

ПЕРСПЕКТИВЫ И ТРУДНОСТИ ПРЕПОДАВАНИЯ КИТАЙСКОГО ЯЗЫКА В УЧРЕЖДЕНИЯХ ОБЩЕГО СРЕДНЕГО ОБРАЗОВАНИЯ (НА ПРИМЕРЕ БЕЛАРУСИ)

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Аннотация. Рассмотрено развитие преподавания китайского языка как иностранного в Беларуси в контексте углубляющегося белорусско-китайского стратегического партнерства. Проанализированы особенности распространения практики преподавания китайского языка в Беларуси, выявлены перспективы и трудности, влияющие на его устойчивость и развитие.

Ключевые слова: преподавание китайского языка; китайский язык в Беларуси; белорусско-китайское образовательное сотрудничество; белорусско-китайские отношения; языковая политика.

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OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES OF INTERNATIONAL CHINESE LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN GENERAL SECONDARY EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS (CASE OF BELARUS)

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Abstract. This article examines the development of international Chinese language education in Belarus in the context of the deepening Belarusian-Chinese strategic partnership. Key characteristics of international Chinese language education in Belarus are analysed, and prospects and challenges affecting its sustainability and development are identified.

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Introduction

Bilateral relations between China and Belarus have reached unprecedented levels, marked by an all-weather comprehensive strategic partnership that spans various sectors, including education, trade, tourism, cultural exchanges, and cooperation in science and technology. Currently, approximately 1200 Belarusian citizens are pursuing academic studies in China, while over 11 000 Chinese citizens are enrolled in educational institutions in Belarus. During the 2023/24 academic year, educational institutions in both countries successfully implemented more than 40 collaborative educational programmes. To date, a total of 714 direct cooperation agreements have been concluded between Chinese and Belarusian institutions of higher education¹.

The growing demand for Chinese language professionals is creating new opportunities for the development of international Chinese language education (ICLE) in Belarus. In 2015, the Chinese language was included in the Belarusian Centralised Testing and National Primary and Secondary School Olympiad. In 2017, the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus approved the Strategy for the Development of the System of Studying and Teaching the Chinese Language in the Republic of Belarus for

2017–2022². In 2018, the Chinese language was incorporated into the National Belarusian University Olympiad. In 2023, representatives from 40 Chinese universities and 41 Belarusian universities signed the Agreement on the Establishment of the Chinese-Belarusian University Union³. In 2024, the Republican Public Association of Chinese Language Teachers was established to promote the Chinese language and culture not only among students but also among the broader Belarusian community⁴. In 2025, the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus approved the Strategy for Teaching and Learning the Chinese Language in Educational Institutions of the Republic of Belarus for 2025–2030⁵. All these initiatives signify that Belarus has officially integrated the Chinese language into its national education system, gaining recognition and support from both the government and the public.

The article adopts a macro perspective to examine the overall development of ICLE in Belarus. It provides a historical account of the development and current status of ICLE, identifies key characteristics of its growth. The exploration of opportunities and challenges in this context aims to offer valuable insights for the high-quality and sustainable advancement of ICLE in Belarus.

Characteristics of ICLE development in Belarus

Rapid development of ICLE. ICLE in Belarus originated at Belarusian State University of Foreign Languages (BSUFL). In 1993, its faculty of translation enrolled the first group of Chinese language translators. In 2001, the faculty of philology at Belarusian State University (BSU) admitted the first group of students training to become Chinese language teachers. The second intake occurred in 2006, and since then, BSU has been enrolling students majoring in oriental (Chinese) philology annually. In 2006, the faculty of English at BSUFL enrolled its first cohort of Chinese language teachers.

Prior to 2013, the faculty of translation and the faculty of English at BSUFL admitted students majoring in Chinese translation or teaching only once every five years. However, since 2013, these faculties have transitioned to annual enrollments, significantly increasing the number of students. In the same year, the faculty of intercultural communications at BSUFL also admitted its first group of students specialising in intercultural communication with a focus on Chinese. On 1 January 2018, the faculty of Chinese language and culture was established at BSUFL, underscoring the growing

¹Kononovich E., Konoga P., Kryat D., Tselyuk A., Osipov M. Model examples of cooperation. Important accents and results of Lukashenko's intensive international meetings // Belarus segodnya : website. URL: <https://www.sb.by/articles/obraztsovyie-primery-sotrudnichestva-vazhnye-aktsenty-i-itogi-nasyshchennykh-mezhdunarodnykh-vstrech-.html> (date of access: 13.04.2025) (in Russ.).

²On approval of the strategy for the development of the system of studying and teaching the Chinese language in the Republic of Belarus for 2017–2022 [Electronic resource] : Order of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus, 26 Oct. 2017, No. 648 // Normativka.by. URL: <https://normativka.by/lib/document/73340> (date of access: 19.04.2025) (in Russ.).

³Belarus and China signed an agreement on the creation of an association of universities // BelTA : website. URL: <https://belta.by/society/view/belarus-i-kitaj-podpisali-soglasenie-o-sozdanii-assotsiatsii-universitetov-600861-2023/?ysclid=m9nxv7r4b15572430> (date of access: 19.04.2025) (in Russ.).

⁴The Republican Public Association of Chinese Language Teachers has begun its work // BelTA : website. URL: <https://belta.by/society/view/respublikanskoe-obschestvennoe-objedinenie-prepodavatelej-kitajskogo-jazyka-nachalo-rabotu-641755-2024/?ysclid=m9nyef5e1v795289844> (date of access: 19.04.2025) (in Russ.).

