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## A University-Based Construction of Asian Studies in Spain: Structural Analysis and Potential

## Una construcción universitaria de los estudios asiáticos en España: análisis estructural y potencial

## 西班牙亚洲研究的大学本位建构：结构分析与潜力展望

劳尔·拉米雷斯·鲁伊斯

raul.ramirez@urjc.es

Raúl Ramírez Ruiz\*

*Faculty of Education and Sport Sciences and Interdisciplinary Studies*

Universidad Rey Juan Carlos  
Madrid (Spain) 28032

李秋杨

liqiuyang@tjnu.edu.cn


Li Qiuyang\*\*

*School of Foreign Studies*

Tianjin Normal University  
Tianjin, China 300387

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\* Dr. Raúl Ruiz Ramírez is Professor in Faculty of Education and Sport Sciences and Interdisciplinary Studies, Universidad Rey Juan Carlos, Spain. His research interests include Chinese history and history of relationship between China and Europe.

 0000-0002-1690-7200

\*\* Dr. Li Qiuyang is Professor in School of Foreign Languages, Tianjin Normal University, China. Her research interests include discourse studies and sinology studies.

 0000-0001-6510-2831

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**Abstract:** Asian Studies in Spain emerged in the late 1970s, driven by China's reform and opening-up policy and Japan's growing international influence, gradually evolving into a systematic academic field. This article examines the origins, development, and structural characteristics of Asian Studies in Spain, analyzing its contributions to Spanish cultural diplomacy and educational globalization, particularly in cultivating regional experts on Asia, attracting international students, and promoting Sino-Spanish cultural exchanges. It also explores the institutionalization process of Asian Studies in Spain and the challenges it faces. By comparing degree programs across different periods, the study reveals the evolution of Spain's Asian Studies within the bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degree systems, highlighting the regional concentration and disciplinary diversity of its academic offerings.

**Key Words:** Spain; Asian Studies; degree programs; social sciences; cultural exchange; education system.

**Resumen:** Los Estudios Asiáticos en España surgieron a finales de la década de 1970, impulsados por la política de reforma y apertura de China y el creciente influjo internacional de Japón, evolucionando gradualmente hasta convertirse en un campo académico sistemático. Este artículo examina los orígenes, el desarrollo y las características estructurales de los Estudios Asiáticos en España, analizando sus contribuciones a la diplomacia cultural española y a la globalización educativa, particularmente en la formación de expertos regionales sobre Asia, la atracción de estudiantes internacionales y la promoción de los intercambios culturales sino-españoles. Asimismo, explora el proceso de institucionalización de los Estudios Asiáticos en España y los desafíos a los que se enfrenta. Mediante la comparación de programas de grado en distintos periodos, el estudio revela la evolución de los Estudios Asiáticos en España dentro de los sistemas de grado, máster y doctorado, destacando la concentración regional y la diversidad disciplinaria de su oferta académica.

**Palabras clave:** España; Estudios Asiáticos; programas de grado; ciencias sociales; intercambio cultural; sistema educativo.

**摘要:** 西班牙的亚洲研究始于20世纪70年代末，受到中国改革开放及日本国际影响力上升的推动，逐步发展为一个系统化的学术领域。本文回顾西班牙亚洲研究的起源、发展与结构特征，分析其对西班牙文化外交和教育全球化的贡献，特别是在培养亚洲区域专家、吸引国际学生及促进中西文化交流方面的成就，以及西班牙的制度化过程及其所面临的挑战。通过对比不同时期的学位课程，揭示了西班牙亚洲研究在本科、硕士和博士学位体系的演变历程，突显其学位设置的区域集中性和学科多样性。

[关键词] 西班牙；亚洲研究；学位课程；社会科学；文化交流；教育体系

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## 1. Introduction

Spain's scholarly engagement with Asia can be traced to the Age of Discovery, when the nation's formidable maritime capabilities facilitated its global exploration and established initial connections with the Asian continent. Spanish explorers traversed vast oceans to reach various Asian territories, returning with fragmentary yet groundbreaking observations that laid the foundation for subsequent Asian Studies. During the 16th

and 17th centuries, Spanish missionaries emerged as pivotal figures in Asia, systematically documenting and analyzing Asian languages, cultures, and societies while engaged in religious propagation. Their scholarly contributions produced invaluable primary sources that significantly enhanced Western comprehension of Asia.

However, due to complex historical factors, Spain's exploration in Asia subsequently entered a period of dormancy, resulting in stagnated development of Asian Studies. This academic inertia persisted until the late 1970s, when China's implementation of Reform and Opening-Up policies and Japan's rapid economic ascendancy on the global stage prompted Spanish academia to refocus its attention on the increasingly dynamic and opportunity-rich Asian region.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century has witnessed comprehensive expansion and deepening of Asian Studies across Spain, with particularly noteworthy achievements in the development of degree program structures. The discipline has evolved from its initial linguistic-focused curriculum to encompass multidisciplinary programs integrating humanities, social sciences, economic trade, and international relations. This transformation has established a clearly stratified academic system spanning undergraduate, master's, and doctoral levels, thereby creating a robust foundation for cultivating specialized professionals in Asian Studies.

In recent years, as Asian countries including China, Japan, South Korea, and India have demonstrated growing influence in international politics, economics, and cultural spheres, Spanish academic institutions have demonstrated remarkable responsiveness to these geopolitical shifts. The proactive establishment of Asian Studies related courses and degree programs has yielded multiple benefits: nurturing a cohort of domestic experts proficient in Asian affairs, attracting international scholars and students to engage with the field, and constructing vital bridges for Sino-Spanish cultural exchange. These initiatives have significantly contributed to fostering mutual understanding and facilitating collaborative endeavors between distinct civilizations.

However, despite the increasingly consolidated position of Asian Studies within Spain's academic system, significant challenges persist in the design of degree programs. These include the uneven geographical distribution of courses and regional resource allocation; insufficient curricular diversity to accommodate varied student interests and career aspirations; and a lack of long-term, stable program planning resulting in fluctuations that adversely affect teaching quality and academic continuity (Raúl Ramírez-Ruiz et al., 2023).

