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## Current Situation and Prospects of Teaching Chinese to Bashkir Ethno-Cultural Group

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**Abstract.** In recent years, the demand for Chinese language education in Russia has increased due to the development of Sino-Russian comprehensive strategic partnership. The Ministry of Science and Education of the Russian Federation attaches great importance to the preservation and development of education in ethnic regions. The Bashkir region has great potential for the promotion and development of Chinese language teaching system. This article presents the current situation with Chinese language education in the Bashkir region, considers the problems existing at the present stage on the conditions and methods of teaching Chinese to the population of this ethnic region, and also describes a promising concept for the development of Chinese language education and promotion of Chinese culture in the Bashkir region.

**Keywords:** Chinese language teaching, the Bashkir language, Bashkortostan, current situation, problems, prospects.

Research area: Social Structure, Social Institutions and Processes; Languages of the Peoples of the Foreign Countries (Chinese); Foreign Language Teaching; Theoretical, Applied and Comparative Linguistics.

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## Современное состояние и перспективы преподавания китайского языка для башкирской этнокультурной группы

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**Аннотация.** В последние годы спрос на обучение китайскому языку в России возрос в связи с развитием китайско-российского всеобъемлющего стратегического партнерства. Министерство науки и образования Российской Федерации придает большое значение сохранению и развитию образования в этнических регионах. В Башкирском регионе имеется огромный потенциал для продвижения и развития системы обучения китайскому языку. В данной статье представлена современная ситуация с образованием на китайском языке в Башкирском регионе, рассмотрены проблемы, существующие на современном этапе по условиям и методике обучения китайскому языку населения данного этнического региона, а также описана перспективная концепция развития образования на китайском языке и продвижения китайской культуры в Башкирском регионе.

**Ключевые слова:** обучение китайскому языку, башкирский язык, Башкортостан, современная ситуация, проблемы, перспективы.

Научная специальность: 5.4.4. Социальная структура, социальные институты и процессы; 5.9.6. Языки народов зарубежных стран (китайский); 5.9.8. Теоретическая, прикладная и сравнительно-сопоставительная лингвистика.

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### Introduction

The Bashkir region has good prospects for the development of the education system, as well as the development and strengthening of economic relations with the PRC, which is a stimulating factor for promoting Chinese language learning in this ethnic region. It is also important to consider geographical and linguocultural factors. However, now there is a problem of inefficiency of the Chinese language teaching system among the main peoples of Bashkortostan. This article presents the current situation in the republic in the relevant areas of development, especially in the sphere of Chinese studies, analyzes the problems of

Chinese language teaching and the suggests ways of solving them.

### 1. Brief description of the development of the ethnic situation in the Bashkir region

In terms of ethnic composition, 36.3 % of the population of the Republic are Russians, 29.8 % are Bashkirs, and 24.1 % are Tatars. Bashkirs are the indigenous population of the Republic. The republic is also home to Chuvashs, Mari, Ukrainians, Mordva, Germans and representatives of other nationalities.

The head of the region is the Head of Bashkortostan, elected by the State Assembly – Kurultai of the Republic of Bashkortostan on the

recommendation of the President of the Russian Federation.

As far back as Peter the Great personally pointed out the importance of the development of the Bashkir region, which led to the establishment of copper and iron mining plants. The population grew steadily, also thanks to the newcomers. In the 1861 regulation, the Bashkirs were granted the rights of the rural population. In the 20th century enlightenment, culture and ethnic consciousness began to develop. The February Revolution allowed the people to gain statehood, but the Great Patriotic War that began slowed down the progress. Repression, drought and assimilation played a negative role. Currently, the region is called the Republic of Bashkortostan and is characterized by active urbanization (Bashkirs, 2021).

## **2. Educational policy of the Russian Federation for the development of the ethnic region**

The Ministry of Science and Education of the Russian Federation attaches great importance to the preservation and development of education in ethnic regions. The Bashkir region has great potential for the development of Chinese-language education. Bashkiria became the winner of the federal program “Professionalism” and will receive 400 million rubles from the Russian Federation budget to create four educational clusters. This was announced by the republic’s Minister of Education and Science Ildar Mavletberdin (Bashkiria will receive..., 2024).

