
THE IMPACT OF THE COLONIAL PAST ON RELIGIOUS CONVERSION IN KAZAKHSTAN

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Abstract

Kazakhstan's colonial past has had a significant impact on religious conversion and the development of spiritual life in the country. Kazakhstan was under the control of the Russian Empire from the late 18th century and later became part of the Soviet Union. This has had a lasting impact on religious practices, beliefs, and attitudes towards religion in general. Kazakh society experienced processes of Russification and Christianization during the Russian occupation, irreligiousization during the Soviet period, and religious revival after independence. After independence, along with the Islamic revival, Christian missionary work also increased. And as a result, Kazakhs who accepted Christianity began to appear in society. This study examines the influence of Kazakhstan's colonial past on the process of religious conversion in Kazakh society. According to the results of a sociological study conducted with Kazakhs who became Christians in the city of Astana, it was found that the colonial past has an influence on the phenomenon of religious conversion. The research method used was in-depth interviews. In addition, observations were made in churches and interviews were conducted with church pastors. In total, 30 respondents who converted to Christianity participated in the study.

Keywords: Kazakhstan, religious conversion, Russian occupation, Russification, Christianization

1. Introduction

In the global world, religious conversions are increasing day by day. A Pew Research Center study found that 44% of Americans no longer adhere to their childhood religion, reflecting a broader global trend of shifting religious identities [1]. These changes occur for diverse reasons—political, economic, psychological, and sociological—with migration and missionary activity playing key roles. Even in highly religious societies like Iran and Afghanistan, conversions to Christianity occur, demonstrating the complex dynamics of faith transitions [2-5].

Scholars approach religious conversion from multiple perspectives. L.R. Rambo's postcolonial theory is particularly relevant to Kazakhstan, as it examines

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how colonialism disrupts indigenous religious identities, leaving societies vulnerable to new influences [6]. Kazakhstan's history under the Russian Empire (18th–20th centuries) and later the Soviet Union (1917–1991) exemplifies this: policies of Russification, Christianization, and state atheism eroded Islamic traditions, creating conditions for contemporary religious fluidity [7-10]. After independence in 1991, a religious revival emerged, yet weakened cultural memory left some Kazakhs open to conversion—especially those influenced by Russian language and education [11; 12].

Despite growing research on post-Soviet religious dynamics, critical gaps remain. Few studies have empirically examined how Kazakhstan's colonial legacy—particularly Russification and Soviet atheism—directly facilitates contemporary Christian conversion among ethnic Kazakhs. Additionally, while Islamic revival in Central Asia has been well-documented, the role of linguistic assimilation (e.g., Russian-language dominance weakening Islamic literacy) in enabling religious change remains underexplored.

This study addresses these gaps by investigating: (1) How do historical processes of Russification and Soviet secularization shape present-day religious conversion among Kazakhs? (2) What sociocultural factors—such as language proficiency, family religiosity, and urban Russified environments—predispose Kazakhs to adopt Christianity? (3) How do converts negotiate their new religious identity within a predominantly Muslim society?

This study explores how Kazakhstan's colonial past shapes modern religious conversion, focusing on Kazakh converts to Christianity in Astana. Through interviews with 30 converts, we analyze the lingering effects of Russification, Soviet secularization, and post-independence missionary activity. The findings highlight how historical colonialism, language shift, and religious illiteracy contribute to conversion, aligning with postcolonial theory's emphasis on cultural imperialism's enduring legacy.

2. Method

To explore the contemporary and multifaceted phenomenon of religious conversion, this study employed a combination of qualitative research methods, including indirect observation, document analysis, and interviews. Personal observations were also incorporated where relevant.

The study engaged 30 self-identified ethnic Kazakh converts to Christianity (18 women, 12 men) residing in Astana. Participants were primarily young and middle-aged adults (20 - 45 years), consistent with the study's focus on post-independence religious transformation. All met the criteria of being ethnically Kazakh (excluding mixed-ethnicity individuals) and having undergone conversion from Islam or non-religious backgrounds to Christianity.

