

PERSPECTIVES AND TRENDS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE POLICIES IN CHINA: THE CASE OF PORTUGUESE

PERSPECTIVAS Y TENDENCIAS EN POLÍTICAS DE LENGUA EXTRANJERA EN CHINA: EL CASO DEL PORTUGUÉS

PERSPECTIVES ET TENDANCES EN POLITIQUES EN MATIÈRE DE LANGUES ÉTRANGÈRES EN CHINE : LE CAS DU PORTUGAIS

PERSPECTIVAS E TENDÊNCIAS DAS POLÍTICAS DE LÍNGUAS ESTRANGEIRAS NA CHINA: O CASO DO PORTUGUÊS

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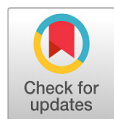
ABSTRACT

This case study aims to provide a review of language policies pertaining to foreign language teaching in China through the lens of China's geopolitical position and its self-perception as one of the leaders and most active actors in developing South-South cooperation. From an initial study of 127 academic materials, documents, and news articles containing explicit or implicit references to policies, initiatives, or proposals related to the development and planning of less commonly taught foreign languages —Portuguese among them— at the tertiary level, 35 sources were selected for further analysis of the relationship between foreign language education and China's foreign policy. These sources shed light on the multifaceted nature of language policies in China, particularly in relation to foreign language teaching. Ultimately, this analysis seeks to identify patterns, developments, and implications for China's foreign language instruction approach.

Keywords: geopolitics, Chinese foreign policy, language planning, Portuguese language

RESUMEN

El presente estudio de caso hace una revisión de las políticas lingüísticas relativas a la enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras en China a través de la lente de la posición geopolítica de China y su autopercepción como uno de los líderes y actores más activos en el desarrollo de la cooperación Sur-Sur. A partir de un estudio inicial de 127 materiales académicos, documentos y artículos de prensa que contenían referencias explícitas o implícitas a políticas, iniciativas o proyectos de ley relacionados con el desarrollo y la planificación de las lenguas extranjeras menos enseñadas —el portugués entre ellas— en el ámbito universitario, se seleccionaron 35 fuentes para un análisis más profundo de la relación entre la enseñanza de



Received: 2024-03-13 / Accepted: 2024-09-25 / Published: 2024-10-17

<https://doi.org/10.17533/udea.ikala.356580>

Editors: Gilvan Müller de Oliveira, Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, Brazil; Umarani Pappuswamy, Central Institute of Indian Languages, India; Martha Lucía Pulido Correa, Universidad de Antioquia, Colombia; Luanda Sito, Universidad de Antioquia, Colombia. This special issue on Policies and Practices for Global Multilingualism was carried out within the framework of the UNESCO Chair on MLP, Universidad de Antioquia, 2022-2026.

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Íkala, Revista de Lenguaje y Cultura

MEDELLÍN, COLOMBIA, VOL. 29 ISSUE 3 (SEPTEMBER-DECEMBER, 2024), PP. 1-21, ISSN 0123-3432
www.udea.edu.co/ikala

lenguas extranjeras y la política exterior de China. Estas fuentes arrojan luz sobre la naturaleza polifacética de las políticas lingüísticas en China, especialmente en relación con la enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras. En última instancia, este análisis pretende identificar patrones, desarrollos e implicaciones en el enfoque chino de la enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras.

Palabras clave: geopolítica, política de lenguas extranjeras en China, planificación lingüística, portugués

RÉSUMÉ

Cette étude de cas vise à analyser les politiques linguistiques relatives à l'enseignement des langues étrangères en Chine sous l'angle de la position géopolitique de la Chine et de la perception par celle-ci de sa place en tant que chef de file et acteur le plus actif dans le développement de la coopération Sud-Sud. À partir d'une étude initiale de 127 documents universitaires, documents et articles de presse contenant des références explicites ou implicites à des politiques, initiatives ou propositions liées au développement et à la planification des langues étrangères moins couramment enseignées —le portugais parmi eux— dans le troisième cycle, 35 sources ont été sélectionnées pour une analyse plus approfondie de la relation entre l'enseignement des langues étrangères et la politique étrangère de la Chine. Ces sources mettent en lumière les multiples facettes des politiques linguistiques en Chine, notamment en ce qui concerne l'enseignement des langues étrangères. En fin de compte, cette analyse cherche à identifier des modèles, des développements et des implications sur l'approche de la Chine en matière d'enseignement des langues étrangères.

Mots-clés : géopolitique, politique des langues étrangères en Chine, planification linguistique, portugais

RESUMO

Este estudo de caso visa fornecer uma análise das políticas linguísticas relativas ao ensino de línguas estrangeiras na China, através das lentes da posição geopolítica da China e de sua autopercepção como um dos líderes e atores mais ativos no desenvolvimento da cooperação Sul-Sul. A partir de um estudo inicial de 127 materiais acadêmicos, documentos e artigos de notícias contendo referências explícitas ou implícitas a políticas, iniciativas ou propostas relacionadas ao desenvolvimento e planejamento de idiomas estrangeiros menos ensinados – entre eles o português – no nível universitário, 35 fontes foram selecionadas para uma análise mais aprofundada da relação entre o ensino de idiomas estrangeiros e a política externa da China. Essas fontes lançam luz sobre a natureza multifacetada das políticas linguísticas na China, especialmente em relação ao ensino de idiomas estrangeiros. Em última análise, essa análise busca identificar padrões, desenvolvimentos e implicações na abordagem da China ao ensino de idiomas estrangeiros.

Palavras chave: geo-política, política de línguas estrangeiras na China, planejamento linguístico, português

Introduction

Language policy represents the intersection of language with social realities and is embedded in a socio-historical context (Garcez & Schulz, 2016; Jatobá, 2020). Recognizing the interdisciplinary nature of language policy research and its inseparable connection to the social world, it becomes evident that the relationship between language and politics is not one of complementarity but rather interdependence. While many individuals involved in language policy research may not have direct or indirect connections to language studies, it is crucial for linguist researchers in this field to engage in ongoing dialogue not only with related areas of linguistics but also with other disciplines such as political science, law, anthropology, international relations, and education.

