

Research on the Coordination of Chinese Language Education in Central Asian Borderlands and Cross-border Language Policies from a Regional and Country Studies Perspective

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Abstract: Borderland Chinese language education targeting Central Asia serves as a vital vehicle for linguistic connectivity, cross-border people-to-people exchanges, and economic and trade cooperation between the People's Republic of China and the five Central Asian countries. Cross-border language policies constitute the institutional foundation for China and border regions adjacent to Central Asia to conduct language governance and coordinate bilateral linguistic relations. Taking Kashgar Prefecture and Kashgar University as case studies and considering the distinct national conditions of each Central Asian state, this paper investigates the practical significance and current practices of the coordinated development of the two undertakings. It analyzes prevailing problems at the present stage and puts forward targeted countermeasures based on the development realities of the China–Central Asia cross-border region. The research aims to lay a solid foundation and inject new momentum into the high-quality development of borderland language education for Central Asia and the modernization of cross-border language governance, and proposes corresponding development approaches.

Keywords: Regional and country studies perspective; Borderland areas; Chinese language education; Cross-border language policies; Policy coordination

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1. Introduction

Regional and country studies focus on targeted research into regional development and governance based on the geopolitical characteristics of a specific region, interstate relations, and socio-cultural differences, breaking through the single domestic research perspective. The borderlands of southern Xinjiang in northwest China are adjacent to the five Central Asian countries. Home to concentrated cross-border ethnic groups and

diverse linguistic landscapes, this area constitutes a key region for promoting the national common language and characters, as well as an important hub for China to engage with Central Asia and carry out cross-border linguistic interactions, cultural exchanges, and economic and trade activities. At the current stage, border Chinese teaching models targeting Central Asia in southern Xinjiang tend to be homogeneous. Differentiated arrangements tailored to the characteristics of individual countries are absent. In addition, the language policies oriented toward Central Asia lack precision and coordination. As a result, domestic educational practices become disconnected from the cross-border policies of Central Asian states, failing to meet the requirements of complying with each country's linguistic regulations, sharing educational resources, and pursuing mutual development of both sides. Therefore, from the regional and country studies perspective, this paper focuses on the current development and existing problems of primary and secondary school Chinese education targeting Central Asia in the southern Xinjiang borderlands, and identifies mutually integrative and reinforcing approaches to improve the coordination between the two dimensions.

2. Overview of coordination between Chinese language education in China's borderlands and cross-border language policies from a regional and country studies perspective

From a regional and country studies perspective, within the framework of China–Central Asia relations, the coordinated development of the two undertakings requires abandoning homogeneous and one-size-fits-all domestic development mindsets. In light of the distinct national conditions of each country, bilateral cooperative ties and varied linguistic ecologies, efforts should be made to realize precise adaptation, two-way interaction, and mutual complementarity between Chinese language education practices and cross-border language policies targeting Central Asia.

Borderland Chinese language education implemented for Central Asia represents a distinctive practice of national common language and character education in southern Xinjiang. Different from language education carried out in inland regions, it not only consolidates local residents' proficiency in the national common language and strengthens educational resources in border areas, but also leverages the unique linguistic environment adjacent to Central Asia to promote the regional spread and application of the Chinese language across Central Asia ^[1–3].

Cross-border language policies toward Central Asia are not merely a set of domestic linguistic norms. Instead, they constitute an overarching institutional arrangement for bilateral linguistic exchanges, educational interactions, language resource preservation, and regulation of linguistic order, formulated by China with full consideration of linguistic coexistence and communication between southern Xinjiang and the five Central Asian states. Covering linguistic and cultural exchanges and cooperation between China and Central Asia, governance of cross-border ethnic languages, administration of language and cultural communication, and port linguistic governance, such policies serve as the primary regulatory framework guiding linguistic exchanges between China's western borderlands and Central Asian countries.