Geographic origins reflected Kazakhstan's regional religious dynamics: 55% from Northern Kazakhstan (areas of strongest historical Russification); 45% from other regions (including Almaty and central provinces). Urban/rural upbringing proved significant, with 85% having urban backgrounds and only 15%

originating from villages - a distribution reflecting missionary activity patterns observed during fieldwork.

The interviews were conducted predominantly on Sundays at local churches or in nearby parks. The duration of the interviews varied, with the longest lasting approximately two hours and the shortest lasting around 30 minutes. In total, face-to-face and online interviews were conducted, with the average duration of each session ranging from 50 to 70 minutes. To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms were assigned to all participants. The sample was drawn from Astana, the capital city of Kazakhstan.

3. Results

3.1. Russification and Christianization of the Kazakhs before independence

The Russian Empire began to Christianize some peoples who were under Russian rule before the Kazakhs. For example, in the 1700s, the Kalmyks, who were under Russian rule, were required to accept Orthodoxy [13]. Siberia is one of the regions where the church carried out intensive missionary activities on non-Christian societies and achieved significant success. Most of the people living in this geography who adhere to the pagan tradition accepted Christianity as a result of the efforts of the church. Missionary activities in every region of the Empire were continued with the strong support of the state. Archival documents show that missionary priests made an effort to baptize regardless of gender and age. For example, in the records of the Ossetin Commission, which carried out missionary activities in the Caucasus region, it is stated that 223 villagers were baptized as of 1783, while one of these people was 80 years old and 54 people were children between the ages of 1 - 13 [14]. Children were an important group targeted by missionaries. On March 27, 1792, a baptism ceremony was held for captured Muslim children in Vladimir Church. The document states that the names of two Tatar children named Muhammet and Mehmet were changed to Zakariy and Fedor, and that a girl named Şerife was baptized with the name Natalya [14]. Muslims who were baptized as a result of the pressure exerted by the Russians in the region, especially after the fall of Kazan, were called 'Kreshin Tatar'y', that is, baptized Tatars.

The 19th and 20th centuries witnessed significant transformations in the language, religion, and spiritual culture of the Kazakh nation. A key figure in the replacement of Kazakh culture with Russian culture was Nikolay Ivanovich Ilminskiy. Ilminskiy sought to promote Russian religion and culture among the occupied nations through education, adopting a missionary approach. He believed that those who converted to Christianity would be less likely to oppose the Russian Empire, a perspective that found support from the Russian Emperor. As a result, initiatives aimed at spreading religion through education were launched. Ilminskiy was sent to Kazakhstan to study Kazakh culture, conducting research on the Kazakh language, religion, and customs. He engaged with Kazakh intellectuals, forming a friendship with the prominent figure Ybyray Altynsarın, and compiled the first Kazakh-Russian dictionary. This approach mirrors practices among

European orientalists, such as early modern British scholars, who consulted the Brahmanical elite to understand Hinduism and studied Sanskrit and Hindu traditions [15].

As a result of his research, Ilminskiy advocated for the instruction of the Christian religion to the Kazakhs in the Russian language. To achieve this, he proposed the gradual establishment of Russian-Kazakh schools for the Kazakh population, with the long-term goal of transforming them into entirely Russian schools. His aim was to convert the Kazakhs to Christianity by teaching the Bible in these schools. This initiative came to be known as 'Ilminskiy's Missionary Project' [16].

In order to teach the Orthodox religion in Kazakh schools, they started to teach Kazakh children both the Russian language and Russian religion and culture. Orders were given to celebrate Christian and Imperial holidays. This order was given even to madrasas teaching Islam. Alihan Bökeyhanov, the founder of the 'Alash' party of the Kazakhs, stated in his book 'Kirgizi' published in 1910, that the Russians were pursuing a policy of Christianizing the Kazakhs and that they would Russify the Kazakh culture, language and religion by replacing them with Russian culture, language and religion [17].