Thus, the question posed by Jernudd and Das Gupta (1971) regarding language planning as a cooperative effort among political, educational, economic, and linguistic authorities remains relevant. In our view, language policy as an academic field aims to examine and analyze actions, choices, and control mechanisms related to language *structure (langue)* and its *use (parole)*, whether through official, explicit or implicit (language) policies. As a result, language policy intersects with various aspects of the social world, allowing for a wide range of approaches and methodologies depending on the research object, theoretical frameworks, and ideological perspectives of the researchers and (language) policymakers. Thus, research approaches and methodologies can encompass several possibilities, such as historical analysis, measurement of language attitudes, implementation and evaluation surveys, sociolinguistic surveys, comparative methods, corpus analysis, and communication ethnography (Eastman, 2009[1983]; Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997, among others).

Considering the complexity of the aforementioned context, regarding the policies for foreign language teaching in China (excluding English), there is still a scarcity of statistical data and research

on language policies. Therefore, this paper aims to provide a bibliographical analysis on language policies pertaining to foreign languages teaching in China. In light of this, one of the contributions of this paper will be an extensive review of policies and academic texts related to China's language policy for foreign languages.

We will focus on the *less commonly taught foreign languages in China* (非通用语种), specifically examining Portuguese-as-a-foreign-language (PFL) teaching to have an outlook of the prevailing trends in foreign language education in the country. This examination will be approached through the lens of China's geopolitical position and its self-perception as one of the leaders and one of the most active actors in the development of South-South cooperation (Jatoba, 2023a). To do this, the review will draw upon a wide range of scholarly works, including academic articles, research papers, thesis, and relevant policy documents.

For the literature review in Chinese, a preliminary search was conducted across various Chinese databases, including PubScholar (<https://pubscholar.cn/>), CNKI (<https://tra-oversea-cnki-net.libezproxy.um.edu.mo/index/>), and the CSSCI (Chinese Social Sciences Citation Index — <http://cssci.nju.edu.cn/>), as well as government online platforms. This initial search yielded 127 academic materials, documents, and news articles containing explicit or implicit references to policies, initiatives, or proposals addressing the development and planning of less commonly taught foreign languages and Portuguese in the tertiary level. After evaluating the impact factor and the explicit references to the relationship between foreign language education and China's foreign policy, 35 academic articles were selected for further analysis.

Finally, these sources will shed light on the multifaceted nature of language policies in China, particularly in relation to foreign language teaching. By specifically analyzing the case of Portuguese language instruction, this review aims to discern

patterns, developments, and implications that underscore China's approach to foreign language education within its geopolitical framework.

As stated above, the main objective is to illuminate the complex and multifaceted nature of language policies in China, particularly concerning the instruction of foreign languages through a bibliographical analysis of literature in Chinese, English, and Portuguese languages. Finally, by conducting a focused analysis of Portuguese language education, this review seeks to identify patterns, developments, and implications that highlight China's strategic approach to foreign language instruction within its broader geopolitical context.

A Historical Overview of Foreign Language Policy and Teaching in China

4 Foreign language education in China has experienced a fragmented trajectory from the establishment of the Republic of China in 1912 to the Communist Party of China's victory in 1949 (Ross, 1992). During this period, despite the Ministry of Education declaring English as the most important language in most regions in 1914, the political instability prevailing in China hindered the development of consistent and effective language teaching policies, including those for English and other foreign languages. Although our review primarily focuses on modern China, it is worth mentioning that the foundations of foreign language education, particularly English, can be traced back to the mid-1800s to 1911, the end of the Qing Dynasty. During this earlier period, as outlined by Lin (2011), the empire's approach to foreign languages emphasized state-sponsored learning divorced from cultural and ideological implications, with strict supervision by the State.

During the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911), foreign language education in China was primarily viewed through a utilitarian lens, with English instruction being considered a pragmatic pursuit while Chinese knowledge was seen as foundational

(Lin, 2011). The latter part of the Qing Dynasty witnessed the establishment of more institutionalized diplomatic relations between China and the West, leading to a reconsideration of China's ethnocentric worldview and a need to adapt to the changing global order (see X. M. Zhang & Xu, 2007, p. 412). These developments prompted a shift in foreign affairs policy and a revision of the xenophobic tendencies that had prevailed (X. M. Zhang & Xu, 2007).

However, it was not until the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949 that explicit policies for foreign languages and minority languages were required to align with the ideological aspirations of the new government. In the early 1950s, the Russian language gained significant prominence in Chinese education due to its revolutionary ideology, surpassing English as the most important foreign language (Lam, 2005). This shift reflected the influence of ideological considerations on language policy during that period.

However, because of industrialization policies and the gradual resumption of Chinese diplomacy in the late 1950s and early 1960s, English language education was again reconsidered as a possibility to actively participate in the global scene and promote internal development, which also aligned with the goal of closer engagement with the West (Lam, 2005). Nevertheless, just as the country seemed ready to establish ties with the West, the events triggered in the second half of the 1960s culminated in the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (Cultural Revolution).

The Cultural Revolution, spanning from 1966 to 1976, was a highly detrimental period for education in China, particularly for foreign languages (Magner, 1974). This era was marked by the persecution of intellectuals and the *bourgeoisie*, as well as a pervasive sense of nationalism and xenophobia. These sentiments extended to foreign language education, with state ideology being expressed through slogans and anti-foreign language propaganda. For instance, slogans like

“Even without learning the ABC, one can make the revolution”¹ were disseminated, reflecting the devaluation of foreign language learning during that time.