Building upon this context, the present study employs systems science methodology to conduct a comprehensive, multidimensional analysis of contemporary Asian Studies in Spain. Through meticulous examination of its current developmental status, precise identification of disciplinary characteristics, and in-depth investigation of existing challenges, this research aims to: accurately delineate the field's position within the academic landscape; forecast future development of Asia Studies in Spain through evidence-based projections; and critically evaluate the role and impact of Spanish Asian Studies in facilitating socio-cultural dissemination, advancing educational internationalization, and strengthening Sino-Spanish cultural exchange.

Theoretical and practical contributions of this study include providing an integrative theoretical framework for understanding the current state and future directions of Spanish Asian Studies; offering scholarly perspectives to foster innovation and development within the field; and generating robust academic support for enhancing Sino-Spanish cultural dialogue and collaboration. By addressing these objectives, the research seeks to establish a foundation for sustainable disciplinary growth while responding to the evolving demands of global Asian scholarship (Raúl Ramírez-Ruiz, 2025: 113-134).

## 2. The Origins of Asian/Chinese Studies in Spain

Within the Spanish context, the conceptualization of “Asia” has historically been predominantly synonymous with “China”. Medieval Europe’s understanding of Asia remained geographically constrained, largely limited to territories east of the Islamic world (Raúl Ramírez-Ruiz et al., 2025). It was not until the 13th century, with the rise of Genghis Khan’s Mongol Empire and the Yuan Dynasty’s revival of East-West trade routes, that European perceptions expanded. The travel accounts of Marco Polo, Ibn Battuta, and Ruy González de Clavijo (Ramírez Ruiz, R. et al., 2017). Spain, inheriting this exploratory legacy, subsequently emerged as one of the foundational contributors to Western Sinology during the following centuries, though its pioneering academic achievements have been largely overlooked in historiography (Ramírez Ruiz, 2014). The Iberian expansion facilitated direct engagement with China through a series of pivotal events: Columbus’ 1492 arrival in the Americas, *The Treaty of Tordesillas* in 1494 demarcating spheres of influence, and Vasco da Gama’s 1498 landing in India. These developments indirectly shaped

Spain's Asian trajectory, serving as crucial preludes to its Sinological explorations<sup>1</sup>.

Spain's colonial expansion reshaped the historical landscape of Asia, and its rule over the Philippines facilitated the establishment of the "triangular trade" system. Against this backdrop, Spanish Sinology emerged as a distinct field. Early Spanish Sinology, driven by the demands of global hegemony, exhibited both religious and military characteristics. From the 16th century to the present, the evolution of Sino-Spanish relations and the development of Spanish Sinology can be divided into four distinct phases (Ramírez Ruiz y Ramos Rovi, 2023):

The Imperial Ambition Phase (16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries): Leveraging its maritime supremacy, Spain pursued global expansion, harboring ambitions of both conquest and religious conversion in China. The Decline and Missionary Phase (18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries): As Spain's global influence waned, its activities in Asia shifted from political and military expansion to a focus on religious missions. The Ephemeral Aftermath (20<sup>th</sup> century-1973): Spain's political and academic presence in Asia nearly vanished during this period. The Revival of Sino-Spanish Relations (1980s-21<sup>st</sup> century): following the formal establishment of diplomatic ties between China and Spain in 1973, Spain renewed its focus on Asia, particularly Chinese studies<sup>2</sup>.

#### Phase I: The Imperial Ambition Phase (16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> Centuries)

During this period, Spain leveraged its maritime supremacy to pursue global expansion, harboring both conquest and missionary ambitions toward China. The scholarly contributions of Spanish missionaries marked the dawn of Western Sinology's golden age, providing Europe with its first systematic accounts and academic analysis of China. Key figures and milestones include St. Francis Xavier, who established the "accommodation policy" for Western missionaries engaging with China; Martín de Rada, who confirmed that "Cathay" was China and was hailed by Zhang Kai as "the West's first sinologist" (Folch, 2008; Zhang, 2003); Juan Cobo, who in 1588 produced the first Western translation of a Chinese classic, *Espejo rico del*

<sup>1</sup> For this Iberian "encounter" with China and the genesis of Sinology, see Professor Zhang Kai's *History of Sino-Spanish Relations* (Zhengzhou: Elephant Press, 2003), along with Álvarez, J. R., *Outline of Spanish Sinology* (Autonomous University of Barcelona, 2006: 4); Pérez Expósito, F. L., *Approximation to the Hispanic vision of China until the beginning of the 17th century* (Taipei, 1993); and López Álvarez, J., *The Spanish, pioneers in the transmission of Chinese thought to Europe* (Notes for a Spanish Sinology), *Gades*, 1, 1978: 37-54.

<sup>2</sup> See Palacios, L. and Ramírez, R., *China, History, Thought, Art and Culture*, Córdoba, 2011: 160. During this phase, Spain laid the foundation for Western Sinology through the contributions of key figures.

*claro corazón* (Mingxin baojian), predating Matteo Ricci by nearly 80 years<sup>3</sup>; Bernardino de Escalante, who created one of Europe's earliest maps of China. Juan González de Mendoza, the author of *Historia de las cosas más notables, ritos y costumbres del gran reino de la China* (1585) (González de Mendoza, 2022)<sup>4</sup>; Diego de Pantoja, a Jesuit missionary whose erudition in Renaissance thought and deep study of Chinese culture positioned him as a pivotal sinological figure; Domingo Fernández de Navarrete, whose 1676 *Tratados históricos, políticos, éticos y religiosos de la monarchía de China* synthesized China's imperial system (Busquets Alemany, 2016: 506-616). Despite these achievements, Spanish Sinology's impact remained constrained because its scholarship primarily served imperial political and religious agendas rather than circulating as universal academic knowledge. After 1814, Spain's declining global influence led to scholarly neglect of its pioneering role in Asian studies (Ramírez Ruiz, 2016).