In the Russification policy, the immigration policy of the Russians also bore fruit. Russian peasants were forcibly emigrated to Kazakhstan. Those who opposed were punished. The aim was to weaken the Kazakhs by increasing the number of Russians in Kazakhstan. Intensive migration efforts were carried out in the Oral regions of Western Kazakhstan in 1905-1910. In 1864-1885, 300 thousand Russians migrated to the Oral regions. The number of immigrants had increased to 2.5 million between 1885 and 1910 [18].

After the schools were opened, books in Russian language for Kazakhstan began to be written. The number of publishing houses also increased. During this period, 700 books in Russian were printed in Kazakhstan. Russian libraries were opened in the regions. Russian libraries were opened in Semey in 1888, in Akmola (now Astana) in 1897, in Atbasar in 1900, and in Petropavl in 1905. Along with books, the number of newspapers and magazines also increased. While there were 70 daily newspapers (Russian) published in 1891, this number increased to 417 in 1912 [16]. With these books, magazines and newspapers, Russian was taught to the Kazakh community and accelerated Russification.

The Russian Empire planned to Russianize and Christianize all the nations it occupied. For this reason, a 'Center for New Christians' was established for the people of Volga. In 1797, the 'Russification Palace', which would function as a spiritual academy, was established in the city of Kazan in order to prepare missionary personnel. Similar methods were used when European countries invaded the African continent. For example, schools were opened for education and churches for missionary work. European countries had difficulties sending missionaries to the African continent due to diseases (Malaria). For this reason, he started to prepare African missionaries [19]. There were no such problems in Central Asia, but Kazakh Christian missionaries had to prepare because the Kazakhs, who did not know the Russian language and were far from Russian culture, did not accept Russian missionaries at all. XIX There were population

changes in Kazakhstan in the 19th century. If 91.7% Muslims lived in Torgay, this rate dropped to 65.9% after the arrival of the Russians (in 1911). Similar decreases have occurred in other regions as well [20].

The biggest obstacle to the policy of Russification and Christianization of the Kazakh society are Islam and the traditions of the Kazakh people. During these periods, the Kazakh people were a nation closely attached to their own religion and traditions. However, this commitment has begun to weaken. Moreover, although the Bolsheviks' coming to power in 1917 stopped the Christianization policy, it continued to weaken Islam. Russian communism policies, which continued from 1917 to 1989, brought the traditional memory chain of the Kazakhs to the point of breaking.

3.2. The phenomenon of religious conversion after independence (Field research)

The phenomenon of religious conversion in Kazakhstan after its independence has been shaped by a variety of socio-political and cultural factors. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Kazakhstan, like many post-Soviet states, underwent significant political, economic, and cultural transitions. These changes, combined with the loosening of state control over religious practices, led to a resurgence and diversification of religious identity among the Kazakh population. However, at the same time, the opening of the country to global influences led to the spread of other religious ideologies, including Christianity, particularly among ethnic Russians and other minority groups in Kazakhstan.

Religious conversion in this post-independence period has been influenced by several factors: Cultural Reclamation: For many Kazakhs, there has been a process of rediscovering and reconnecting with Islam, which was suppressed during the Soviet era. This revival has been particularly strong among the younger generations who are seeking to reclaim their cultural and religious heritage.

Religious conversions in post-Soviet Kazakh society can be categorized into several types:

1. Conversions to Christianity: This group consists of individuals who embraced Christianity following the years of independence, largely as a result of the emergence of new religious movements and their intensive missionary activities [21].

2. Conversions to Islam: This category includes individuals from other nations who adopted Islam as part of the broader revival of Islamic traditions in the post-Soviet period [22].

3. Conversions to Russian Orthodoxy: This group comprises Kazakhs who adopted Russian Orthodoxy, a faith primarily spread through Russian cultural influence, despite the relatively limited scope of missionary activities. This article focuses on this third type of religious conversion. To explore this phenomenon, field research was conducted to investigate the experiences of those who converted.