3. Practical dilemmas in the coordination between borderland Chinese language education targeting Central Asia and cross-border language policies from a regional and country studies perspective

3.1. Lagging coordination concepts and the absence of awareness of national differences among Central Asian countries

At present, Chinese language education targeting Central Asia and cross-border policy governance in the borderlands of southern Xinjiang are still dominated by a single domestic governance perspective, without integrating coordination concepts that account for the distinct national conditions of individual Central Asian countries. In terms of Chinese language education implementation, uniform syllabi and standardized teaching models for national common language education are adopted in most regions. Such arrangements fail to take into consideration that each country has its own language family, legal regulations, and cultural backgrounds, and they lack corresponding adjustments to teaching contents and communication approaches based on economic interdependence between bilateral states. Due to significant disparities in diplomatic relations with different Central Asian nations, targeted teaching plans tailored to each Central Asian country have not yet been formulated.

Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are major trading partners whose bilateral cooperation centers on land-based cross-border trade. Nevertheless, local Chinese language education merely emphasizes basic literacy and grammar instruction, while neglecting practical content relevant to economic and trade cooperation with Central Asia. Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan prioritize people-to-people exchanges, yet existing curricula have not been adapted to reflect the cultural characteristics of these Central Asian countries.

3.2. Fragmented coordination mechanisms and the absence of a two-way interaction system between China and Kazakhstan

A systematic two-way coordination and interaction mechanism serves as an important underpinning for the integrated development of borderland Chinese language education and cross-border language policies. Nevertheless, Chinese language education targeting Central Asia and related policy governance in southern Xinjiang are currently developing in a fragmented and passive manner, without a complete two-way interaction system in place. Domestic competent authorities suffer from unclear division of powers and responsibilities and tend to operate in isolation. No regular coordinating and interaction mechanism has been established among departments responsible for language affairs, education, foreign affairs, ethnic affairs, and port administration. Education authorities oversee the implementation of Chinese language teaching, foreign affairs departments are in charge of cross-border exchanges with Central Asia, and language authorities coordinate the formulation of policy norms. Poor inter-departmental coordination and insufficient information sharing have led to a two-way disconnect: the delivery of educational initiatives lacks dedicated policy support, while formulated policies cannot be effectively translated into educational practice.

3.3. Insufficient educational adaptability and inability to meet the demands of cross-border policy governance for Central Asia

Southern Xinjiang's borderland Chinese language education lacks adequate capacity for national differentiation targeting Central Asian countries and regional localization, failing to align with the regional governance objectives of cross-border language policies toward Central Asia.

First, teaching content is disconnected from the demands of cross-border cooperation with Central Asia.

At present, primary, secondary, and grassroots adult Chinese language education in the region mainly focuses on basic grammar and Chinese character literacy. Practical teaching modules tailored to Central Asia, including intercultural communication, business terminology for Central Asian trade, cross-border folk customs adaptation, and port services, are insufficient. As a result, learners' Chinese proficiency cannot satisfy practical demands stemming from China–Central Asia cross-border exchanges, economic and trade cooperation, and people-to-people interactions, nor can it achieve the governance goal of bilateral linguistic connectivity.

Second, teachers lack professional literacy related to individual Central Asian countries. Grassroots Chinese instructors in southern Xinjiang possess solid basic teaching capabilities, yet most of them have limited knowledge of regional and country studies on Central Asia. Their understanding of Central Asian states' language policies, cultural taboos, education systems, and cooperation norms remains inadequate. Consequently, they struggle to balance the popularization of Chinese with adjustments adapted to each Central Asian country in teaching practice, which may lead to deviations in implementing cross-border language policies toward Central Asia.

Third, the coverage of educational scenarios is limited. Existing Chinese language education is largely school-centered, while socialized Chinese training targeting port workers, border residents, inbound visitors, and cross-border merchants is insufficient. Effective regional language governance requires comprehensive support, which cannot be fulfilled merely by school-based instruction. Isolated classroom teaching fails to provide all-round coordination and backing for overall governance objectives.