According to the strategic plan of the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation, in 2022 Bashkir State University and Ufa Aerospace University merged to form Ufa University of Science and Technology. Ufa University of Science and Technology is the largest scientific and educational center in the Bashkir region of Russia. The university has 50,000 students, more than 3,000 international students from 60 countries and about 3,000 teachers. The university has six branches in the Republic of Bashkortostan, which makes it one of the top five universities in Russia in terms of colleges and universities. The university campus is one of 40 modern university campuses in Russia approved by President Vladimir Putin.

Ufa University of Science and Technology is among 120 universities in the Russian strategic program “Priority 2030”.

Thus, higher education in Bashkiria enjoys great support from the government, which has consolidated the profitable resources of universities to keep the youth of Bashkiria in access to higher education locally and to attract the best Bashkir scholars who left for other regions and countries back home.

## **3. Overview of Economic, Trade and Cultural Development between the Bashkir Region and China**

The trade turnover between Bashkiria and China exceeded USD 1.2 billion in 2022. Exports of goods from the republic to China amounted to \$ 871 million, imports – \$ 361 million. This was reported by the representative of the Republic of Bashkortostan at the Russian Trade Representation in China, Flur Asadullin, on the air of RBC Ufa TV channel. According to him, Bashkiria exports agricultural products, machine building, food products, equipment, and imports machine building products, plastic products, etc. (Bashkiria-China trade, 2023).

The Chinese province of Liaoning is interested in establishing strong business ties with Bashkortostan. This was stated by Deputy Governor of Liaoning Province Jin Gwei at a meeting with Bashkir Prime Minister Andrei Nazarov in Shanghai. “Our province plays a big role in the development of bilateral interaction between China and Russia. I know that Bashkortostan occupies an important place in the Russian economy. Therefore, we are interested in developing effective cooperation with you,” emphasized the vice-governor of China’s Liaoning Province (China opens to talents..., 2024). In 1999, the Government of Bashkortostan and the People’s Government of the Chinese province of Liaoning concluded a cooperation agreement. This document made it possible to strengthen trade, economic, scientific and technical ties between Bashkortostan and China. Besides, since 2011 the Bashkir capital has been a sister city of Shenyang, the capital of Liaoning. More than 20 years have passed since the agreement was signed. Today the world economic situation has changed. Technologies

have significantly stepped forward. Now one of the popular areas of cooperation can also become tourism (Bahshieva, 2023).

#### **4. History of the development of Chinese language education in the Bashkir region**

Chinese studies education, which is based on the study of the Chinese language, is the most important component of the whole system of Russian-Chinese relations. It is especially important and relevant for the eastern, border or major transportation routes and the regions of Russia most closely economically and culturally connected with China.

Even though the origins of Russian Chinese studies were in Eastern Siberia, and by the early twentieth century a specialized higher oriental studies institution was already operating in the Far East, there has always been a problem of lack of a developed and full-fledged system of Chinese studies education in the eastern regions of Russia (Dacyshen, 2024).

The Oriental Department of Bashkir State University (now Ufa University of Science and Technology) was founded in 1990, and this department teaches Chinese. It is one of the very first universities in Bashkiria to develop Chinese language teaching (Faculty of Bashkir Philology).

#### **5. Current state of teaching Chinese to Bashkirs**

The current state with educational institutions offering Chinese language programs in the Ufa region:

##### ***(1) Universities and colleges***

Currently, there are 23 universities and colleges in the Ufa region, the main ones offering Chinese language programs are Ufa University of Science and Technology, Bashkir State Pedagogical University, Ufa Oil University, Bashkir Agricultural University and others. Today there are more than a dozen higher educational institutions in Ufa. Ufa University of Science and Technology plays a key role in the scientific and educational system of the Republic of Bashkortostan and is the most influential and largest higher education institution in the

region. Ufa University is among the top five universities in the Russian Federation in terms of the number of students and has established itself as a leading university in the field of technical, humanities and applied sciences.

Several higher education institutions in the republic are making attempts to integrate Chinese into their curricula: Chinese is taught at Ufa Oil University and Bashkir State Pedagogical University named after M. Akmulla. However, these universities have limited student enrollment.