⁵The winners of the global competition «Chinese Bridge» were awarded at BSUPC // Belarus segodnya : website. URL: <https://www.sb.by/articles/pobediteley-vsemirnogo-konkursa-most-kitajskogo-jazyka-nagrady-v-bgufl.html?ysclid=mhx9x7h0gz991734540> (date of access: 01.09.2025) (in Russ.).

significance of Chinese in Belarusian education. By the 2022/23 academic year, 12 universities in Belarus were offering Chinese-related majors, with nearly 2000 students studying Chinese. Among them, seven universities offered Chinese as a first foreign language⁶.

The initiative to introduce Chinese into Belarusian general secondary education institutions was spearheaded by A. Tozik, former Belarusian ambassador to China (2006–2010) and current (since 2016) principal of the Republican Confucius Institute of Sinology (RCIS BSU). In 2006, Minsk Gymnasium No. 12, Minsk Gymnasium No. 23, and Minsk School No. 10 began offering compulsory Chinese classes for primary pupils. Following the

implementation of the Strategy for the Development of the System of Studying and Teaching the Chinese Language in the Republic of Belarus for 2017–2022, the number of general secondary education institutions offering Chinese classes increased significantly. By the 2023/24 academic year, 46 secondary education institutions were offering compulsory Chinese classes, 56 institutions were offering optional Chinese classes, and 58 institutions were providing Chinese as an extracurricular interest-based subject. The trend over the years shows that the number of pupils learning Chinese as a compulsory subject in general secondary education institutions grew from 200 in 2010 to 1900 in 2023⁷ (fig. 1).

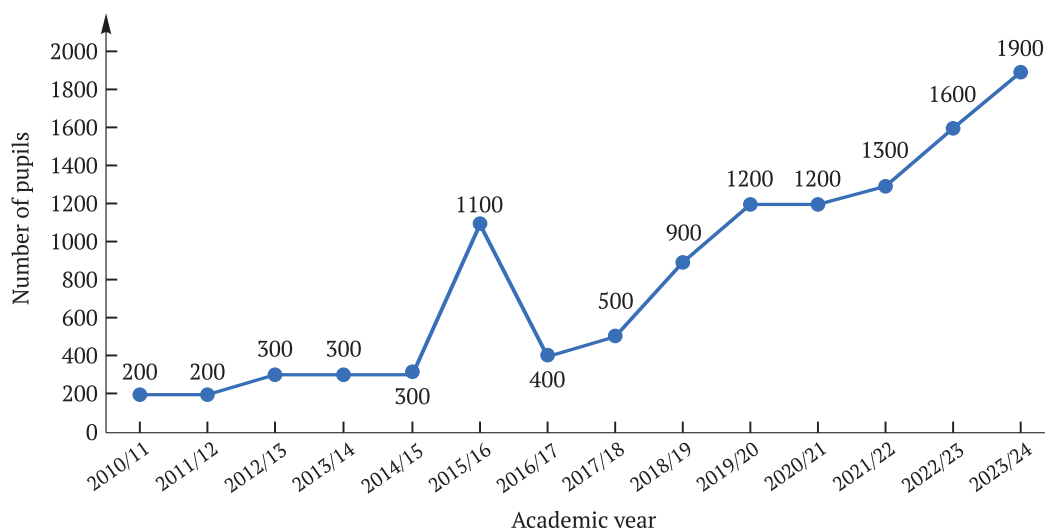


Fig. 1. Distribution of pupils taking compulsory Chinese classes in Belarusian general secondary education institutions by academic year

Specifically, in the 2023/24 academic year, there were 1921 pupils in Belarus taking compulsory Chinese classes (17 of whom were studying Chinese as a second foreign language), 2127 pupils taking optional Chinese classes, and 2068 pupils taking Chinese classes of interest, for a total of 6116 pupils. The largest concentration of Chinese language learners is in the capital, Minsk, and the Minsk region, accounting for about half of the total number of pupils (fig. 2).

Chinese as a school subject. In 2009, to ensure the uniformity of disciplines and subject content, the Ministry

of Education of the Republic of Belarus included Chinese in the Learning standard for foreign languages in grades 3–11 of general secondary education⁸. In the 2012/13 academic year, Chinese was incorporated into the Unified curriculum for grades 3–11 in general secondary education institutions [1, p. 158]. By the 2015/16 academic year, the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus completed the compilation of the first generation of domestic Chinese language textbooks, titled «Chinese». This set of textbooks marked a significant milestone in the development of Chinese as a school subject in Belarus.

⁶Kurak A. Why more attention should be paid to the popularisation of Sinology // Belarus segodnya : website. URL: <https://www.sb.by/articles/ieroglif-klyuch-k-uspekhu.html> (date of access: 19.04.2025) (in Russ.).