#### Phase II: Decline and Missionary Activity (18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> Centuries)

The period from 1640 to 1713 witnessed the gradual decline of Spanish global hegemony, with its overseas activities increasingly limited to educational and missionary work. Several key factors contributed to the stagnation of Spanish Sinology during this era: Emperor Kangxi's 1724 expulsion of Catholic missionaries severed Western scholars' access to traditional Chinese thought and culture in the mainland. Also, Spain's defeat in the Napoleonic Wars and the subsequent loss of its naval fleet significantly diminished its international standing. Finally, without political support or adequate scholarly resources, Spanish Sinological studies nearly ceased development, becoming a peripheral discipline in Western academia (Ramírez Ruiz, 2014).

#### Phase III: Ephemeral Aftermath (20<sup>th</sup> Century-1973)

Following the Opium Wars, Spain did not participate in the Western imperialist expansion in China (Martínez Robles, 2007: 120-124). Between 1840 and 1898, Spanish Sinology stagnated at both individual and institutional levels. The 1864 Treaty of Tianjin between China and Spain secured limited concessions compared to other Western powers. By the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Spanish commercial activities in China had virtually ceased. After the 1898 Spanish-American War, Spain's missionary and Sinological focus shifted to Taiwan and Hong Kong, though no significant scholarly

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<sup>3</sup> French sinologist Paul Pelliot discovered Cobo's manuscript in 1929 at Madrid's National Library. See Álvarez, J. R., *Outline of Spanish Sinology*, Autonomous University of Barcelona, 2006: 5.

<sup>4</sup> González de Mendoza, J., 2022. *History of the Most Notable Things, Rites and Customs of the Great Kingdom of China*. Madrid: José Antonio de Castro Foundation, 620.

contributions emerged during this period (Xu & Mu, 2009). Following the establishment of the People's Republic of China, Spanish Sinological and missionary activities remained confined primarily to Hong Kong and Taiwan. The notable scholars of this era included: Jesuit priests Carmelo Elorduy and Fernando Mateos; Dominican missionary Antonio Domínguez; Female scholar Marcela de Juan, who contributed to classical Chinese translation and cultural studies. Her late-life work, *The China I Experienced Yesterday and the China I See Today*, reflected her deep engagement with Chinese society and culture (Segura Morís, 2004: 44-66).

#### Phase IV: The Revival of Sino-Spanish Relations (1980s-21<sup>st</sup> Century)

The formal establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Spain in 1973, followed by the Spanish King's state visit to China in 1978, marked the beginning of a new era in bilateral cooperation and academic exchange, giving rise to modern Sinology<sup>5</sup>.

This new phase of Sinology, now institutionalized within university systems, has developed distinct socioeconomic characteristics. As China's global prominence has grown rapidly, Spanish academia has produced a significant body of high-quality scholarly works, fostering transnational research collaborations. The scope of Asian Studies in Spain has expanded beyond China to include Japan, South Korea, India, and other regions, gradually forming an independent academic discipline. The revival of Asian Studies in Spain has been driven by multiple interrelated factors: the continuity of its historical academic legacy, the political transition following the Franco regime's demise, the new Spanish government's aspirations to reestablish its international standing, and the substantial market opportunities created by Asia's economic ascendancy. These elements collectively catalyzed the academic and economic resurgence of Asian Studies in the Spanish context.

### 3. Research Methodology and Data Collection for Asian Studies in Spain

Spanish Asian Studies is characterized by its "small-scale" nature, with existing literature having compiled these research outputs (Li, 2019). Consequently, when analyzing or studying these academic achievements,

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<sup>5</sup> Since their formal establishment, Sino-Spanish diplomatic relations have remained consistent-characterized by superficial cordiality yet lacking substantive depth. See: Ramírez Ruiz, R. & Niu, G., 2023. Thirty Mandarins: The Chinese Officials Who Established the Model of Relations Between China and Spain. *Historia Actual Online*, 62: 47-64.



the primary challenge lies in identifying reliable information and data sources to present a comprehensive and authentic panorama of Asian Studies in Spain.

(1) RUCT (Registry of Universities, Centers, and Degrees)<sup>6</sup>: As Spain's official Registry of Universities, Centers and Degrees, RUCT serves as a vital tool for analyzing and statistically tracking academic programs. This government-maintained platform features comprehensive registration of all officially recognized: Bachelor's degrees (Grados); Master's degrees (Másteres Universitarios) and Doctoral programs (Doctorados).

(2) SIU (Integrated University Information System)<sup>7</sup>: As Spain's official platform for collecting, processing, and disseminating university data, the SIU was established to fulfill the requirements of the European Higher Education Area while implementing quality assurance procedures for degree programs. The system provides comprehensive data across multiple domains, with particular relevance to this study through its "Academic Field" category, which contains detailed information about student demographics and enrollment trends; curriculum structures and program characteristics and Degree completion metrics.

(3) Quality Assurance Committee (Comisión de Garantía de Calidad): The Quality Assurance Committee serves as a critical evaluation and certification body for each degree program, ensuring the continuous updating of curricula, maintenance of academic standards, and overall educational quality. Its assessments constitute an essential component of Spain's official degree accreditation process.

(4) Teseo<sup>8</sup>: Teseo is a platform for archiving doctoral theses in Spain, containing all doctoral dissertations from Spanish universities since 1976. This database serves as an important resource for research in the Social Sciences and Humanities (SHS) and provides key references for academic achievements and emerging topics in Asian Studies. Managed by the Spanish Ministry of Education, Culture, and Sports, researchers can use this platform to retrieve information on doctoral theses related to Asian Studies.

Beyond the official data sources mentioned above, this study gathers more direct and in-depth academic data and primary materials through university websites, Asian research institutions, and interviews with scholars

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.educacion.gob.es/ruct/home>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.universidades.gob.es/portal/site/universidades/menuitem.78fe777017742d34e0acc310026041a0/?vgnnextoid=719f372673680710VgnVCM1000001d04140aRCRD>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.usc.es/export9/sites/webinstitucional/gl/centros/ciedus/doutoramento/descargas/formularios/Teseo-Manual-Gestion.pdf>



and experts, thereby compensating for the limitations of official data. By utilizing these diverse sources, we can conduct a more comprehensive analysis of the current state and developmental trajectory of Asian Studies in Spain from multiple perspectives.