However, in the second half of the Cultural Revolution, between 1971 and 1972, with the new guidelines adopted by the Chinese Communist Party committee, the situation of foreign language education began to emerge from chaos and ruins (Mao & Min, 2004, p. 324). Some foreign language institutes were reopened, authorized to admit new students and open new courses. However, the years of setbacks only came to an end in 1976, a year marked by the death of Mao Zedong and, consequently, the end of the Cultural Revolution.

With this milestone, the period of China’s Reform and Opening-Up Policy (改革开放, Gǎigé kāifàng) began, which brought new hope and momentum to language education. With the reintroduction of the National College Entrance Examination (高考 Gāokǎo) in 1977, most universities effectively resumed their activities in 1978. During this period, Deng Xiaoping announced the four pillars for China’s modernization (agriculture, industry, national defense, and science and technology).

In order to modernize the educational system and reestablish international cooperation, foreign experts were invited to China, and Chinese students and teachers were sent to foreign universities. It is interesting to note that despite the traumatic experiences of the Cultural Revolution and other political movements with anti-Western elements, the Chinese people have embraced the study of English and other foreign languages with dedication in recent decades (see Adamson, 2004; Yu, 2012).

While Ross (1992) argues that foreign language education in modern China has been marked by discontinuity, it can be observed from the

1 Original slogan: “不学abc, 照样干革命” (*bùxué ABC, zhàoyàng gàn géming*). “ABC” refers to the teaching/learning of Western languages.

historical events of the last century that, since the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, there has been a growing effort to implement foreign language education (Jatobá, 2020, 2023a, 2023b). In addition to considering the historical context of foreign language education in China, it is important to understand the internal linguistic environment of the country, as emphasized by Lam:

At the individual level, the language experience of learners in China is certainly not linguistically discrete; each learner tends to be exposed to more than one language or more than one dialect. Hence, a multilingual approach is quite essential for an appreciation of the realities of language education in China. (2005, p. 18)

Therefore, it is necessary for teachers and researchers to consider the linguistic *repertoires* of Portuguese as Foreign Language (PFL) learners in China, and for studies in language policy to acknowledge that multilingualism in China is an inseparable reality in the classroom, whether in Chinese language classes or foreign language classes (Jatobá, 2020, p. 50).

With these considerations regarding the historical background of foreign language education, we now turn to a more specific review of studies on policies and the teaching of less common foreign languages.

“Belt and Road” and the Teaching of “Less Common Languages”

Originally referred to as the “Silk Road Economic Belt” and the “21st Century Maritime Silk Road”, the “Belt and Road” concept was first unveiled by President Xi Jinping in September 2013 in Astana, Kazakhstan. The overall action plan for the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and its principles, structures and cooperation priorities were jointly launched by the National Development and Reform Commission (国家发展和改革委员会, *guójiā fāzhǎn hé gǎigé wěiyuánhui*), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (外交部, *wàijiāo bù*), and the Ministry of Commerce (商务部, *shāngwù*

bù) in Bo'ao City (博鳌), Hainan Province, on March 28, 2015. According to the State Council of China (2015), BRI is a collaborative project aimed at integrating the development strategies of countries along the route to foster mutual interests and prosperity and the Chinese government has outlined its goals through the “Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road,” which seeks to revitalize the ancient Silk Road and enhance connections among Asia, Europe, and Africa. In addition, this initiative promotes win-win cooperation, common development, and peace by encouraging mutual understanding, trust, and extensive exchanges, while advocating for openness, inclusiveness, and practical cooperation across various fields to create a community of shared interests and responsibilities.

6 Pondering the sociocultural implications of BRI, authors have argued for the need for cultural and normative content to be addressed and studied more clearly so that more transparent objectives are duly added to the BRI economic plan in order to prevent the ideals announced from being perceived as forms of neocolonialism or imperialism (Vilaça, 2018). Furthermore, considering that some of the desired outcomes expressed in the action plan are to increase mutual understanding and work to build a community of shared interests with bilateral political trust, economic integration and cultural inclusion (The State Council of China, 2015), what would be the role of teaching Chinese and foreign languages? What would be the role of the Portuguese-speaking countries (PSC)? What would be the value of the Portuguese language in China?

To answer these questions, it is essential to keep in mind that language, besides being a cultural value, is a political and economic asset. In this regard, it will be crucial to understand the BRI and its “linguistic challenges” and, to do so, we will use as a starting point the main demands of these “challenges” raised by Chinese researchers, namely,

(i) the emergence of language planning policies (Z. G. Zhang, 2016; H. Zhao & Xu, 2016; S. J. Zhao, 2015), (ii) the training of “talents” in less common languages (D. Liu & Hu, 2016; Wen, 2016; S. J. Zhao, 2015), (iii) linguistic security along the “Belt and Road” (R. P. Zhang, 2015); (iv) the creation of language technology and software (Z. G. Zhang, 2016); and (v) the governance of linguistic life (语言生活治理, *yǔyán shēnghuó zhìlǐ*) (R. P. Zhang & Liu, 2017).

The aforementioned challenges and demands—which imply concrete actions for the linguistic and cultural development of the “Belt and Road”—will be addressed in the following subsection and, finally, the questions raised in relation to the role of the PSC and the value of the Portuguese language in the “Belt and Road” will be discussed in our final considerations.

Linguistic Challenges and “Talent Training”: A Chinese Scholars’ Perspective

For those familiar with the policies, action plans, and concepts of the Chinese central government, the terms “language talent” (语言人才, *yǔyán réncái*), “linguistic talent training” (语言人才培养, *yǔyán réncái péixùn*), “training of talents in language” (语言人才培养, *yǔyán réncái péiyǎng*), and “training of talents in a foreign language” (外语人才培养, *wàiyǔ réncái péiyǎng*) are recurrent. However, what is or how is “talent” or “talent in language” defined?

