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Works of grammar from the Chinese College at Naples in the 19th century: a descriptive analysis

Panel: Chinese language learning and teaching in European countries: past and present

Two years before the establishment of the first academic teaching of Chinese language at the Collège de France (1814) entrusted to Jean-Pierre Abel-Rémusat (1788-1832), the Napoleonic government set in Naples transformed the almost one-century old “Chinese College” into a sort of high school, naming it Special school of Chinese. Up to this time and despite the intention of the founder Matteo Ripa (1682-1746), the teaching and learning of the Chinese language had been very scanty and fragmentary. Even though the British government resolved to ask Naples for two pupils to serve as interpreters for Lord Macartney’s Embassy (1792), Chinese language teaching, however, was not continual nor systematic. Thus, during the French decade (1806-1815), the “Special school of Chinese” needed to build a much more organic teaching method and, in order to do so, it was necessary to compile some teaching material.

The aim of the paper is to illustrate and describe in detail two works of Chinese grammar written to respond to this need respectively entitled *De Lingua Sinensi* (anonymous) and *Zhongguo zi. Gramatica chinese fatta per uso della scuola speciale istallata nel Collegio de’ Chinesi in Napoli da Gennaro Filomeno Maria Terres allievo della suddetta scuola, 1813* (Chinese grammar for use at the special school of the Chinese College in Naples by Gennaro Filomeno Maria Terres, pupil of the above-mentioned school). These two works of grammar are quoted in some works but they have never been studied or described. The paper therefore aims to illustrate them, to put forward some hypotheses on the author of *De Lingua Sinensi* based on textual evidence and will trace a link that connects Italian Chinese language teaching to French Sinology.