#### 4. The Development of Official Degrees in Asian Studies

The study of Asia in Spain began after the establishment of diplomatic relations with China, initially driven by individual efforts and the introduction of a limited number of related courses. By the mid-1980s, Asian studies had gradually expanded to several universities, including the University of Granada, the Autonomous University of Barcelona, and the Autonomous University of Madrid. In the 1990s, the first East Asian Studies Centers (CEAO) were established, marking the preliminary development of Asian studies in the country. The second phase of Asian studies emerged in 2003 with the introduction of second-degree programs (advanced undergraduate courses), injecting new vitality into the field. However, the formal institutionalization of Asian studies occurred in the 2008/09 academic year with the launch of undergraduate degree programs. Between 2011 and 2014, several universities successively introduced doctoral and master's degree programs in the discipline. After four decades of development, particularly with the progressive establishment of official degree programs over the past two decades, Spain has now built a comprehensive Asian studies education system covering all three academic levels (bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees). Currently, 15 public universities and 8 private universities across the country offer degree programs related to Asian studies.

Currently, four autonomous communities in Spain offer official degree programs in Asian studies, covering multiple academic levels, including bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees. Geographically, Catalonia holds a slight advantage, with four universities providing Asian studies degrees: the Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB, 1988), Pompeu Fabra University (UPF, 2003), the University of Barcelona (UB, 2016), and the Open University of Catalonia (UOC, 2003). Madrid also has four universities offering such programs, led by the Autonomous University of Madrid (UAM, 1985), followed by Universidad Rey Juan Carlos (URJC, 2006), the International University of Madrid (UDIMA), and the University of Alcalá (UAH, 2014). In Andalusia, the University of Granada (UGR, 1978), the University of Seville (USE, 2011), and the University of Málaga (UMA, 2011) provide Asian studies degrees. Additionally, in Castile and León, the

University of Salamanca (USAL, 2003) and the University of Valladolid (UVA, 2018) also offer degree programs in this field.

At present, Spain has established an extensive and well-distributed academic network for Asian studies nationwide. Below is a list of universities and their affiliated academic centers offering Asian studies degrees, categorized based on factors such as program duration, institutional stability, and degree types.

#### **4.1 Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB)**

The Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB) has introduced nine Asian studies-related degree programs over the years, six of which remain active, while three have been discontinued. The university currently offers two undergraduate degrees, three master's programs, and one doctoral program. From 2003 to 2022, the establishment and continuity of these official degree programs demonstrate remarkable stability.

The inception of Asian studies at UAB can be traced back to 1988, when Professor Zhou Minkang introduced Chinese language courses within the Translation and Interpreting program. In 1999, Professor Sean Golden organized the Advanced Program in International and Intercultural Studies of the Far East, collaborating with Professor Minoru Shiraishi to establish Spain's first Japanese Studies program. In 2003, UAB partnered with Pompeu Fabra University (UPF) to launch a second-cycle undergraduate degree (Licenciatura de Segundo Ciclo) in East Asian Studies, which included a specialization in Japanese.

#### **4.2 Autonomous University of Madrid (UAM)**

The Autonomous University of Madrid (UAM) offers four Asian studies-related degree programs, covering all official academic cycles in Spain. Since 1985, the university has collaborated with Beijing Foreign Studies University by appointing professors of Chinese and Japanese, fostering academic development and exchange programs. Professor Taciana Fisac played a pivotal role in advancing Asian studies at UAM. In 1990, leveraging the emerging field of "Far Eastern Languages and Cultures", she promoted academic growth and established the East Asian Studies Center (CEAO-UAM) within three years (Li & Ramírez Ruiz, 2021).

In 2003, UAM introduced a second-cycle bachelor's degree (Licenciatura de Segundo Ciclo) in East Asian Studies. In 2009, it launched the undergraduate program "Asian and African Studies: Arabic, Chinese, and Japanese", which has undergone multiple updates. By 2014, the university established the doctoral program "Humanities: Geography, Anthropology,

and African & Asian Studies”, which was revised in 2022. Additionally, in the 2020-2021 academic year, UAM initiated a master’s degree in “East Asian Studies”, forming an independent academic framework.

#### **4.3 University of Salamanca (USAL)**

With its long-standing academic tradition, the University of Salamanca (USAL) has offered nine Asian studies-related degree programs, four of which remain active while five have been discontinued or are in the process of being phased out. From 2003 to 2022, the university has maintained a coherent curriculum structure across bachelor’s, master’s, and doctoral levels in this field. During the 1990s, USAL established strong academic ties with Japan under the leadership of scholars such as Vicente González and Alfonso Falero, solidifying its position as a leading institution in Asian studies in Spain. In the 2003-2004 academic year, USAL became one of the pioneering Spanish universities to offer a second-cycle degree program (Licenciatura de Segundo Ciclo) in East Asian Studies.

The university launched its first master’s programs in East Asian-Japanese Studies and East Asian Studies in 2008, though these programs underwent multiple revisions and had relatively short durations. In 2013, USAL introduced a new Master’s in East Asian Studies while discontinuing the previous versions. The doctoral program in Modern Languages, established in 2014, incorporated cutting-edge theoretical approaches to East Asian studies, completing the university’s comprehensive framework for Asian studies degrees. Most recently, in 2021, USAL added a Master’s in Advanced Studies of East Asian Languages, Literatures and Cultures to its academic offerings.

#### **4.4 Pompeu Fabra University (UPF)**

Pompeu Fabra University (UPF) has developed a distinctive trajectory in Asian studies since Professor Dolors Folch founded its East Asian Studies program in 1992. While collaborating with the Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB) to launch a joint undergraduate program in East Asian Studies in 2003, UPF’s approach diverged from conventional academic pathways when its initial shared degree model proved unsuccessful, prompting a strategic shift toward master’s programs and specialized degrees developed in partnership with industry organizations like business chambers and the School of International Commerce (ESCI).

The university currently maintains five active programs out of seven total offerings in Asian studies, including its 2008 Postgraduate Diploma in Euro-Asian Business with ESCI designed for trade professionals, the

2010 University Master's in Chinese Studies (later updated in 2015 with broader East Asian humanities content), and more recent programs such as the 2018 Master's in Asia-Pacific Studies in a Global Context examining geopolitical dynamics and the 2021 Master's in Global Language Translation: Chinese-Spanish addressing linguistic mediation needs. Though UPF briefly partnered with the University of Barcelona on a now-phasing-out Master's in Traditional Chinese Medicine (2016), its overall programming reflects a pragmatic orientation combining academic rigor with professional applications, particularly in business and translation sectors, distinguishing its Asian studies profile from more traditional university models through sustained collaboration with trade and industry entities.

