grupsderecerca.uab.cat/txicc/en
- 8. Most of the articles published by members of the group are openly available from the UAB's institutional digital document repository: https://ddd.uab.cat/collection/txicc
- 9. https://www.youtube.com/user/TXICC

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