Ufa University of Science and Technology stands out from other universities due to the availability of accredited licenses at the Faculty of Bashkir Philology, Oriental Studies and Journalism: 1) Bachelor's degree programs 58.03.01 Oriental Studies and African Studies, profile "Languages of the Peoples of Asia and Africa (Chinese language)", 2) Master's degree programs 58.04.01 Oriental Studies and African Studies, profile "Languages of the Peoples of Asia and Africa". These programs provide students with an opportunity for in-depth study of Chinese language and culture, which allows to train highly qualified specialists in the field of Oriental Studies. More than 450 students study Chinese at Ufa University's Oriental Studies Department, and Chinese language events for schoolchildren are regularly organized, with 50 to 300 participants. Also, 150 students study Chinese as a second language at the Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences of Ufa University of Science and Technology.

##### ***(2) Primary and secondary schools***

Primary and secondary schools in Ufa and the region as a whole offer Chinese language programs. Some educational institutions of the republic have started to introduce Chinese as a second foreign language in the curriculum in recent years due to the growing interest in China and its culture, including in business and economics. According to the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Bashkortostan, 885 people study Chinese in schools in the city of Ufa. The growing demand for learning Chinese suggests that more and more schools in the Republic of Bashkortostan will begin to introduce Chinese into school pro-

grams. Are there opportunities for the inclusion of Chinese in the national education system in the future, and is there a favorable policy in this regard? At the moment, the leader among foreign languages in the educational institutions of the Republic is English, but in recent years there has been an increasing interest on the part of pupils and parents in learning Chinese and other oriental languages.

### **(3) Chinese language teaching institutions at the social level**

Currently, there are about 20 online and offline private language teaching schools in Ufa that offer Chinese language courses, including some summer camps and short-term Chinese interest classes. The vast majority of these schools are founded by Russians, and there are almost no classes with native Chinese speakers. Various options for learning Chinese are available in the Ufa area: 1) tutors: private teachers offer individual lessons that can be tailored to the learner's learning levels and needs; 2) language schools: courses at language centers in various formats (group, individual, evening classes); 3) online courses: many platforms such as Preply and TutorOnline offer flexible language learning environments with experienced teachers.

### **(4) Number of Chinese language teachers in the largest universities of the Ufa region**

Ufa University of Science and Technology: 5

Bashkir State Pedagogical University: 3

Ufa University of Oil: 2

### **(5) Number of students studying Chinese at universities and colleges**

Ufa University of Science and Technology, about 300

Bashkir State Pedagogical University, about 200 students

Ufa Oil University, about 100 students.

*Number of students studying Chinese in primary and secondary schools:* about 500.

### **(6) Chinese language teaching methodology**

Non-native Chinese teachers are relatively conservative in teaching methodology, they

mainly use the translation method in teaching Chinese. The native Chinese teachers mainly use immersion method and contrastive method (Shhukin, 2002). When teaching Chinese in the Bashkir region, the authors found that the grammar of Bashkir and Tatar languages is similar to Chinese. For example, teaching Chinese prepositions of time and place. The character “前” has the meaning “before”, in Chinese the phrase “五天前” means “before five o'clock (of the day)”. In Russian and English for this situation, the preposition precedes the noun, while in Chinese, Bashkir and Tatar preposition goes before the noun. The same is true for situations with locution: 房子前 (in front of the house), 门前 (in front of the door). Using the theory of comparative linguistics to learn Chinese grammar may be a more effective method for students of these two ethnic groups.

### **(7) New programs**

The Faculty of Bashkir Philology, Oriental Studies and Journalism of Ufa University has developed new Master's degree programs: 58.04.01 Oriental Studies and African Studies, profile “Oriental languages in the sphere of professional communication (Chinese language)”, 58.04.01 Oriental Studies and African Studies, profile “Language support of international activity in Eurasian space (Chinese, Korean languages)”, 58.04.01 Oriental Studies and African Studies, profile “Language support of business activities (Chinese language)”, 58.04.01 Oriental Studies and African Studies, profile “Cross-cultural studies of Asia and Africa in the context of international relations”, focused on training specialists in the field of international relations and business, which emphasizes the uniqueness of Ufa University in the context of the educational environment of Ufa and promotes the development of intercultural communication.