#### 4.5 University of Granada (UGR)

The University of Granada (UGR), with its profound academic tradition and notable achievements in translation studies, has demonstrated unique characteristics in developing Asian studies-related degree programs. While it has not established dedicated undergraduate programs in Asian studies, its development in this field has been closely tied to key individuals and focused primarily at the master's level within the framework of translation studies. Pedro San Ginés, who began teaching Chinese in 1978, became a foundational figure in Spanish Sinology, and under his influence, UGR introduced Chinese language courses covering diverse areas from language and classical literature to modern literature, translation studies, and linguistics.

The institutionalization of Asian studies at UGR was completed in 2009 with the formal establishment of degree programs in Spain. Without directly creating Asian studies degree programs, the university has long maintained a bachelor's degree in Translation and Interpreting, which incorporated a Chinese cultural track in the 2010-2011 academic year. In 2010, UGR launched a degree program in Modern Languages and Literature, subsequently updated in 2016 and 2022. At the master's level, UGR offers three translation and interpreting programs: a university master's degree initiated in 2010 (currently in the process of being phased out), a Master's in Professional Translation established in 2014 and revised in 2020, and a Master's in East Asian Studies introduced in the 2013-2014 academic year and updated in 2021. Complementing these academic offerings, UGR has actively promoted Asian studies through initiatives such as establishing a Confucius Institute and creating Spain's first Asia-Pacific Studies Forum, significantly advancing the development of Asian studies in the region.

#### 4.6 The University of Valladolid (UVA)

The University of Valladolid (UVA) has anchored its Asian studies focus on its rich historical legacy, demonstrating a clear mission to promote Asian cultural dissemination and develop disciplinary frameworks for deeper understanding of Asia. This institutional commitment traces back to 1993 when Professor José María Ruiz established Spain's first academic center for Japanese studies. Under Professor Óscar Ramos' leadership in 2000-2001, this evolved into the Center for Asian Studies (CEA), marking a significant expansion in scope.

UVA has actively pursued strategic partnerships to advance Asian studies. A landmark collaboration occurred in 2003 when the university joined forces with the Indian government (through the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, ICCR) and Valladolid City Council to create the Casa de la India Foundation. This initiative materialized in 2006 with the inauguration of the Casa de la India, becoming Europe's third Indian cultural center after Berlin and London. The university further strengthened its Indian studies program through the introduction of Hindi language courses in 2012 and the establishment of a Chair in Contemporary Indian Studies in 2019.

The most recent academic developments include the launch of a Master's program in International Relations and Asian Studies in 2018, followed by the introduction of an undergraduate degree in International Relations in early 2022 featuring specialized tracks focused on China, India, and Japan. These programs represent UVA's comprehensive approach to Asian studies, blending cultural promotion with rigorous academic training across multiple Asian regions.

#### 4.7 The University of Barcelona (UB)

The University of Barcelona (UB) has adopted a collaborative approach in developing its Asian studies degree programs, particularly through partnerships with other academic institutions. A prime example is its joint Master's in Traditional Chinese Medicine with Pompeu Fabra University, established in 2016 and subsequently updated in 2021. Additionally, UB has worked closely with the Confucius Institute, though this collaboration led to the discontinuation of its independent master's program in East Asian Culture and Business. This cooperative model reflects UB's strategy of leveraging institutional partnerships to strengthen its Asian studies offerings while optimizing resource allocation. The university's emphasis on shared programs demonstrates its commitment to interdisciplinary and inter-institutional approaches in developing Asian studies curricula, particularly in specialized fields like traditional medicine and cultural-business studies.

#### 4.8 Universidad Rey Juan Carlos (URJC)

Universidad Rey Juan Carlos (URJC) currently offers two active master's degree programs in Asian studies, both established in 2017 and updated in 2021: the "Master's in Intercultural Communication and Business between Europe and China" and the "Master's in the European Union and China" (the latter jointly offered with Madrid Distance University as an online or hybrid program). The university's engagement with Asian studies dates back to 2006 when it collaborated with the Madrid Chamber of Commerce to launch the "Expert Course on Asia" (discontinued in 2011).

Since 2012, under the leadership of Professor Raúl Ramírez Ruiz, URJC has organized the "China: Economy, Power, and Future" conference series, which over its 12-year span and nine editions has become a key academic platform, bringing together leading Spanish sinologists to discuss China's evolving role in global affairs. Additionally, the university's "Spain-China Relations" research group has contributed significantly to historical scholarship, publishing influential works such as *History, Thought, Art, and Culture of China* and *Contemporary Chinese History: From the Opium War to the Present*, reinforcing URJC's strong research output in Asian studies. These initiatives highlight URJC's commitment to fostering academic exchange and producing high-quality research on China and broader Asian studies within Spain.

#### 4.9 University of Málaga and University of Seville (UMA and USE)

In recent years, the University of Málaga (UMA) and the University of Seville (USE) have strengthened their collaboration in Asian studies. In the 2011-2012 academic year, they jointly launched the "Degree in East Asian Studies", which underwent revisions in 2017 and 2021-2022 to better integrate the two institutions' distinct regional focuses.

The program combines the expertise of leading scholars from both universities: Professors Antonio Domenech and Fernando Wulff at UMA, and Professor Jesús San Bernardino at USE, who specializes in Chinese and Japanese studies. The curriculum features a shared core taught identically at both institutions before branching into three specialized tracks: Korean Studies at UMA, and Japanese and Chinese Studies at USE.

Designed by Professors Wulff, Domenech, and San Bernardino, the program uniquely blends language and literature studies with area studies approaches, covering disciplines from history and tourism to economics. This interdisciplinary structure aims to cultivate globally competent professionals. Students spend their first two years at either university before selecting a specialization-pursuing Chinese or Japanese Studies in



Seville, or Korean Studies in Málaga for the final two years. This innovative model not only leverages each university's strengths but also provides students with flexible pathways to develop regional expertise.