Contrary to the common definition of talent as a “gift”, an innate or “natural aptitude”, from the Chinese perspective, “talent” may be rather a possible result of an “acquired aptitude” through intensive work and training. As defined in the preface to the Outline of the National Medium and Long-Term Talent Development Plan (2010-2020), “talent refers to those who possess a certain degree of professional knowledge or experience, perform creative work, and contribute for society and are workers with greater capacity and quality in human resources” (China, 2010, n. p.).

In light of this, given the specificity of the use of the word “talent” in Chinese, our translation option in this case study is, whenever possible, to keep the word “talent”. We pay attention to the fact that another translation option is “specialized language boards”. This option is, little by little, gaining space in documents and reports from the Macao Special Administrative Region (MSAR) Government. However, we avoid using “specialized staff” because we understand that the use of the term has normally been restricted to the scope of training for professionals in the public sphere.

From the perspective of the emergence of linguistic planning and talent training policies, S. J. Zhao (2015) argues that linguistic support must be guaranteed for the construction of the BRI because the basic integration between language and culture will be the foundation that will bring the population closer to the construction of the initiative. Regarding the emerging needs for “training talent in language” and creating linguistic products and services, R. P. Zhang (2015) proposed seven linguistic demands that must be studied in depth for the creation of policies and plans for more efficient actions, namely: (i) accelerating the modernization and protection of linguistic resources in the Central and Western Regions of China; (ii) languages of cross-border ethnic groups and peripheral security; (iii) “Belt and Road” and China’s policy on foreign language teaching; (iv) Chinese internal communication and “Belt and Road”; (v) Chinese language teaching and “Belt and Road”; (vi) “Belt and Road” discursive system; and (vii) the development of a “linguistic think tank” and its future work.

In the two aforementioned investigations, S. J. Zhao (2015) and R. P. Zhang (2015) highlighted the emergence of the development of language policies by the Central Government. H. Zhao and Xu (2016) go further and, based on the case of Gansu province and the teaching of less common languages, including referring to the teaching of the Portuguese language in the province, argue and defend that decision-making

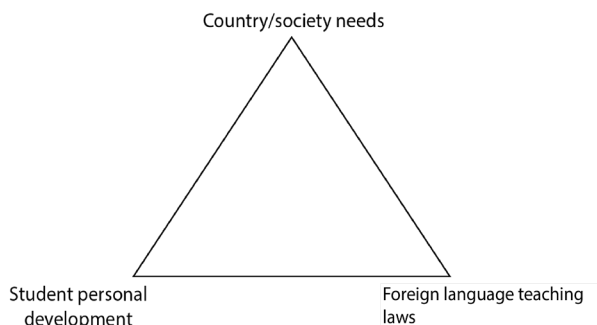
centers in language policies have provincial autonomy so that they can develop policies and action plans that improve the structure of language education, based mainly on local needs and practices and that contribute not only to the development of the province, but also for the global implementation of the “Belt and Road”.

M. Y. Wang (2017) corroborates the propositions of S. J. Zhao (2015), R. P. Zhang (2015) and H. Zhao and Xu (2016) regarding the urgency of more effective policies for the “training of language talents”. In this study, the fact is highlighted that among the countries included in the “Belt and Road” there are more “less common languages” than “common” ones and, therefore, it is suggested that the government creates an encouraging environment for universities to open courses in “less common languages”, in a rational and orderly manner, in order to create mechanisms to strengthen understanding and collaboration, especially with countries in East Asia, Central and Eastern Europe, the Middle East and Africa (M. Y. Wang, 2017, p. 3).

About the creation of less common language courses, Wen (2016) pays attention to the fact that, when considering the lack of “language talent”, politicians and academics tend to think about this problem from an internal perspective, without considering contexts and specificities of countries and regions along the belt. Furthermore, there is still a lack of mechanisms for the design and implementation of *up-side down* bachelor degree programs (specialty subjects in the first two years and general domain subjects in the last two years), a solid theoretical basis and clear goals in curricular programs to produce language experts.

In order to resolve these demands, Wen (2016) suggests to (i) deepen studies that encourage the creation of a theoretical and strategic basis that integrates the needs of the State and society, learning/acquisition theories and that take into account the learner needs and foreign language teaching laws (see Figure 1); (ii) consider internal

Figure 1 Bases for a Foreign Language Talent Training Strategy



Source: Translated from Wen (2016, p. 29)

and external perspectives for creating diversified teaching programs; and (iii) create hybrid programs in the “specialty + language X” and “language X + specialty” style.

Taking these three pillars as a strategic basis, Wen suggests that foreign language teaching policies in China and the training of talents in the Chinese language must be designed using as a reference the types of talents that satisfy both the needs of society and the skills and abilities of students, so that it is possible to plan the paths for training and developing full language talents. a summary of the main ways the government trains talent is described in Table 1. Fu and Wu (2018) resume the discussion about whether or not there are effective policies for training talent in language, and, like Wen (2016), they summarize (see Table 2) the actions and paths for creating programs in less common languages and the respective quality requirements for language talent.

From a governance theory perspective, all linguistic challenges of the “Belt and Road”, according to R. P. Zhang and Liu (2017), are underlying, interdependent and a consequence of the State’s central responsibility to promote and make decisions for “governance of linguistic life.” This concept, proposed and developed by R. P. Zhang and Liu (2017), aimed to project and implement practical governance theory and philosophy in the area of language policy. Its most significant contribution would be its pragmatic character in proposing and

integrating, broadly speaking, issues concerning language policy and planning into a national and global governance agenda.

In line with the other authors referred to in this subsection, R. P. Zhang and Liu (2017) argue that the “Belt and Road” is a strategic plan for global governance and, consequently, cannot be carried out without effective language policies in the short, medium and long term. However, according to the authors, linguistic planning for the “Belt and Road” should not be restricted to national demands, but contribute within a global logic to the co-elaboration of linguistic policies with representatives from different sectors of the public sphere and with different theoretical and conceptual assumptions that produce more efficient and more realistic central policies (R. P. Zhang & Liu, 2017, p. 95).