Language courses in Chinese at Ufa University – 72 hours (at least 6 hours per week). Over the last 3 years, more than 60 students have taken Chinese language courses and received state certificates. In 2024–2025 academic year 19 students will be trained at the courses. Professional retraining courses “Teaching Chinese language in educational institutions” with the

qualification “Chinese language teacher” – 504 hours (not less than 20 hours per week). Over the last 3 years more than 30 students have been trained at the professional retraining courses and received professional retraining diplomas. In the 2024–2025 academic year, 8 students will take these courses. In addition, some sports and art classes (calligraphy) are planned to be introduced into the educational process in order to ensure more harmonious distribution of workload, mental hygiene and development of comprehensive interest in Chinese culture.

#### **(8) Teaching materials and equipment**

In Bashkiria, Chinese language teaching materials are incomplete and few in number; they are limited to the standard HSK curriculum and do not cover the full range of language teaching resources. The curriculum lacks a systematic approach; there are only intensive reading and literature courses, but no courses on speaking, reading, writing, listening and speaking, on teaching social and political translation of news, history and culture. There are no specialized stores for direct purchase of Chinese language books and caps to practice writing characters, everything has to be ordered online. Brushes, rice paper, ink and other materials for Chinese calligraphy are not available in the region. Such important attributes of Chinese culture as fans, Chinese knots and Chinese dresses, etc. can be ordered only through the Internet.

At the same time, *the demand for Chinese language training at the Russian business level is growing*. With the sharp increase in economic and trade exchanges between Russia and China after the imposition of sanctions in February 2022, the demand for Chinese language specialists in Russian banking, automobile import, e-commerce and other industries has increased dramatically.

### **6. Prospects for the development of Chinese language teaching in the Bashkir region**

#### **(1) Establishment of the Center of Chinese Language and Culture**

Ufa University of Science and Technology is a new type of comprehensive university,

which was established in 2022 by merging Ufa State Aviation University and Bashkir State University in accordance with the strategic plan of the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation. The campus is among 40 modern university campuses in Russia approved by President Vladimir Putin. Ufa University of Science and Technology is among 120 higher education institutions included in Russia’s “Priority 2030” strategic program.

Bashkir State University, one of the predecessors of Ufa University of Science and Technology, has been cooperating with Liaoning University for more than 30 years, and the Chinese language teachers sent by Liaoning University have laid a solid foundation for teaching Chinese at the Oriental Department and Foreign Languages Department of Ufa University of Science and Technology.

According to the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Bashkortostan, Ufa University of Science and Technology, Ufa Oil University, Bashkir State Pedagogical University, Bashkir State Medical Academy of the Republic of Bashkortostan, universities and colleges of the Republic of Bashkortostan, have established a joint Intellectual Campus. Ufa University of Science and Technology hopes to establish a Chinese Language and Culture Center with Liaoning University as part of this Intellectual Campus. This will be extremely beneficial not only for the Chinese language learners at Ufa University of Science and Technology, but also for the entire region of the Republic of Bashkortostan as a center for promoting Chinese language and culture.

Center of Chinese Language and Culture can open a cultural and creative goods store selling Chinese language teaching aids, Chinese language learning books, Chinese calligraphy goods, Chinese painting goods, Chinese dresses, Chinese cultural goods, etc., which will promote Chinese culture in the ethnic region.

#### **(2) Organizing summer camps in China**

During the summer months, there are many primary and secondary school students and Chinese language enthusiasts from local residents in Bashkiria who want to go to China to participate in summer camps, get acquainted

with Chinese culture, immerse themselves in the Chinese language and, more importantly, explore study opportunities in China. It would be worthwhile to organize summer camps in China in the future.

### **(3) The development of “Chinese Language + Professional Skills”**

With the deepening of the Belt and Road Initiative, economic and trade cooperation and cultural exchanges between China and participating countries are becoming more frequent, and the demand for composite talents and foreign experts under the “China+” concept is increasing (China opens to talents..., 2024). Such a concept could be “China-plus”. In the field of international Chinese language teaching, the term “Chinese +” is quite common, such as “Chinese + Chinese medicine”, “Chinese + tourism” and so on. Some scholars believe that “Chinese plus” is teaching other professions with Chinese and based on Chinese, while subjectively cultivating Chinese language proficiency as a core ability (Yuan, Li, 2024). In our view, the “plus” in “Chinese +” can be interpreted as “based on...” or “application of...”. For example, “Chinese + tourism” means “tourism vocational education based on Chinese language learning” or “application of Chinese language in tourism vocational education”. If we compare Chinese language proficiency with professional skills, for example, in tourism services, Chinese language proficiency is the foundation and professional skills dominate.