⁷Medvedeva I. V., Kangro I. S., Vasilevskaya Zh. N., Kukharevich E. I., Molodtsov O. E., Palkovskaya E. M. Education in the Republic of Belarus [Electronic resource] : short data book. Minsk : Natl. Statistical Comm. of the Repub. of Belarus, 2015. URL: https://www.belstat.gov.by/ofitsialnaya-statistika/publications/izdania/public_compilation/index_3461/?sphrase_id=2186109 (date of access: 13.04.2025) (in Russ.); Medvedeva I. V., Kangro I. S., Vasilevskaya Zh. N., Dovnar O. A., Kukharevich E. I., Palkovskaya E. M. Education in the Republic of Belarus [Electronic resource] : short data book. Minsk : Natl. Statistical Comm. of the Repub. of Belarus, 2017. URL: https://www.belstat.gov.by/ofitsialnaya-statistika/publications/izdania/public_compilation/index_7498/?sphrase_id=2186109 (date of access: 13.04.2025) (in Russ.); Medvedeva I. V., Kangro I. S., Vasilevskaya Zh. N., Dovnar O. A., Kukharevich E. I. Education in the Republic of Belarus [Electronic resource] : short data book. Minsk : Natl. Statistical Comm. of the Repub. of Belarus, 2019. URL: https://www.belstat.gov.by/ofitsialnaya-statistika/publications/izdania/public_compilation/index_13888/?sphrase_id=2186109 (date of access: 13.04.2025) (in Russ.); Medvedeva I. V., Kukharevich E. I., Vasilevskaya Zh. N., Dovnar O. A., Tarasyuk N. V., Lapkovskaya T. V. Education in the Republic of Belarus [Electronic resource] : short data book. Minsk : Natl. Statistical Comm. of the Repub. of Belarus, 2021. URL: https://www.belstat.gov.by/ofitsialnaya-statistika/publications/izdania/public_brochures/index_41468/?sphrase_id=2186109 (date of access: 13.04.2025) (in Russ.).

⁸Educational standard «General secondary education. Foreign language grades III–XI» [Electronic resource]. URL: https://psv4.userapi.com/s/v1/d/rN15m0vQZPvNR9VK-63GDx-ykHDCz-99KLbmdIe2qOu2rX3ZGboQ4Mc8Fktd2NfDZ2qXVd3rVbrGLpLa_bHfgDgEWZqJJOSL26RJC4KEE8pqx7rX/Obrazovatelny_Standart_Obschee_Srednee_Obrazovanie_Inostranny_Yazyk_III_KhI_Klasy.pdf (date of access: 19.04.2025) (in Russ.).

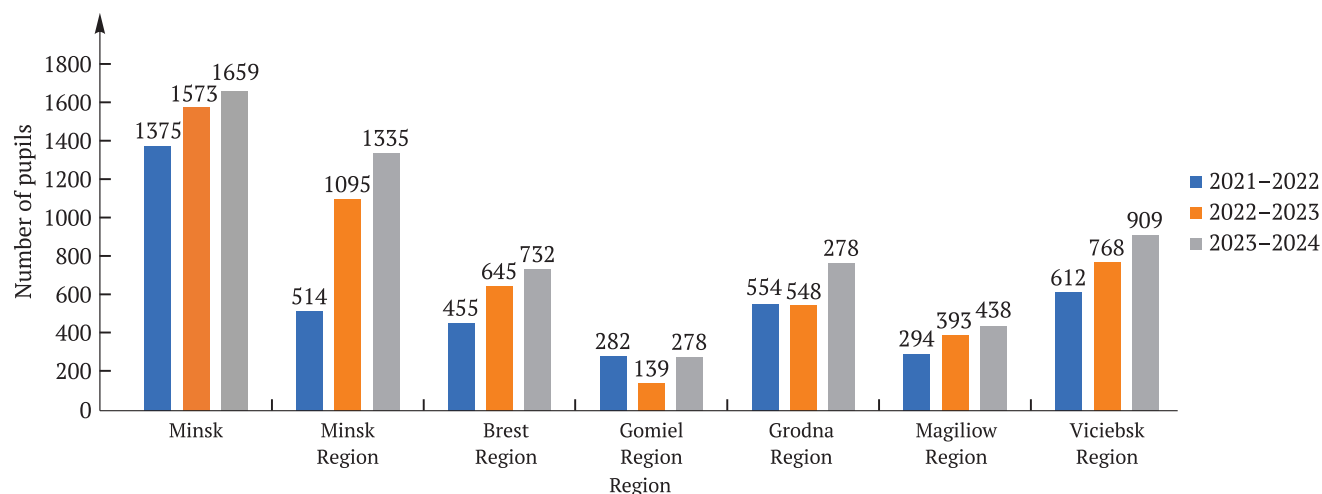


Fig. 2. Distribution of pupils taking Chinese (as a subject or through electives, clubs and interest groups) classes in Belarusian general secondary education institutions by region

In 2017, the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus standardised the teaching of Chinese as a second foreign language in general education institutions and released the Syllabus for Elective Courses (Chinese) in General Secondary Education Institutions Teaching in Russian and Belarusian. By 2020, the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus had published additional syllabi, including Syllabus for Elective Courses «Foreign Language Introduction (Chinese)» in Grades 1–2, Syllabus for Elective Courses (Chinese) in Grades 3–11, Syllabus for Elective Courses «Reading Workshop (Chinese)» in Grades 5–6, Syllabus for Elective Courses «Culture of Verbal Communication (Chinese)» in Grades 7–8, and Syllabus for Elective Courses «Workshop on Verbal Communication (Chinese)» in Grade 9.

In 2023, the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus issued the second edition of the syllabi «Foreign Languages (English, German, French, Spanish, Chinese) for Russian- and Belarusian-speaking General Secondary Education Institutions» for Grades 3–4, Grades 5–9 (Basic and Advanced Levels), and Grades 10–11 (Basic and Advanced Levels)⁹. This further solidified the inclusion of the Chinese language in the national education system. These syllabi defined general provisions,

course content, main learning outcomes, and standardised the teaching of Chinese as a first foreign language. The Specifications for the Centralised Testing and Examination of foreign languages (Chinese), published in 2023, outlined the exam structure, number of tasks, task types, difficulty levels, exam duration, the vocabulary, grammar, socio-cultural competencies, and reading skills students are expected to master for university entrance exams.