3.4. Poor policy implementation and insufficient supporting educational infrastructure adapted to Central Asia

Current cross-border language policies targeting Central Asia mostly focus on top-level macro-strategic design, while detailed supporting policies suited to regional educational practice are absent. This hinders effective integration between policies and local Chinese language education practices.

National policies concerning China–Central Asia linguistic exchanges and regional language governance are dominated by macro-strategic arrangements. They fail to formulate tiered and categorized implementation measures for teaching in light of the geographical features of southern Xinjiang and the differentiated demands of individual Central Asian countries. As a result, local authorities lack specific guidance and operational norms when carrying out Chinese language teaching and cross-border linguistic cooperation.

Furthermore, special supporting measures for country-specific teaching for Central Asia, bilateral educational cooperation, and targeted teacher training remain incomplete. Supporting mechanisms in terms of special funds, assessment incentives, and research support are insufficient. Consequently, macro-level planning cannot yield tangible and effective outcomes, and there is no guarantee mechanism for long-term interdependent development between the two sides.

4. Optimization paths for coordination between borderland Chinese language education targeting Central Asia and cross-border language policies from a regional and country studies perspective

4.1. Foster the concept of differentiated coordination for Central Asian countries and break the limitations of homogeneous development

Leveraging Kashgar's core geographical advantage of bordering Central Asia and capitalizing on Kashgar

University's strengths in running education programs under the westward opening strategy, people should reshape the philosophy of coordinated development between borderland language education targeting Central Asia and cross-border policies, and thoroughly abandon the conventional unified and homogeneous development mindset. It is essential to accurately grasp development trends between China and Central Asian countries in mutually beneficial economic and trade cooperation, shared port construction, promotion of cultural exchanges, and friendly grassroots cooperation, and adopt differentiated approaches to address relevant issues.

For Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, the two Central Asian economic and trade hubs, people shall optimize Chinese language education content focusing on bilateral cross-border trade cooperation, port economic links, and commercial service communication. Priority will be given to teaching economic and trade terminology, cross-border commercial communication, and scenario-based Chinese instruction for port settings. Efforts will be coordinated with the joint formulation of bilateral commercial language norms and public linguistic order at ports, and practical relevant documents will be formulated and issued accordingly.

4.2. Establish an integrated cooperation system targeting Central Asia and form a two-way interaction mechanism

Establish a coordination system for Central Asian language education and policies featuring multi-level linkage, inter-departmental collaboration and cross-border cooperation to tackle fragmentation in development. Set up a local government-led inter-departmental coordination mechanism that integrates administrative authorities covering education, language affairs, foreign affairs, culture and tourism, and port administration. Together with local universities such as Kashgar University, a dedicated working group on cross-border Chinese language education and policy coordination targeting Central Asia shall be formed. Clear division of powers and responsibilities among all participating entities will be defined to conduct regular activities including research on Central Asia-oriented language education, policy seminars, and work coordination. Such efforts will break inter-departmental barriers and ensure efficient connection between the implementation of Central Asia-oriented language policies and the advancement of Chinese language education.

Grassroots bilateral exchange mechanisms between China and Central Asian countries need to be improved. Drawing on the framework of strategic partnerships between China and the five Central Asian states, schools and other educational institutions in Kashgar Prefecture can establish regular cooperative ties with educational entities in Central Asian countries. Consensus can be reached through joint talent training involving two-way language teaching, reciprocal teacher exchange programs for further studies, educational resource sharing, and mutual academic support.

4.3. Improve the country-specific Chinese language education system for Central Asia to meet the needs of cross-border governance

Relying on Kashgar University and cooperating with primary and secondary schools as well as grassroots educational institutions in the region, the local borderland Chinese language education system shall be upgraded and renovated to precisely accommodate the demands of cross-border language governance for Central Asia and bilateral cooperation.