#### **4.10 Open University of Catalonia (UOC)**

The Open University of Catalonia (UOC) has played a notable role in East Asian studies through its innovative online education model. In the 2003-2004 academic year, under the leadership of Dr. Anna Busquets, the university launched a second-cycle degree program (Licenciatura de Segundo Ciclo) in East Asian Studies, though this was discontinued due to legislative changes in Spain's higher education system.

A decade later, in the 2013-2014 academic year, UOC introduced a Master's in Chinese and Japanese Studies: The Contemporary World, directed by Dr. Carles Prado. This program represented one of Spain's early attempts at delivering comprehensive Asian studies through digital education, combining interdisciplinary approaches to analyze China and Japan's evolving roles in global affairs. However, this master's program is no longer offered.

#### **4.11 University of Alcalá (UAH)**

The University of Alcalá (UAH) has established a distinctive position in language education, particularly in Spanish language training for Chinese students. In 2019, the university launched its "Master's in Conference Interpreting for Business (Spanish-Chinese)", a specialized program designed to cultivate professional interpreters for international business settings, addressing the growing demand for skilled linguists in Sino-Spanish commercial exchanges.

#### **4.12 Complutense University of Madrid (UCM)**

Beyond formal Asian studies degree programs, it is noteworthy that Asian language studies hold significant presence within modern language degrees across Spanish public universities, particularly in linguistics or translation and interpreting departments. Key institutions offering such training include the University of Granada, along with others not previously mentioned Complutense University of Madrid, University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, and University of Valencia. These programs underscore the broader integration of Asian linguistic and cultural studies into Spain's higher education framework, complementing dedicated Asian studies curricula.



Complutense University of Madrid (UCM) has significantly advanced Chinese language education under the pivotal leadership of Professor Consuelo Marco, who also contributed to the development of Korean and Japanese language programs. At the undergraduate level, UCM's Bachelor's in Modern Languages and Literature offers students flexible specialization options, allowing them to pursue Chinese Studies as either a major or minor, or to select Korean Studies as a minor.

At the graduate level, UCM provides two specialized master's programs: the "Expert Diploma in Chinese-Spanish Translation", designed to train professional translators, and the "Master's in Teaching Spanish as a Foreign Language to Non-Native Speakers", which enhances pedagogical training for educators. Additionally, the university offers a dedicated program on "China: Evolution and Current Affairs", focusing on contemporary Chinese issues.

A key academic contribution is Professor Marco's establishment of the Spanish Research Group on China (GISEC-LCS), which adopts an interdisciplinary approach to examine Chinese language, culture, and society, producing influential research outputs. The group also publishes the peer-reviewed "East Asian Studies" journal, serving as an important platform for scholarly exchange in the field.

Further expanding its Asian studies offerings, UCM introduced a Japanese minor program in the 2023-2024 academic year, complemented by an annual permanent seminar on Japanese language and culture. These initiatives foster academic and cultural engagement, attracting students, faculty, and external participants interested in Japan, thereby enriching the university's intellectual environment.

#### **4.13 University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria (ULPGC)**

The University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria (ULPGC) offers a distinctive Bachelor's in Modern Languages program with a unique English-Chinese track. Taught in Spanish with English as the primary language of study, students may select either French or Chinese as their secondary language. Notably, the Chinese track maintains a selective enrollment of 25 students, emphasizing both linguistic proficiency and intercultural competence to prepare graduates for effective communication and collaboration in global contexts.

#### **4.14 University of Valencia (UV)**

While not offering dedicated official degrees in Asian studies, the University of Valencia (UV) maintains three dynamic programs incorporating

East Asian languages and literature. The university launched its Bachelor's in Modern Languages and Literature (Estudi General) in December 2010, updated in 2015 and fully accredited by 2017, which includes an East Asian Languages and Literature minor. This minor option was also incorporated into UV's Catalan Philology degree program, similarly established in 2010 with updates in 2015 and accreditation in 2017. Additionally, UV's Bachelor's in Translation and Interlinguistic Mediation provides Chinese language electives designed to develop students' proficiency to CEFR A2 level, enhancing their cross-linguistic professional competencies. These programs collectively enable students to engage with East Asian linguistic and literary studies while enriching their broader academic profiles.

#### 4.15 Other Academic Centers and Research Institutions

The establishment of Asian studies degree programs has given rise to a network of related research institutions, collectively advancing the field in Spain. East Asia Research Centers (EARCs) emerged in universities even before the formalization of official degrees, fostering numerous research teams and laying a robust academic foundation for Asian studies while promoting scholarly exchange and collaboration.

Language and cultural promotion agencies from major Asian countries have also played active roles, such as the Japan Foundation (2003), Korean Cultural Center (2011), and Casa de la India (2003), have each worked to disseminate their respective languages and cultures. Notably, Confucius Institutes, introduced in Spain since 2007, have established 10 branches across the country, demonstrating China's global influence in language and cultural outreach and significantly enhancing Sino-Spanish cultural exchange and mutual understanding (Li Qiuyang, Chen Chen & Óscar Fernández Álvarez, 2022). These institutions, alongside academic programs, form a dynamic ecosystem that sustains and expands Asian studies in Spain.

The Spanish government has also strengthened ties with Asian countries through diplomatic initiatives, establishing several bilateral councils: the Spain-Japan Council Foundation (2001), the Spain-China Council Foundation (2004), and the Spain-India Council Foundation (2009). These institutions, among which Casa Asia stands out as the central node of Spanish Public Diplomacy toward the Asia-Pacific region, have significantly enhanced multilateral cooperation.

However, Spain's Asian studies landscape still faces notable gaps, particularly the lack of dedicated think tanks focused on Asian affairs. While influential policy research institutions like the Real Instituto Elcano

and Barcelona's CIDOB (Barcelona Centre for International Affairs) exist, their engagement with Asian studies remains peripheral. This limited institutional capacity falls short of meeting Spain's growing need for in-depth, policy-relevant research on Asia—a critical shortcoming as Spain seeks to deepen its strategic engagement with the region.