At the same time, the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus requires that at least 20–25 % of students at all levels of educational institutions learn Chinese (50–55 % learn English, and 25–30 % learn Spanish, French, or German). This implies that a minimum of 200 000 students enrolled in general secondary education institutions will be mandated to undertake compulsory Chinese language courses in the future [2, p. 11].

High level of localisation of Chinese language teachers. In the 2023/24 academic year, there were 164 Chinese language teachers in general secondary education institutions in Belarus, 133 of whom were local teachers (81.1 %), while 31 were teachers from China (table 1). Among the 133 local teachers, 64 graduated from the Chinese language teacher retraining programme.

Table 1

Distribution of Chinese language teachers teaching in general secondary education institutions of Belarus in the 2023/24 academic year by region

Region name	Number of local teachers	Number of teachers from China	Total
Minsk	38	8	46
Minsk Region	34	9	43
Brest Region	9	8	17
Gomel Region	15	0	15
Grodna Region	13	1	14

⁹Chinese // National educational Internet portal. URL: <https://adu.by/ru/homeru/obrazovatelnyj-protsess/obshchee-srednee-obrazovanie/uchebnye-predmety-v-xi-klassy/kitajskij-yazyk.html> (date of access: 19.04.2025) (in Russ.).

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Region name	Number of local teachers	Number of teachers from China	Total
Magiliow Region	9	0	9
Viciebsk Region	15	5	20
Total	133	31	164

In 2018, RCIS BSU launched a retraining programme for Chinese teachers in general secondary, secondary specialised, and higher education institutions. The programme spans 22 months, totaling 4200 hours, and is designed to meet the demand for qualified Chinese teachers in Belarusian educational institutions. The retraining programme only accepts teachers with higher education and teaching experience who are currently employed in educational institutions in Belarus. Upon completing the two-year course, teachers can generally pass Chinese Proficiency Test HSK Level 4 or Level 5 and obtain a national diploma, qualifying them as Chinese language teachers¹⁰. In 2020, 13 specialists com-

pleted the retraining program. In 2021, the number increased to 24, followed by 22 in both 2022 and 2023, and 27 in 2024.

Additionally, on 17 June 2024, the constituent assembly of the Republican Public Association of Chinese Language Teachers was held at BSUFL. The primary goal of the association is to unite the growing number of Chinese language teachers in Belarus. It aims to develop effective methods for teaching Chinese as a foreign language and to promote Chinese language and culture not only among students but also within the broader Belarusian community. The association included 50 school and university teachers.

Development opportunities for ICLE in Belarus

Continuous deepening of mutually beneficial and pragmatic cooperation across various fields.

On 20 January 1992, China and Belarus formally established diplomatic relations. Over the past 33 years, Belarusian-Chinese political relations have steadily progressed, with bilateral relations upgraded four times: from «friendly and cooperative relations» to a «comprehensive strategic partnership», then to a «comprehensive strategic partnership featuring mutual trust and win-win cooperation», and finally to an «all-weather comprehensive strategic partnership» (15 September 2022).

In the economic sphere, pragmatic cooperation between China and Belarus in industry, agriculture, trade, and investment continues to advance. According to data from the Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China, bilateral trade volume between China and Belarus has increased from 60.8 mln US dollars at the start of diplomatic relations to about 5.08 bln US dollars in 2022. From January to November 2023 alone, bilateral trade volume reached 7.677 bln US dollars, a year-on-year increase of 69.2 %. China's exports to Belarus amounted to 5.277 bln US dollars, a year-on-year increase of 83.8 %, while China's imports from

Belarus totaled 2.340 bln US dollars, a year-on-year increase of 44.0 %¹¹. In the educational sector, the value of educational services exported to China reached 34.8 mln US dollars, representing a 146 % increase compared to 2022¹².

Additionally, several joint projects have been launched, including the China-Belarus industrial park «Great Stone» (2012), Beijing hotel (2014), the Belarusian-Chinese joint venture «Automobile manufacturing company *BelGee*» (2017), Svetlogorsk Pulp and Board Mill (2020), Belarusian National Biotechnology Corporation (2022), and the National Football Stadium and Swimming Pool of International Standard (2024).

In 2018, the news agency *Sputnik* published an article titled «What foreign language employees are missing in Belarus?». The article analysed the number of vacancies for foreign language experts on Belarusian job search websites (table 2)¹³. With increasingly close cooperation and exchanges between China and Belarus, the urgent demand for Chinese language experts in Belarus has risen rapidly, providing positive momentum for the rapid development of ICLE in Belarus.

¹⁰Training courses for Chinese language teachers for general secondary, secondary specialised and higher education institutions // Republican Confucius Institute of Sinology of Belarusian State University : website. URL: <https://rci.bsu.by/education-ru/teacher-course-ru/chineses-program-ru.html> (date of access: 19.04.2025) (in Russ.).

¹¹Brief introduction of China-Belarus economic and trade cooperation from January to November 2023 // Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China : website. URL: https://by.mofcom.gov.cn/zbhz/hzjj/art/2023/art_53bfcec485774ec8ae58e62e8e29b826.html (date of access: 13.04.2025) (in Chin.).

¹²Kononovich E., Konoga P., Kryat D., Tselyuk A., Osipov M. Model examples of cooperation. Important highlights and results of Lukashenko's intensive international meetings // Belarus segodnya : website. URL: <https://www.sb.by/articles/obraztsovyie-primery-sotrudnichestva-vazhnye-aktsenty-i-itogi-nasyshchennykh-mezhdunarodnykh-vstrech.html> (date of access: 13.04.2025) (in Russ.).