First, refine country-specific teaching content for Central Asia. In combination with the linguistic features, cultural traditions, key cooperation areas, and cross-border communication scenarios of each

Central Asian country, develop teaching materials suitable for students from respective nations and optimize curricula. Integrate country-specific trade rules, bilateral cultural differences, port communication etiquette, and provisions governing bilateral cooperation into teaching content. This approach addresses the general public's demand for Chinese proficiency while taking into account various practical challenges encountered by Central Asian nationals in Chinese language use.

Second, build a professional cohort of teachers competent in country-specific teaching for Central Asia. Incorporate regional and country studies of Central Asia, linguistic and cultural characteristics of each state, cross-border language cooperation policies, and intercultural teaching skills into the regular training system for Chinese instructors at local primary, secondary, and tertiary institutions. Establish bilateral teacher exchange platforms for China-Kazakhstan, China-Kyrgyzstan, China-Uzbekistan, and other partnerships to facilitate mutual visits, academic exchanges, and joint teaching research between Chinese and foreign educators, so as to comprehensively improve teachers' capabilities in country-specific Chinese teaching and adaptability for cross-border communication.

4.4. Improve the supporting system for policy implementation toward Central Asia and enhance capacity for coordination support

Formulate detailed implementation plans for cross-border language policies targeting Central Asia and improve a comprehensive supporting guarantee system, so as to translate macro strategies for cooperation with Central Asia into tangible outcomes in educational development.

First, roll out differentiated implementation measures tailored to individual Central Asian countries. In light of Kashgar's geopolitical advantages, the national characteristics of each Central Asian state, regional linguistic ecologies, and local educational foundations, formulate detailed rules for coordinated cross-border language education by country. Clarify development goals, core tasks, implementation routes, and progress milestones for cooperation with each country, so as to offer clear guidance for grassroots teaching practice and bilateral cooperation.

Second, refine special guarantee mechanisms. Set up special funds for coordinated cross-border language education with Central Asia to prioritize core initiatives including the development of country-specific teaching materials for Central Asia, targeted teacher training, bilateral cross-border educational cooperation, and the cultivation of Central Asian international students. Establish a dedicated assessment and evaluation mechanism, incorporating the effectiveness of implementing Central Asia-oriented language policies, innovations in country-specific teaching, achievements of bilateral educational exchanges, and outcomes of cross-border language governance into the assessment system of local educational authorities and universities, so as to fully motivate grassroots practitioners.

5. Conclusion

From a regional and country studies perspective, the coordinated development of borderland Chinese language education targeting Central Asia and cross-border language policies represents a major approach that conforms to the geopolitical characteristics of southern Xinjiang borderlands, advances the modernization of China–Central Asia cross-border language governance, and deepens regional people-to-people exchanges as well as economic and trade cooperation. At present, prominent obstacles restrict their coordinated development, including backward country-specific coordination concepts, loose two-way

interaction mechanisms, insufficient educational adaptability, and weak safeguards for policy implementation.

Given the substantial disparities among Central Asian countries in national conditions, linguistic ecologies, and cooperation demands, generalized ideas for borderland development are inapplicable. Targeted and differentiated development should be carried out based on the national and regional features of Central Asia. It is essential to foster the philosophy of precise country-specific coordination, establish an integrated interaction mechanism, develop an educational system with Central Asian characteristics, and improve the guarantee system for policy implementation. These efforts will boost mutually reinforcing and integrated development between borderland Chinese language education and cross-border language policies toward Central Asia. While vigorously promoting the popularization of the national common language in border areas and consolidating the foundation for regional educational development, we can break down linguistic barriers between China and Central Asia, facilitate people-to-people connectivity, economic and trade links, and cultural integration between both sides, and provide robust linguistic support for China's westward opening-up and the building of the China–Central Asia community with a shared future.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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