From the perspective of learning organization, the time for learning Chinese is relatively short, while the time for learning vocational skills is longer; from the perspective of learning sequence, Chinese is learned in the early stage, and practical skills prevail in the middle and late stages, along with learning Chinese. In other words, in “Chinese language” education, Chinese is the primary language, and in “Chinese plus” education, Chinese is the secondary language. Thus, the concept of “Chinese+” covers a number of aspects, such as “Chinese+Tourism”, “Chinese+Chinese Medicine”, etc., and relies on “Chinese applications”. It is a kind of naming method of “interdisciplinary

group” based on Chinese application, which reflects the significance of the international discipline system, academic system and discourse system of Chinese language teaching. Since the 13th Confucius Institute Conference in 2018, the Chinese + program has opened up skills training, business, Chinese medicine and other special courses according to local conditions, promoting the integration of Chinese language and other fields, especially the Chinese + Vocational Skills program, which promotes the development of new skills for talents in the Belt and Road countries.

In 2019, the International Conference on Chinese Language Education (ICLEI) organized the “Chinese Language + Vocational Skills” forum for the first time; in 2020, the Ministry of Education and nine other departments released the “Action Plan for Improving the Quality of Vocational Education (2020–2023)”, which explicitly states that “vocational education should be improved in terms of its quality and excellence”. In 2020, nine departments, including the Ministry of Education, issued the “Action Plan for Improving the Quality and Excellence of Vocational Education (2020–2023)”, which explicitly calls for promoting the “Chinese Language + Vocational Skills” program and helping Chinese vocational education to reach the global level. In November of the same year, the first international promotion base for the Chinese + Vocational Skills Program was officially opened in Nanjing, jointly established by the Chinese and Foreign Language Exchange and Cooperation Center of the Ministry of Education and Nanjing University of Technology (Yuan, Li, 2024). Overseas in 2020, the Center for Sino-foreign Language Exchange and Cooperation of the Ministry of Education of China and the Vocational Education Council of the Ministry of Education of Thailand signed a memorandum of understanding on cooperation in the development of “Chinese language + vocational skills” online. Last March, the Institute of Language and Vocational Education established jointly by the education departments of China and Thailand was set up in Bangkok, marking the further deepening of cooperation between China and Thailand in Chinese lan-

guage education and expanding the channels for comprehensive cooperation in vocational education between the two countries, providing a broader platform. The “Chinese Plus” model has rich opportunities for innovation. For students, Chinese language learning will become more attractive and they can learn about Chinese culture from different perspectives. For teachers, the curriculum content and teaching methods can be flexibly customized according to students’ interests and needs, providing more personalized and diverse educational services.

Ufa University of Science and Technology has a strong research group in natural science, engineering and technology, and cooperates with many large Russian companies in aviation, petrochemical, etc., which provides teaching and practice of “Chinese + Professional Skills” in the Training and Testing Center.

### Conclusion

The Republic of Bashkortostan is a rather large ethnic region of Russia, where Russians,

Bashkirs and Tatars live for the most part. The linguocultural features of the region, in particular the similarity of the grammar of the Bashkir and Tatar languages with Chinese, orientation to the Eastern type of culture, geographical location, active economic contacts with China and consistent development of higher education – all these give good prospects for the development of a specialized system of Chinese language teaching. However, the data presented in the study show that now the situation with Chinese language education and popularization of Chinese culture in the ethnic region is very complicated, there are many problems to be solved further. One of the most attractive ways to solve these problems could be the opening of the Center for Chinese Language and Culture on the basis of Ufa University of Science and Technology in cooperation with Liaoning University (PRC), which can provide the necessary resources and programs for Chinese language education, including teaching and practice in the framework of “Chinese + Professional Skills”.

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