¹³What foreign language skills are in short supply among workers in Belarus? // Sputnik : website. URL: <https://sputnik.by/20181114/Rabotnikov-s-kakimi-inostrannymi-yazykami-ne-khvataet-v-Belarusi-1038648835.html> (date of access: 13.04.2025) (in Russ.).

Table 2

**Total number of vacancies
for foreign language experts on Belarusian
job search websites in 2018**

Foreign languages, knowledge of which is required from a specialist	Number of vacancies
Chinese	2184
English	484
Lithuanian	21
German	18
Latvian	16
Polish	13
French	5
Persian	3
Japanese	3
Czech	1
Hindi	1

China and Belarus have jointly designated 2024 and 2025 as years of scientific and technological innovation and will continue to expand bilateral cooperation in these areas. Therefore, there is a need for more individuals who not only master Chinese but also have expertise in relevant fields [3].

Strong mutual recognition and understanding between the peoples of China and Belarus. From 6 to 15 April 2015, the Information and Analysis Center under the President of the Republic of Belarus conducted a nationwide sociological survey of the adult population of Belarus (aged 18 and above). The sample size was 1005 respondents. According to the results, 72 % of Belarusians believe that China is a friendly country to Belarus. Additionally, 61 % of Belarusians are willing to work, study, or live with Chinese people. Furthermore, 72.5 % of Belarusians have a positive attitude towards temporary residents from China, such as students and workers, and 76.0 % of Belarusians under the age of 30 prefer closer cross-cultural exchanges with the Chinese¹⁴.

Belarus is positively evaluated by the Chinese people in many aspects: it is seen as a peaceful, clean, and hospitable country with order and discipline, a country that serves the people [4]. Although the two countries have many differences, such as in population, territory, and history, the people share many similarities in character: respect for the elderly, valuing family, and prioritising collective interests over personal ones. In the collection «Chinese people's views on Belarus», Zhao Chunchao, vice president of *China Great Wall Industry Corporation*, stated: «The Belarusian people I have seen are a great

nation: determined, hardworking, careful, conscientious, dedicated, and they keep their promises»¹⁵ [5, p. 203].

On 10 August 2018, the mutual visa exemption agreement between China and Belarus officially came into effect. Under this agreement, Chinese citizens holding ordinary passports can enter Belarus without a visa for tourism, business, visiting relatives, and other activities. The implementation of this mutual visa exemption will further promote exchanges between the peoples of the two countries.

Ongoing transformation and enhancement of Belarusian-Chinese educational cooperation. The cooperation in the field of education between China and Belarus is founded on a series of treaties and legal frameworks. The basic document is the Agreement on Cultural Cooperation Between the Government of the People's Republic of China and the Government of the Republic of Belarus, signed in Beijing in November 1992. In December 1996, S. Ling, prime minister of Belarus (1996–2000), visited China, and the two countries signed the 1997–2000 Cooperation Agreement Between the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Belarus and the State Education Commission of the People's Republic of China. In October 1998, V. Strazhev, minister of education of the Republic of Belarus (1994–2001), visited China, and the education ministers of China and Belarus signed the first Agreement Between the Government of the People's Republic of China and the Government of the Republic of Belarus on Mutual Recognition of Degrees, committing to maintaining and further developing academic exchanges. In May 2000, Zhili Chen, minister of education of the People's

¹⁴China is a friendly country for Belarusians // BelTA : website. URL: <https://belta.by/infographica/view/kitaj-druzhestvennaja-dlja-belorusov-strana-133/?ysclid=lskdw4fju9827297420ю> (date of access: 13.04.2025) (in Russ.).

¹⁵Here and further translated by us. – K. H., M. D., M. O.

Republic of China (1998–2003), visited Belarus and signed the 2001–2005 Education Cooperation Agreement Between the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China and the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus. In response to the growing demand for Chinese language specialists in Belarus, the number of Belarusian students studying in Chinese universities increased from 10 to 15 each year. In July 2000, China and Belarus signed the second Agreement Between the Government of the People's Republic of China and the Government of the Republic of Belarus on Mutual Recognition of Degrees, whereby China and Belarus mutually recognised bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees from both countries. In December 2005, the ministries of education of both countries reached the 2006–2010 Education Cooperation Agreement Between the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China and the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus, which increased the total number of scholarship students on both sides from 15 to 20 each year. In October 2006, Guocheng Zhao, deputy director-general of the Confucius Institute Headquarters and deputy director of the Chinese Language Council International (2005–2011), held friendly talks with A. Tozik, ambassador of Belarus to China (2006–2010). The two sides signed the Agreement on Cooperation in the Field of Chinese Language Teaching, which came into effect in November 2006. In September 2009, the State Administration of Foreign Experts Affairs of China signed a cooperation agreement with the Ministry of Education of Belarus on vocational training, professional training, internships, retraining, and expert exchange [6].

Since 2013, with the proposal of the Belt and Road Initiative and the launch of the China-Belarusian Industrial Park project, cooperation in education between the two countries has significantly accelerated. Notable milestones include the meeting of the education cooperation Subcommittee of the China-Belarus Intergovernmental Cooperation Committee (since 2015), the Agreement Between the Government of the People's Republic of China and the Government of the Republic of Belarus on Cooperation in the Field of Education (May 2015), the Memorandum of Understanding on Joint Training of Talents Between the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China and the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Belarus (September 2016), and the Agreement Between the Government of the People's Republic of China and the Government of the Republic of Belarus on Mutual Recognition of Academic Qualifications and Degrees (May 2019).