Despite their possible applicability in linguistic policy studies, the concepts of “linguistic governance” and “governance of linguistic life” have not yet been deepened in longitudinal or even descriptive studies. However, this proposition of applying governance theory to linguistic planning illustrates very well how linguistic issues play a key role in the success of the initial phase of implementing the “Belt and Road” and how they will soon become the core of the discussion for maintenance and medium and long-term projections of the “Belt and Road”.

Table 1 Pathways for Language Talent Training for the “Belt and Road”

Task Category	Less-Common Language Talents and Required Training Paths in China	Chinese Language Talents and Training Paths Needed for Countries Along the “Belt and Road”
Intergovernmental exchange in humanities	Country/region experts	Country/region experts
Decision making and project negotiation	Senior translation talent	Senior translation talent
	Country/region experts	Country/region experts
	Senior translation talent	Senior translation talent
Investment for corporate establishment	Industry Experts	Industry Experts
	—	Country/region experts
Investment for the construction of infrastructure	Interdisciplinary talents in less common languages	Interdisciplinary talents in Chinese language
	Interdisciplinary talents in less common languages	Interdisciplinary talents in foreign languages
Projects abroad	Interdisciplinary talents in less common languages	Interdisciplinary talents in Chinese language
	—	Interdisciplinary talents in Chinese language
Cross-border e-commerce	Interdisciplinary talents in less common languages	Interdisciplinary talents in Chinese language
	Interdisciplinary talents in less common languages	Interdisciplinary talents in Chinese language
Domestic Projects	Interdisciplinary talents in less common languages	Interdisciplinary talents in Chinese language
	Interdisciplinary talents in less common languages	Interdisciplinary talents in Chinese language

Source: Translated and adapted from Wen (2016)

Table 2 Training Language Talents for the “Belt and Road”

Type of Talent	Occupation	Main Quality Requirements
Specialization of language talents	Translation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Be proficient in one or more foreign languages (common or “non-common”), in particular, in the national languages along the route. 2. Have political perspicacity. 3. Have basic knowledge of certain industry sectors.
	Language teaching	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Be proficient in one or more foreign languages (common or “non-common”), in particular, in the national languages along the route. 2. Have advanced teaching capabilities and good teaching ability.
	Language experts	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Have advanced knowledge and proficiency in the language. 2. Master research and investigation methods. 3. Master one or more “common” or “non-common” international languages, preferably with national languages as the object of research.
Orientation for language talent	Think-tank experts for the government	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Be proficient in one or more foreign languages (common or “non-common”), in particular, in the national languages along the route. 2. Know the political, economic, cultural, social, linguistic, legal, ethnic and religious aspects of a given region or country. 3. Possess political acumen, intercultural competence and a future-oriented international perspective.
	Business consultants	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Be proficient in one or more foreign languages (common or “non-common”), in particular, in the national languages along the route. 2. Know the political, economic, cultural, social, linguistic, legal, ethnic and religious aspects of a given region or country. 3. Have insightful business acumen.
“Compound” talents	“Compound” technical skills (e.g. engineers, designers, technicians, front-line operators, etc.)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Have the ability to speak a foreign language (“common” or “non-common”) to use at work and in daily communication. 2. Master professional knowledge and skills in a given industry field. 3. Have a good global understanding, ability for intercultural communication, innovation, problem solving and other comprehensive qualities.

Source: Translated from Fu and Wu (2018, p. 6).

Thus, what the aforementioned authors have in common is that the “Belt and Road” is a new economic cooperative system exploring new models of international cooperation and global governance. This system brought new challenges to China’s language policy. The lack of “language talent” (in particular, in less common languages), issues of “national language security” and the development of language technology are just some of the short-term challenges that demand urgent reform

of current Chinese language policy. As D. Liu and Hu (2016, p. 93) explain, China remained focused for a long time on teaching English and traditional European languages, paying little attention to training a cadre of specialists in fundamental languages for the construction of the “Belt and Road.”

Therefore, reforms in policies for the teaching of foreign languages—such as the debureaucratization

of curriculum review and reform procedures, as well as reducing excessive pressure for teachers to direct their efforts towards research rather than teaching (Jatobá, 2020, pp. 189–192)—are urgently needed. However, these reforms must pay attention to the coordinated use of various sources and multifaceted interests that safeguard the national strategic interests of expanding the talent pool in less common languages, seeking, thus, practical results with concrete plans and scientific reforms that guide us in order to avoid “blind reforms” (D. Liu & Hu, 2016, p. 93). For illustration purposes, in the next section we will take the case of Portuguese language.

“Belt and Road”: The PSCs and the Value of the Portuguese language²

Returning to questions about the role of the PSCs and the value of the Portuguese language, it is important to mention that in the field of Language Policy and Planning there is still no broad and in-depth literature in China on the role of the PSCs in the “Belt and Road” or, even, about the value of the Portuguese language. For example, of the 83 articles we consulted in Chinese academic journals published between 2011 and 2024 that mention the training of “talent in less common languages” or the “Belt and Road” from a language policy perspective, only eleven mentioned the Portuguese language (M. C. Dai, 2016; W. D. Dai & Wang, 2011; Ding, 2017; Dong, 2016; Qian, 2018; Shang, 2023; Shu, 2013; Sun & Liu, 2018; Z. G. Zhang, 2011; H. Zhao & Xu, 2016). Of these, only four mentioned Brazil (Dong, 2016; Shang, 2023; Shen & Xia, 2014; Z. G. Zhang, 2011); two, Angola (Dong, 2016; Z. G. Zhang, 2011); one, Mozambique (Z. G. Zhang, 2011); and two, the PSC (Dong, 2016; Y. C. Li & Vicente, 2020).