## 5. Structural Characteristics of Official Asian Studies Degrees in Spain

Following a comprehensive review of the overall landscape of Asian studies in Spain and an examination of official degree programs offered by universities, we shall analyze the key structural features of these academic developments. Spain's official degree system in this field comprises the following categories: six undergraduate programs, fifteen master's degrees, four doctoral research tracks, along with major and minor specializations in Asian languages offered at four universities.

### 5.1 Undergraduate Programs

The development of undergraduate degrees in Asian studies in Spain began in the 2008/2009 academic year and can be divided into three phases. The initial phase (2009-2011) saw the establishment of three degree programs. In 2015, the University of Salamanca created Spain's first undergraduate degree specifically in Asian Studies. The post-pandemic phase (2020-2021) witnessed the addition of two new undergraduate programs, reflecting the gradual expansion and deepening of Asian studies in Spain.

These six degree programs are distributed across different regions: two each in Catalonia and Castile-León, and one each in Madrid and Andalusia. In terms of disciplinary focus, 83% (five programs) fall under the Arts and Humanities field, primarily offered by faculties of Linguistics, Translation and Interpretation, or Philosophy and Letters. The remaining 17% (one program) is the International Relations degree at the University of Valladolid, which belongs to Social Sciences. Among these programs, four offer specializations in Chinese, Japanese or Korean studies, while the University of Valladolid focuses specifically on Indian studies. This distribution demonstrates both the disciplinary emphasis and regional concentration of Asian studies at the undergraduate level in Spain, with a strong tradition in philological approaches complemented by emerging social science perspectives.

## 5.2 Master's Degree Programs

Spain offers a total of 15 Asian studies-related master's degrees, with 13 focusing on East Asian studies and 2 specializing in translation. Geographically, these programs are distributed as follows: Catalonia hosts 7 programs (47%), offered by the Autonomous University of Barcelona (4), Pompeu Fabra University (3), and the University of Barcelona (1 shared program); Madrid has 4 programs (26%), provided by the Autonomous University of Madrid, the University of Alcalá, and Universidad Rey Juan Carlos; Castile and León offers 3 programs (20%), administered by the University of Salamanca (2) and the University of Valladolid (1); and Andalusia features 1 program (7%) at the University of Granada. Catalonia accounts for nearly half of Spain's master's degree offerings in this field, while Madrid, though ranking second, provides a similar number of programs as Castile and León. Andalusia maintains only one master's program—that of the University of Granada.

In terms of academic disciplines, these master's programs are distributed as follows: 9 programs (60%) fall under the Arts and Humanities, 5 programs (33%) belong to Law and Social Sciences, and 1 program (7%)—the Master's in Traditional Chinese Medicine—is classified under Health Sciences (Medicine). Regarding program structure, most courses follow a 60-credit format (12 programs/80%), with a few exceptions: the Traditional Chinese Medicine and Asia-Pacific Studies programs require 120 credits, while the International Relations program comprises 90 credits. Several programs offer specialized tracks (e.g., East Asian, Japanese, or Chinese Studies) or mobility options (available at institutions such as the Autonomous University of Barcelona and the University of Granada).

Concerning with the instructional modalities and language of instruction, the predominant teaching format across Spain's Asian studies master's programs is in-person instruction. Only two programs employ online or hybrid delivery methods: the master's program at Universidad Rey Juan Carlos and the Traditional Chinese Medicine program at the Autonomous University of Barcelona. Notably, the Master's in Global Studies at the Autonomous University of Barcelona stands out in its language of instruction, with courses delivered equally in Spanish and English, 50% for each (Ramírez Ruiz et al., 2023).

## 5.3 Doctoral Programs

Doctoral programs related to Asian studies in Spain remain relatively scarce, currently concentrated across four universities in three autonomous communities. These include: the Autonomous University of Barcelona

(2013) and Pompeu Fabra University (2013) in Catalonia; the Autonomous University of Madrid (2014); and the University of Salamanca (2014) in Castile and León. All doctoral programs fall within the Arts and Humanities discipline, integrating language studies with historical and humanistic approaches.

The most comprehensive doctoral offering exists at the Autonomous University of Barcelona, which boasts 20 years of experience and provides four specialized tracks in East Asian studies. In 2013, Pompeu Fabra University incorporated two Asia-related research directions within its History and Humanities doctorate: the historical track examines modern/contemporary Asia, Sino-European relations, colonialism, migration and postcolonial worlds; while the humanities track focuses on arts, culture and non-European philosophy. The Autonomous University of Madrid's doctoral program features four research lines, one specifically dedicated to Asian and African studies. The University of Salamanca offers a single East Asia-focused track emphasizing linguistic and literary studies.

Two distinctive characteristics emerge in Spanish doctoral education in Asian studies is first, a predominant focus on historical, humanistic and cultural studies (exemplified by the Autonomous University of Madrid and Pompeu Fabra University); second, a linguistic research orientation as seen at the Autonomous University of Barcelona and University of Salamanca (Ramírez Ruiz et al., 2023).

#### **5.4 Language and Translation Specializations**

As previously noted, four Spanish universities offer major, minor, and course-level specializations in Asian languages within their modern languages, linguistics, or translation and interpreting degree programs, all established between 2009 and 2012. Within the Spanish higher education system, such “qualification programs” typically serve as precursors to full degree programs—exemplified by the Chinese/Japanese translation and interpreting courses launched at the Autonomous University of Barcelona in 1988, and similar initiatives at the University of Granada and Complutense University of Madrid.

These language-focused programs have played a crucial role in expanding the geographic distribution of Asian studies across Spanish universities, enabling disciplinary growth in strategically important regions like the Canary Islands and Valencia. Furthermore, Confucius Institutes have served as institutional bridges supporting the development of Asia-related degree programs, their presence often signaling a university's commitment to expanding Asian studies offerings (Ramírez Ruiz et al., 2023).

### 5.5 Non-Degree Programs at Public Universities

A number of Spanish public universities have developed Asian studies-related qualification programs as majors, minors or specialized courses, despite not offering official degree programs at bachelor's, master's or doctoral levels. Typically offered in collaboration with private institutions, these programs emphasize business applications and East Asian languages, adopting a general studies approach delivered primarily through online or hybrid formats. Due to their dependence on student enrollment numbers and lack of official degree accreditation, such programs demonstrate considerable instability and face persistent challenges in achieving sustainable development.