In 2016, the Chinese Embassy in Belarus established the Chinese Ambassador Scholarship to foster cooperation between Belarus and China, encourage outstanding students, and support their interest in learning the Chinese language and culture. Three years later, the ministries of education of China and Belarus jointly designated 2019 as the Chinese-Belarusian Education Year,

creating more opportunities for educational development in both countries. On 21 November 2023, at the founding ceremony and presidents' forum of the first China-Belarusian Association of Universities, representatives from 40 Chinese universities and 41 Belarusian universities signed the Agreement on the establishment of the China-Belarusian Association of Universities. On 4 July 2024, the 24th Meeting of the council of heads of state of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation concluded with the signing of a resolution by the leaders of the member states, formally admitting the Republic of Belarus as a member state¹⁶. This development is expected to further strengthen and deepen bilateral cooperation between China and Belarus in key areas, including education.

Inclusion of Chinese in university entrance exams and various academic competitions at both school and university levels. In 2015, Chinese was added to the Belarusian Centralised Testing (in 2015, the number of applicants was 10, in 2016 – 14, in 2017 – 45, in 2018 – 37). Prior to this, students could take university entrance exams in four foreign languages: English, French, German, and Italian. The inclusion of Chinese as an entry exam not only expanded language choices for students but also reflected the growing prominence of Chinese in Belarus. Chinese was added to the National Belarusian Primary and Secondary School Olympiad as well in the same year. Undoubtedly, the early exposure to Chinese through the Olympiad aims to build a strong foundation for linguistic skills and cultural awareness. By 2018, Chinese had become a subject in the National Belarusian University Olympiad (in 2018, the number of applicants was 130, in 2019 – 149, in 2020 – 95, in 2021 – 109, in 2022 – 87, in 2023 – 120, in 2024 – 95). Adding Chinese to university-level contests emphasises its value in higher education and motivates students to learn the Chinese language at higher levels. The decision also signifies the strategic relevance of Chinese in global economic and diplomatic relations, preparing students to engage in international affairs with a proper understanding of China and the Chinese language.

To sum up, these initiatives signify that Belarus has officially integrated Chinese into its national education system, receiving recognition and support from both the government and the public. Including Chinese in the Centralised Testing and academic competitions at both school and university levels will cultivate high language proficiency, promote the spread of the Chinese language, culture, and history among students, and elevate the status of Chinese. Moreover, the move will equip students with better chances of success in the global workforce, where knowing Chinese is rapidly emerging as an indispensable quality. Through embracing ICLE within its national curriculum, Belarus is not merely opening its children's eyes to the wider world but also entrenching the cultural and economic bond it has with China for a closer, win-win future.

¹⁶Belarus became a member of the SCO // BelTA : website. URL: <https://belta.by/politics/view/belarus-stala-chlenom-shos-645532-2024/> (date of access: 19.04.2025) (in Russ.).

Challenges of ICLE in Belarus

Low status of the teaching profession in Belarus.

In August 2024, during the Nationwide Teaching Conference, A. Ivanets, minister of education of the Republic of Belarus, read out a report on the state and development opportunities for the Belarusian national education system. Speaking in his report about one of the key issues, he pointed out the low prestige of the teaching profession in Belarus. The minister emphasised that the true value of the teaching profession needs to be restored, including increasing its prestige in society¹⁷.

According to UNESCO recommendations on the status of teachers, the salaries of teachers should be propor-

tionate to the importance of the teaching profession, and consequently of the teachers themselves, to the community, and to the other duties incumbent upon them upon entering the teaching profession; the salaries of teachers should take into account the fact that certain positions require higher qualifications, greater experience, and greater responsibility¹⁸. However, irrespective of the subject taught, the salaries of Belarusian teachers are generally less competitive than those in other professions (table 3)¹⁹ [7]. People who possess foreign language skills are able to secure better-paid work as translators, guides, tutors, or assistant managers in the IT or logistics sectors.

Table 3

**Median wages of Belarusian workers
by type of economic activity for May 2024**

Economic activity	Median wages, Belarusian ruble
Information and communication	3065.4
Finance and insurance	2247.8
Construction	2138.0
Industry	1925.6
Professional, scientific and technical activities	1885.9
Transportation, warehousing, postal and courier activities	1871.9
Real estate activities	1671.3
Agriculture, forestry and fisheries	1576.4
Wholesale and retail trade; repair of cars and motorcycles	1565.1
Health and social care	1401.1
Temporary accommodation and food services	1368.9
Administrative and support service activities	1341.2
Education	1250.0
Arts, sports, entertainment, and recreation	1099.2

The portrayal of the teaching profession in Belarusian media frequently focuses on the non-monetary aspects of the vocation²⁰. Consequently, some parents, influenced by current salary levels, may view teaching as a secondary option for those pursuing other career paths. This perspective can also shape how the profession is perceived by their children.

Moreover, the rewards of superior teacher performance do not always correlate with the vast amount of

time and effort invested. Attaining a competitive wage may require extra work, such as administrative duties, teaching electives and extracurricular activities, mentoring students for subject Olympiads, and delivering excellent results. Teachers are also required to keep in touch with parents and pupils, conduct home visits, and assess the living conditions of students. As a result, some of the novice teachers will be inclined to pursue other careers.

¹⁷Nationwide Conference on Teaching // Press Service of the President of the Republic of Belarus : website. URL: <https://president.gov.by/en/events/ucastie-v-respublikanskom-pedagogiceskom-sovete-1724766419> (date of access: 13.04.2025) (in Russ.).