However, with the exception of Shang (2021, 2023), these researches only mentioned the Portuguese language or some of the PSC for purely contextual

purposes or to list the less common language courses that have been opened in recent years without, therefore, delving into the case of the Portuguese language and in Sino-Lusophone relations. Meanwhile, only one study was found that presents a comparative study on state policies and strategies for promoting Portuguese and Spanish in higher education in China (L. T. A. Pires, 2023).

In the case of books published in China, the Portuguese language and the relationship between China and the PSC have been better addressed. Since 2015, the *Blue Book of Portuguese Speaking Countries* series has been published (Gu, et al., 2018; C. A. Wang & Zhang, 2015; C. A. Wang, et al., 2017; C. A. Wang, et al., 2018) and, from 2019, the *Yellow Book of Portuguese Speaking Countries* series (Shang & Ding, 2019). Both series are essentially concerned with presenting annual reports on strategic economic and commercial development between China and the PSC. The Blue Book presents the opinions of a research team specializing mainly in economics, while the Yellow Book presents reports and case studies on global economic cooperation and international issues.

In these two series, approximately 70 studies or reports were published, but only six specifically dealt with linguistic challenges in achieving partnerships between China and PSCs, in commercial or diplomatic areas. These six studies address language teaching in three different directions, namely, the China-MSAR partnership for teaching the Portuguese language (Yan, 2017); Chinese language teaching in Brazil (X. Zhang, 2019); the training of talents in the Portuguese language (Han, 2019; C. S. Li, 2018); the current situation and prospects for Portuguese language teaching in China (Lu, 2018); and the teaching of Portuguese as a heritage language in China (Jatobá & Shang, 2019). Since the purpose of the two aforementioned series is to delve deeper into themes on the economic and commercial agenda, it is significant that language teaching within the scope of cooperation between China and the PSC is gaining more and more space in these publications.

² A preliminary analysis was presented in Jatobá (2020).

Regarding publications in Portuguese, we also did not find a broad literature on language policies for the Portuguese language in China. For our search, in addition to using traditional databases, we used the bibliography on acquisition, learning and teaching of Portuguese as a non-native language by Chinese mother tongue learners (1969–2019), composed of 431 exclusive articles, books and theses on the teaching and promotion of the Portuguese language for speakers of Chinese mother tongue. However, as a result of our survey in different databases, in total five specific studies were found on language policies for teaching the Portuguese language in China (G. Liu, 2015; Jatobá, 2015, 2017, 2020; L. T. A. Pires, 2023); three on the history and development of the Portuguese language in China (C. S. Li, 2012, 2015; Lu, 2018); and two on the “Belt and Road” (C. S. Li, 2017; Pestana, 2019).

After our survey, both in academic literature in Chinese and Portuguese, we observed a predominance of studies on relations between China and the PSC that focus, almost exclusively, on economic exchanges and export and import of commodities between China and emerging Portuguese-speaking countries. Thus, Chinese policies for promoting the Portuguese language are a topic that deserves more attention and which, we assume, will soon be increasingly present on the research agendas of China-PSC relations.

In view of this, the value of the Portuguese language for China is linked to the growth in the importance of commercial exchanges between China and, above all, Angola, Brazil and Mozambique (C. S. Li, 2015, 2017; Jatobá, 2023b; M. D. J. Pires, 2022a, 2022b, 2022c; Pestana, 2019, p. 369; Ye, 2014). In the diplomatic field, the Portuguese language already plays a fundamental role for China, and it will become increasingly prominent for the development of the “Belt and Road” Initiative.

In addition, in diplomacy, the Portuguese language already holds a significant role for China and it is anticipated to play an even greater role

in the development of the “Belt and Road” Initiative. In this sense, Pestana (2019) advises that researchers should inquire into how China will demonstrate the role of the Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLC) and the significance of the Portuguese language in its language policies, both explicitly and implicitly, along with concrete action plans.

Pestana (2019), along with other Chinese articles we examined, does not explicitly articulate the specific value ascribed to the Portuguese language or outline the envisaged short-, medium-, and long-term actions necessary for the implementation of a project aimed at teaching and promoting the Portuguese language in China. Instead, the focus primarily lies on highlighting the advantages that certain Portuguese-speaking countries offer to China, a fact substantiated by the burgeoning trade exchanges between China and PSC.

Studies examining the potential advantages that China offers to PSC often lack a comprehensive analysis of linguistic considerations. Instead, these studies tend to concentrate on areas such as collaborative development of advanced technologies for oil exploration and aeronautical engineering, as observed in the case of Brazil. In the context of the Portuguese-speaking African Countries (PALOP), the focus is primarily on commercial exchanges, energy resource exploration, and commodity trade in exchange for infrastructure development. Lastly, Portugal is viewed as a strategic gateway for China’s entry into the European market. However, a detailed exploration of linguistic issues and the specific role of the Portuguese language in these dynamics is notably absent from these studies.

Regarding China-PSC strategic relations, we highlight the results of Fernandes (2013), which presented empirical evidence, based on extensive import and export and in documents on improving diplomatic negotiations between China and the PSCs, confirming the strategic value of the PSCs. As Fernandes (2013, p. 456) highlights, China is interested in expanding relations with

Portuguese-speaking countries, African countries (Devecioglu & Akçomak, 2024), and the Arab states due to their energy resources. In addition, to facilitate multilateral oil diplomacy, China established dialogue and cooperation forums for these groups, including the Forum for Economic and Commercial Cooperation between China and the Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP) in 2003.