Research has identified these non-degree offerings across 11 universities spanning six autonomous communities (Ramírez Ruiz et al., 2023). Historically, these programs have served as important precursors to official degree programs, as seen in several notable cases: Pompeu Fabra University's Postgraduate Program in Euro-Asian Business (2008), the University of Barcelona's Confucius Institute- collaborated Master's in East Asian Culture and Business, the Open University of Catalonia's Master's in East Asian Studies (2003), Universidad Rey Juan Carlos's Expert Course on Asia (2006-2011) developed with Madrid Chamber of Commerce, and the University of the Basque Country's Master's in Chinese Studies (2006-2011) undertaken with the Lu Xun Chinese Studies Center. These initiatives collectively represent the transitional phase through which many Spanish universities have developed their current official Asian studies programs.

The active non-degree programs we have identified fall into two categories. The first comprises unaccredited university courses, including the University of Zaragoza's hybrid-format Master's in "Japanese Law, Society and Culture" (60 ECTS credits, established 2016) and the University of Córdoba's online "Expert in East Asian Languages, Culture and Business Relations" program (45 ECTS credits, launched 2020 through collaboration with ISTRAD).

The second category features courses from universities with existing Asian studies networks but lacking full official degree programs. This includes Complutense University of Madrid's three offering—the Expert Diploma in Chinese-Spanish Translation, the Master's in Teaching Chinese for Spanish as a Foreign Language Educators, and the "Keys to Understanding China" Diploma. Also in this category are the University of Alcalá's Continuing Education Certificate in Language and Culture and its IAEU-partnered Master's in Chinese and Indian Economics, along with the University of Valencia's "University Expert in East Asia: Valencia and the



Silk Road” and the University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria’s “University Expert in Chinese-Spanish Translation in East Asian Intercultural Contexts”. These programs are typically delivered through major/minor configurations or specialized certificate formats, representing alternative pathways for Asian studies education within Spanish higher education.

### 5.6 Private Universities

In contrast to public universities’ offerings, private institutions in Spain demonstrate a distinct orientation toward social sciences in their Asian studies-related programs, with most degrees exhibiting strong business-focused characteristics. Currently, eight private universities provide degrees, courses, or specialized subjects related to East Asia (Ramírez Ruiz et al., 2023). Alfonso X el Sabio University, CEU San Pablo University, Atlantic European University, European University of Madrid, Francisco de Vitoria University, Nebrija University, Pontifical University of Comillas, and Ramon Llull University. Notably, six of these institutions (75%) are concentrated in Madrid.

Among these offerings, three constitute complete degree programs: Atlantic University in Santander’s specialized degree, the Children’s Language degree jointly offered by Comillas University and the Confucius Institute, and the MBA program at European University of Madrid. Other programs exist as specialized tracks or individual subjects within degrees in linguistics, translation studies, or international relations. Ramon Llull University stands as Catalonia’s sole private institution providing such studies, offering Chinese language options and a specialized subject on Asian regional studies within its International Relations and Global Governance degree. Atlantic University distinguishes itself with seven online master’s programs exclusively focused on traditional Chinese medicine, representing a unique concentration in this specialized field within Spain’s private higher education sector.

## 6. Conclusions

Since the late 1970s, Asian studies in Spain has gradually developed into a systematic academic framework, evolving into an interdisciplinary field that integrates linguistics, cultural studies, history, sociology, and economics. Academic institutions have placed particular emphasis within their Asian studies degree programs on language acquisition - especially Chinese and Japanese-combined with social, historical and cultural studies, demonstrating distinctive cross-disciplinary characteristics.



Over the past two decades, Spain has successfully established a comprehensive Asian studies education system encompassing programs at all academic levels, with 21 degree programs currently in operation. The disciplinary distribution reveals significant patterns: at undergraduate level, 83% of programs fall within arts and humanities; master's degrees show strong representation in both arts/humanities and law/social sciences; while doctoral programs concentrate exclusively in humanities and arts, consistently combining language studies with historical and humanistic research approaches.

The establishment of Asian studies degree programs in Spain exhibits distinctive characteristics rooted in individual scholarly initiatives. Against the backdrop of historical, political, and cultural interactions between Spain and China, the personal research interests and China-related academic backgrounds of pioneering sinologists served as the primary driving force in constructing the disciplinary framework of Asian studies.

Geographically, three autonomous communities-Catalonia, Madrid, and Castile y León have emerged as academic strongholds with comprehensive Asian studies programs across multiple degree levels, while other regions remain relatively underdeveloped, with only four autonomous communities offering official degree programs. These academic offerings concentrate predominantly in socio- economically advanced cities like Madrid and Barcelona, as well as historically significant centers of linguistic scholarship such as Granada, where academic institutions have played pivotal roles in systematizing Asian studies.

Furthermore, Spanish universities have progressively intensified academic collaboration in Asian studies, facilitating resource sharing and broadening scholarly perspectives. This cooperative model has significantly contributed to the field's institutional development while maintaining the distinctive local characteristics shaped by each university's historical trajectory and academic strengths.

Looking ahead, Asian studies in Spain is evolving along three major trajectories. First, the field continues to gain specialization and academic depth. As Asian nations grow more prominent in the global economy, Spanish scholars are deepening their analysis of these countries' political-economic environments and social transformations-particularly in social sciences, where research is becoming increasingly nuanced and discipline-specific.

Second, interdisciplinary and international collaboration is intensifying. Studies of Asia's economies and international relations now routinely integrate multiple academic disciplines, while partnerships with Asian

universities and research institutions are expanding, significantly enhancing the field's global engagement.

Third, degree structures are growing more comprehensive and flexible. Evolving academic demands are driving more adaptable program designs, with online education and similar models creating new pathways for student participation. Private universities and academic organizations are innovating curricular offerings, diversifying the range of available specializations-from intensive language training to area studies combining humanities and social science approaches. Together, these developments reflect Spanish academia's strategic response to Asia's rising global influence while preserving the field's distinctive interdisciplinary roots.

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