¹⁸The 1966 UNESCO/ILO Recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers and the 1997 UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel // All-Russian Trade Union of Education : website. URL: <https://www.esur.ru/Files/rekomendacii196645542.pdf?ysclid=m9o7vili7e97889192> (date of access: 13.04.2025) (in Russ.).

¹⁹Median wages of Belarusian workers by type of economic activity // National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus : website. URL: <https://www.belstat.gov.by/ofitsialnaya-statistika/realny-sektor-ekonomiki/stoimost-rabochey-sily/operativnyedannye/mediannaya-zarabotnaya-plata-rabotnikov-respubliki-belarus-po-vidam-ekonomicheskoy-deyatelnosti/> (date of access: 10.09.2025) (in Russ.).

²⁰There can be no random people in this profession. A teacher is a calling // Belteleradiocompany : website. URL: https://news.by/news/obshchestvo/v_etoy_professii_ne_mozhet_byt_lyudey_sluchaynykh_uchitel_eto_prizvanie (date of access: 19.04.2025) (in Russ.).

Limited awareness of China’s social development in the new era and the persistent stereotype that Chinese is difficult to learn. China and Belarus have enjoyed 33 years of friendly cooperation up to 2025. Against the backdrop of the Belt and Road Initiative and the all-weather comprehensive strategic partnership, the mutual exchange and cooperation between China and Belarus in numerous areas have become much deeper. However, there remains a significant lack of information among some Belarusians concerning the social development of China in the new era.

First, a number of the Belarusians are unaware that China has eradicated poverty, and the standard of living of the general people is ever increasing. Rapid urban development has also taken place, and today, China is not only known for producing affordable goods but also high-quality products. Second, many Belarusians remain unclear about the opportunities to study in China, particularly the fact that China is home to top-tier universities offering scholarships to students from around the world. Finally, the general belief that studying abroad is too expensive holds back the majority of Belarusians. As regards contemplating China as a place of study, they would most likely consider the Chinese language as an insurmountable hurdle, and would prefer to study in English-speaking countries.

Founder of the Chinese language and culture center «Teacher Wei’s Chinese School» at the Confucius In-

stitute for Science and Technology V. Shneiderova has highlighted three primary concerns voiced by Belarusian parents: 1) uncertainty about their children’s future prospects; 2) difficulties in finding qualified Chinese teachers; 3) the perceived complexity of learning Chinese (particularly the large number of characters, word meanings, and tones) which leads many to believe that it is too difficult for foreigners to master the language. These three concerns further confirm the points made earlier.

Uneven development of ICLE across Belarus.

In 2017, the RCIS BSU and BSUFL jointly developed the Strategy for the development of the system of studying and teaching the Chinese language in the Republic of Belarus for 2017–2022. This strategy was approved by the Ministry of Education through Order No. 648 on October 26 of the same year. It specifically set the goal of increasing the number of students studying Chinese as a compulsory subject to 4,000 by 2022. From the 2017/18 academic year to the 2021/22 academic year, the number of pupils enrolled in compulsory Chinese language classes in general secondary education institutions increased from 500 to 1325. However, a key issue emerged: most of the schools offering Chinese language instruction are located in Minsk or the Minsk Region (table 4), which collectively represent only 37.71 % of the total population of Belarus (3 453 151 out of 9 155 978 people as of 2024²¹).

Table 4

Number of general secondary education institutions offering Chinese language classes in each region of Belarus in the 2023/24 academic year

Region name	Compulsory Chinese classes	Optional Chinese classes	Interest-based Chinese classes	Total
Minsk	12	6	19	37
Minsk Region	12	17	12	41
Brest Region	5	9	7	21
Gomel Region	3	7	3	13
Grodna Region	6	10	4	20
Magiliow Region	2	3	5	10
Viciebsk Region	6	4	8	18
Total	46	56	58	160

Consequently, most learners are also concentrated in Minsk or the Minsk Region. For example, in the 2021/22 academic year, out of the 1325 pupils in Belarus who took compulsory Chinese courses, 662 (49.96 %) were located in Minsk and the Minsk Region. In the 2022/23 academic year, out of the 1645 pupils, 760 (46.2 %) were in Minsk or the Minsk Region. In the 2023/24 academic year, out of the 1921 pupils, 868 (45.18 %) were again in Minsk or the Minsk Region. This concentration in Minsk and its region highlights a significant challenge in the promotion and uneven development of ICLE across Bela-

rus. While the capital and its region benefit from better resources, other regions lag in access to ICLE. The rural and less densely populated areas are particularly disadvantaged, lacking qualified teachers and sufficient educational resources to support the growth of ICLE.

Shortage and unequal distribution of Chinese language teachers. In the 2023/24 academic year, there were 164 Chinese language teachers in Belarus, with 89 (approximately 54.27 %) concentrated in Minsk and the Minsk region. Additionally, the Chinese teaching staff in many schools was relatively small, with some loca-

²¹Population as of 1 January 2024 by region and the city of Minsk // National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus : website. URL: https://www.belstat.gov.by/ofitsialnaya-statistika/ssrd-mvf_2/natsionalnaya-stranitsa-svodnyh-dannyh/naselenie_6/chislennost-naseleniya1_yan_poobl/ (date of access: 13.04.2025) (in Russ.).

tions having only one teacher responsible for multiple schools.

Five years ago, students and parents were not sufficiently motivated to study Chinese, but this issue has since been resolved, further exacerbating the shortage of teachers. At the 2022 Republican scientific and practical conference «Chinese Language in the Educational Space of the Republic of Belarus», A. Tozik no-

ted: «Among ten graduates of BSU and BSUFL, only two to three choose to work in general secondary education institutions, while these institutions need more than 2000 Chinese language teachers» [2, p. 12]. This concern, raised by A. Tozik, remains valid: in the 2023/24 academic year, only 38 graduates from BSUFL and 12 graduates from BSU were engaged in teaching Chinese in Belarus (table 5).