Regarding specific relations between China-PALOP, Fernandes (2013) presented detailed reports on commercial exchanges and China's presence in the development of oil production infrastructures and other energy sources. However, it is the case of Angola that deserves greater attention, as,

Cooperation between an energy producing country and an energy consumer, defended by the Chinese and Angolan authorities as mutually beneficial, gained new prominence with the launch of the Strategic Partnership between the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Angola, during the visit of the Vice-President President Xi Jinping to Luanda, in November 2010. . . . Elevating Angola to China's strategic partner meant, on the one hand, that cooperation between the two went to a higher level, and on the other, that Beijing attaches great importance and intends to reinforce to the Sino-Angolan relationship in the long term. The hypothesis that Angola could become the largest oil producer in Africa . . . [may] have contributed to strengthening this relationship, given that, with these partnerships, Beijing seeks to expand the possibilities of cooperation with a producer

with high potential to be your main supplier. In this way, Angola is and will continue to contribute to one of the objectives of external energy security measures: the diversification of energy sources beyond the unstable and insecure Middle East. (Fernandes, 2013, pp. 461–462)

As official data on China-PSC trade exchanges prove, PSCs have strategic importance in meeting China's agricultural, commercial, and energy demands. Furthermore, in addition to the economic aspects, it is worth remembering that, in geographical terms, Portuguese is the most spoken language in the Southern Hemisphere (see Table 3) and, from a geopolitical point of view, it is the language of economic and political blocs, such as The Southern Common Market (Mercosur) and the BRICS group (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa).

In addition to the data verified in Table 3, there is also the fact that Portuguese has been gaining prominence in South-South cooperation, and, as Oliveira (2013, p. 429) recalls, it is the language of 26 international organizations. Among the blocs and international organizations in which Portuguese is an official or working language, we highlight the following: European Union (EU), African Union (AU), Economic Community of Central African States (eccas), Southern African Development Community (SADC), Organization of Ibero-American States (OEI), Common Market

Table 3 Portuguese-Speaking Countries in the Southern Hemisphere

Country	Total Population (Thousands)	No. of Portuguese Speakers (Thousands)	Percentage
Angola	25,000	18,000	72%
Brazil*	208,000	207,000	99.5%
Mozambique	28,000	19,600	70%
Sao Tome and Principe*	95	95	100%
East Timor	1,190	357	30%
Total	262,285	245,052	

Source: Observatório da Língua Portuguesa (2016)

Notes: * Only the population residing in the Southern Hemisphere of these countries was considered.

for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Organization of American States (OAS), Union of South American Nations (UNASUR).

Being the official language in many African organizations, the Portuguese language has gained increasing space in South-South cooperation. Adding to this the fact that the “Belt and Road” Initiative is a long-term project, it is never too much to remember that, in order to build a strategy for the PSC, we must take into account the demographic projections of the PSC. As Oliveira (2016) projected, the 21st century would see a transformation in the geopolitical space of the PSCs. According to the author,

... [there will be] an important geopolitical transformation in the Portuguese-speaking space during the 21st century due to the demographic transition regime occurring at different times in each country. Thus, in 2100, the distribution of Portuguese speakers in the national spaces where the language is official will be fundamentally different from what it was in 2015, pointing, firstly, to a strong growth in the representation of Southern Africa; secondly, it points to the relative growth in the role of the other PALOP and East Timor and, secondly, to the relative decrease in the demographic role of Portugal and Brazil. (p. 40)

Oliveira (2016) put this geopolitical transformation in numbers (see Table 4).

China’s intentions towards Portuguese-speaking Africa involve establishing partnerships in the energy sector, securing commodity supplies, and creating networks of political influence. This is

aimed at strengthening China’s political and economic sway within the CPLP and in South-South cooperation and North-South dialogues.

The roles of Brazil and Portugal in this context have been extensively studied. Gaspar (2018) highlighted China’s interest in Portugal, particularly the inclusion of the Port of Sines in the ambitious “Belt and Road” Initiative. The port serves as a strategic entry point into Europe, facilitating trade and logistics operations. On the other hand, a study by Brazilian diplomat Oswaldo Biato Júnior (2010) shed light on the multifaceted Sino-Brazilian relationship, encompassing economic cooperation, political dialogue, and cultural exchanges.

In summary, Brazil and Portugal hold significant positions in China’s broader objectives. Brazil’s strategic partnership with China spans various sectors, while Portugal’s involvement in the “Belt and Road” Initiative demonstrates their growing economic ties. These dynamics contribute to China’s increasing influence within the CPLP, South-South cooperation, and global dialogues between the North and South.

In relation to soft power, we also add the fact that Portugal belongs to the Northern Globe, which gives the Portuguese language the status of a language for North-South dialogues while the power of influence of Brazil makes Portuguese a language both in South-South cooperation and in North-South dialogues. Additionally, Brazil represents one of the largest countries of the Southern Globe. In relation to the Sino-Brazilian partnership, according to Biato (2010), it has

Table 4 Linguistic Demography of PSCs by Continent (Unit: Million, %)

	2015	Percentage	2100 (Projection)	Percentage
Africa	52,431	19.55%	218,552	51.54%
South America	203,650	76.02%	194,533	45.90%
Europe	10,610	3.90%	7,457	1.75%
Asia	1,170	0.43%	3,265	0.77%
Total	267,861	99.90%	423,807	99.96%

Source: Adapted from Oliveira (2016)

already undergone several evolutions and overcome numerous challenges.

However, enhancing mutual knowledge between these two economic powers remains as a challenge. Biato Júnior (2010, pp. 238–239) concluded that a challenge persists in defending Brazilian interests in China due to the limited perception of Brazil among many Chinese people, who associate it primarily with football, samba, and tropical imagery. This hinders their recognition of Brazil's technological advancements in sectors such as aerospace, hydroelectric power, and bioenergy. Chinese individuals tend to link technological excellence with developed Western countries such as the USA, UK, France, Germany, and Canada, as well as Japan, South Korea, and Australia. These stereotypes pose a barrier to Embraer's sales of regional jets in China, with Chinese government representatives initially doubting Embraer's technical capabilities compared to Canadian counterparts. Addressing this issue requires actions such as organizing technology fairs, facilitating visits by influential Chinese opinion leaders and journalists to Brazil, and fostering academic and cultural exchanges between the two nations to present a more accurate and comprehensive image of Brazil.

