

《汉语成为乌兹别克斯坦许多高校的必修课》

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Chinese language has become a compulsory course in a rising number of high schools in Uzbekistan. Learners were few a decade ago, but numbers have increased quickly in recent years, particularly after Chinese President Xi Jinping raised the initiative of building the Silk Road Economic Belt in 2013.

Writing in Chinese is tough enough for most foreigners. But these Uzbek students go one step further to learn Chinese calligraphy, an art even Chinese students can hardly master. And they are learning the oracle bone script, a form of writing that dates back three millennia.

The class is held as an extracurricular activity on weekends. The teacher says he is not expecting the students to become professional calligraphers or linguistics experts. The learning is all in the name of fun.

Writing with a brush reduces their frustration in learning writing. And learning the oracle bone script gives the students a better sense how the characters are formed pictographically.

Despite the struggles, one student says her whole family is enthusiastically learning the language. The 16-year-old is applying to a Chinese university, a dream shared by her younger sister Robiya.

We visited the girls' home after class, where we were extraordinarily welcomed by her family. Their parents regarded our stay as a good opportunity for their children to practice speaking the language.

Mukhtasar's three youngest sisters are still primary school pupils. But their mother says the earlier they start learning, the better it is for their future. Muhktasar's family is not alone. At regular high schools, Chinese is made a compulsory course for these students, just like math and chemistry.

The schools also set up exchange programs with schools in China to hire native Chinese teachers.

"English used to be the only foreign language course at our school. But in 2013, we introduced Chinese and Arabic and allow students to choose one from the three as their compulsory foreign language course. It turns out the students are very interested in Chinese," Principal of 2nd Academic Lyceum of Tashent Textile Industry Farida Nazarova said.

Students here start to learn Chinese in just recent years, but the number of the learners have been growing fast. In Tashkent, at least three major high schools have made Chinese a compulsory course for college entrance exam, in the hope of preparing more talents who can better grasp the opportunities from China's fast development.

This year, China becomes Uzbekistan's biggest investor and the second-largest trade partner. Around 40 percent of the country's cotton is sold to China. But locals say there is still a shortage of Chinese speakers in the job market.

These youngsters are expected to bridge the gap, and it will definitely take time for them to become proficient. But just like Chinese writing, they will take it one stroke at a time.