Table 5

Educational level of local Chinese language teachers who taught in Belarusian general secondary education institutions in the 2023/24 academic year

Name of educational institution	Number of teachers
RCIS BSU (Chinese language teacher retraining programme)	64
BSUFL	38
BSU	12
Yanka Kupala State University of Grodno	5
Belarusian State Pedagogical University named after Maxim Tank	4
Confucius Institute at Francisk Skorina Gomel State University	3
Joint Institute of Dalian University of Technology and Belarusian State University	3
Vitebsk State University named after P. M. Masherov	1
Saint Petersburg State University	1
Lanzhou University	1
Anshan Teachers College	1
<i>Total</i>	<i>133</i>

There is a severe shortage of Chinese language teachers in general secondary education institutions in Belarus. It is evident that this issue will not be resolved in the next five to ten years by graduates from BSUFL, BSU, or other Belarusian universities, as many of these graduates resign within two years of employment, and some even decline school positions altogether. This trend is likely due to the low status of teachers in Belarus, as discussed above.

Errors and lack of China-related content in domestic Chinese language textbooks. By the 2015/16 aca-

demic year, two Belarusian publishing houses, «Education and upbringing» and «Higher school», had published domestic textbooks titled «Chinese» (fig. 3). The textbooks for grades 3 to 8 are divided into two volumes, while those for grades 9 to 11 consist of a single volume. However, due to the tight publishing schedule, several issues have arisen: pinyin errors, grammatical mistakes, mismatches between some pictures and the content of the exercises, incorrect tasks in some exercises, and outdated information [8].



Fig. 3. The domestic textbook «Chinese» used by general secondary education institutions in Belarus

Any foreign language learning textbook should include essential components such as student textbooks, teacher manuals, exercise books, and audio materials. Currently, the Belarusian domestic Chinese learning textbooks include only student textbooks, audio materials, and writing skills exercise books (for grades 3 to 5). Moreover, the Belarusian domestic textbooks «Chinese» were designed for 5 hours of instruction per week. However, in general secondary education institutions, teachers often have only 2–3 hours per week to teach the subject, making it impossible to cover the entire content [8, p. 23]. As a result, teachers may skip important topics and lack time to adequately develop and improve pupils' writing skills. Additionally, the Belarusian general curriculum stipulates that pupils should be exposed to foreign folk tales, fairy tales, fables, novels, and dramas. However, from elementary school through high school, Belarusian domestic textbooks contain very little China-related content.

Overall, the lack of comprehensive and engaging content, coupled with the errors and omissions in the learning materials, presents significant challenges for both teachers and pupils. Improving the quality and breadth of these materials is essential for enhancing the effectiveness of ICLE in Belarus.

Teachers' limited proficiency in the Chinese language. In December 2017, during the 3rd Scientific and practical conference of Chinese language teachers in the Republic of Belarus, titled «The state and prospects of teaching Chinese in Belarus», A. Tozik noted that many participants in the Chinese language teacher retraining programme would be prepared to teach third-grade pupils while continuing their own Chinese studies alongside them [9, p. 4]. By the 2023/24 academic year, 48.12 % of Belarusian local Chinese language teachers were graduates of the retraining programme. These teachers completed a 22-month mixed online-offline programme, which included 360 days of offline learning and a two-week exchange in China (table 6).

Table 6

Study arrangements for the Chinese teacher retraining programme launched by RCIS BSU

Time period	First academic year	Second academic year
September – October	Offline learning	Offline learning
November – December	Online learning	Online learning
January – February	Offline learning	2-Week teaching practice, of- fine learning
March – April	Online learning	Online learning
May – June	Offline learning	Offline learning, final certi- fication
July – August	2-Week exchange in China, self-studying	–

The Chinese language teacher retraining programme has indeed contributed to addressing the teacher shortage, with 108 graduates from 2020 to 2024. However, there are opportunities to further enhance its effectiveness in developing highly qualified teachers. Potential areas for improvement include strengthening listening skills, pronunciation accuracy, reading fluency, writing skills, and cultural understanding. Addressing these aspects could positively impact the overall learning experience for Chinese language students.

In conclusion, while the retraining programme has made significant progress in addressing the shortage of Chinese language teachers in Belarus, there are still opportunities to further improve the quality of ICLE. To successfully implement Chinese language programmes, a multifaceted approach is needed. This should focus not only on increasing the number of teachers but also on improving the quality of instruction, enhancing resources, and fostering international collaboration [10].

Conclusions

Over the last three decades, ICLE in Belarus has achieved remarkable development, which indicates the increasing importance of Belarusian-Chinese relations. ICLE has become increasingly systematic and refined, characterised by the rising number of Chinese language teachers and the increasing number of students willing to study the language. Besides, the expansion of professio-

nal language learning programmes has made ICLE more accessible to larger numbers of learners, ranging from school children to working professionals aiming to boost their careers. ICLE's prospects for development in Belarus are immense and by far outweigh its constraints.

The advancement of high-quality development of ICLE in Belarus is of great importance in deepening

the Belarusian-Chinese partnership further. Building reforms and language education improvements will help to make the Belarus-China strategic relationship have a solid foundation of mutual understanding and

communication. This will also build deeper cooperation across various sectors and assist in broader objectives of the all-weather comprehensive strategic partnership, making it dynamic and robust in the future.

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