It is worth mentioning that Biato Junior's study was prepared in a phase of optimism and greater growth in Sino-Brazilian strategic relations, coinciding with the dizzying growth of Brazil's diplomatic influence and soft power in the first two terms of the government of President Luís Inácio Lula da Silva (2003–2011). However, with the new foreign policy of rapprochement with the USA by the former president of Brazil, Jair Bolsonaro (2019–2022), not only the agenda of Brazil-China economic partnerships was put at risk, but also the cooling of the agenda of strategic cooperation developed by the Sino-Brazilian High-Level Commission for Concertation and Cooperation (COSBAN). However, with Lula's new mandate, which began in January 2023, Sino-Brazilian relations returned to the agenda of

diplomacy, with President Lula making an official visit to China in the first half of his term.

By way of conclusion, although there are no specific studies on the value of the Portuguese language in Chinese, we assume that the best indicators we have are, from an economic point of view, the increase in commercial exchanges between China and the PSC and, from an economic and cultural point of view, the growth of Portuguese language higher education courses in China and the high employability rate for graduates of these courses (Jatobá, et al., 2021; C. S. Li, 2017; D. H. Li, 2014; Ye, 2012). It is also a fact that there is a deficit in studies not only on the Portuguese language, but also on many of the "less common languages" growing in China (Jatobá, 2023a, 2023b).

Final Considerations

Throughout this article, we have provided a historical overview of foreign language policies in China and highlighted recent policies that have facilitated the promotion of less-commonly taught foreign languages. By using the teaching of the Portuguese language as a case study, we propose that the growing interest in Portuguese can be attributed to the convergence of two significant factors.

The first factor stems from the State's requirements and underscores China's foreign policy interest in the Portuguese-speaking world, particularly the PALOP (Portuguese-speaking African countries). China's objectives extend beyond seeking suppliers of raw materials or potential consumers of Chinese goods; instead, they aim to foster political and diplomatic relationships based on knowledge and mutual respect. To achieve this goal, it is crucial to raise the number of professionals with expertise in the languages and cultures of the Portuguese-speaking countries.

The second factor arises from the private sector needs, specifically the urgent need to train professionals

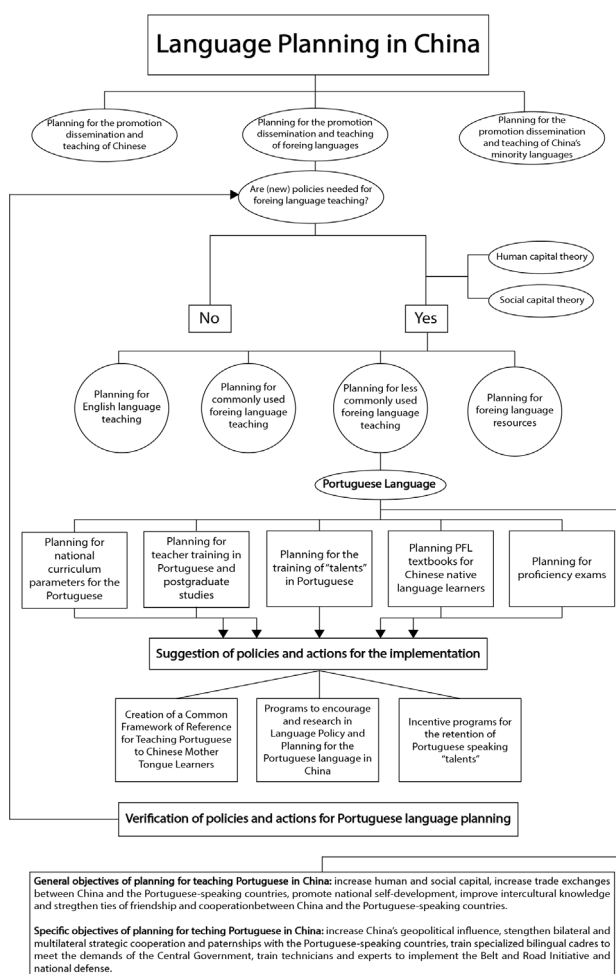
who can effectively respond to market demands between China and the Portuguese-speaking countries, with a particular emphasis on the economies of Angola, Brazil, and Mozambique.

Adhering to China's investment logic of establishing transnational blocs characterized by multipolarity, primarily driven by an interest in expanding commercial exchanges and accessing broader consumer markets, it is reasonable to assert that the Portuguese language will continue to gain prominence in the forthcoming years. Additionally, as one of the BRICS languages, Portuguese grants China access to three continents. Additionally, it is worth noting that Portuguese is also an official

language in Macau, adding to its significance in the context of Greater China.

In order to summarize the relationships between China's geopolitical position and language policies, this case study demonstrated that the teaching of foreign languages—specifically Portuguese—is a critical aspect of China's assertion as a global commercial and political power, as well as a leader in South-South cooperation and South-North dialogue. To systematize this relationship, based on Kang's (2010) proposition and utilizing data from Jatobá (2020), we outline the steps and actions for planning foreign language policies in China (Figure 2).

Figure 2 Trends in Foreign Language Policies in China



Source: Based on Kang (2010), and Jatoba (2020).

Finally, we emphasize that the literature discussed here, despite being extensive, is focused on specific policies and cases regarding the teaching of less commonly taught foreign languages, and most of it is written in Chinese or Portuguese. Therefore, for a more detailed and comprehensive discussion on the subject, it is necessary to include perspectives from other global actors, the teaching of other languages, and materials written in other languages and contexts. This broader approach would enrich our understanding of language policies and their implications in a globalized world, allowing for a more nuanced analysis that reflects diverse educational practices and geopolitical considerations.

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How to cite this article: Jacobá, J. R. (2024). Perspectives and trends in foreign language policies in China: The case of Portuguese. *Íkala, Revista de Lenguaje y Cultura*, 29(3), e11356580. <https://doi.org/10.17533/udea.ikala.356580>