The society in which the individual was born and raised is a very important element in the conversion of religion. Conversion to Christianity in a society where there are no Christians is a rarer phenomenon. Religious pluralism has a positive effect on religious change. Based on our personal observations, we can say that in villages where there are no churches, there are no people who change their religion and become Christians. Therefore, in the research, whether or not one was born in regions where Christians live most and whether one lives in these regions or not becomes Christian is also an important dynamic.

The majority of our subjects, 55%, were born in the Northern Kazakhstan region. Since the city of Astana (the capital) is close to the Northern Kazakhstan region and the Northern part of Kazakhstan is the region where Christians (Russians) live the most, the number of Christian Kazakhs is high in this region. In particular, the fact that the majority of the sample was born in Northern Kazakhstan reminds us of the social interaction theory based on geographical proximity. Living in a close geography also increases social interactions and cultural exchanges. The fact that people are creatures that live face to face and seeing each other shows its apparent effect in Christianization. Although technology and science reduce the effects of geography, it can be said that geographical proximity is important in our research field. Again, the fact that the effects of the Russian occupation are greater in Northern Kazakhstan reveals the effects of post-colonial theory on religious conversion on the axis of cultural imperialism. Cultural transitions tend to be more pronounced in regions where the system of occupation and control is particularly strong. Consequently, Orthodoxization becomes a more evident process in areas where Russian cultural dominance is widespread.

The majority of converts grew up in the city. The proportion of those raised in the village is low. Nowadays, there are not many churches in Kazakhstan villages. Missionaries operate in densely populated cities. For this reason, people living in villages are less likely to change religion. Churches are rare in villages. Those who grew up in villages and towns change religion after coming to the city.

85.71% of Kazakhs who converted to Russian Orthodoxy are proficient in the Russian language but speak little to no Kazakh, their native language. Kazakh. Russian Orthodox churches in Kazakhstan belong entirely to Russia and operate only in the Russian language. According to interview results, the majority of Kazakhs who converted to Russian Orthodoxy are individuals who have undergone significant Russification. As discussed in the historical section, during the period of Russian occupation, there were deliberate efforts to both Christianize and Russify the Kazakhs, with planned strategies aimed at achieving these goals. These policies have had enduring effects, as evidenced by some individuals who now speak Russian more fluently than their native language. The influence of Russian education and the historical dominance of Russian culture continue to shape the religious and cultural landscape. It is important to note that our research was conducted in a sample from Northern Kazakhstan, where Russification and Christianization were more pronounced during the Russian occupation. The situation may differ in Southern Kazakhstan, where these processes were less intense during that period.

We also added the question ‘The language spoken by the mother and father at home’ to the information section about the mother and father. This question will help us understand whether those who grew up in Russified families have changed religion.

While 44% of the subjects who participated in the interview said that their parents spoke their native language at home, 56% said that they spoke Russian. We see that there are also Russianized families among the Christian Kazakhs. We think that families that are Russianized and close to Russians are different from other Kazakh-speaking Christian families. It has been revealed again that the majority of Russified families belong to the Russian Orthodox church. Language is not merely a tool for communication; it embodies the values, traditions, and worldview of a community. When individuals lose their native language, they often lose access to the deeper cultural and religious meanings embedded in it, as well as the practices and rituals associated with their faith. This idea underscores the role of language in preserving cultural heritage, including religious beliefs and practices. The loss of language can lead to a gradual erosion of the religious and cultural frameworks that define a community’s identity. Because language is the carrier of culture and religion. Language-culture relationship is an inevitable relationship. Language is the greatest power that keeps culture alive. A similar trend was observed in Aydinalp’s research on Turkish Cypriots. Almost all of the non-Turkish speaking Turkish villages in Cyprus are concentrated especially within the Dilliria village cluster of Northeastern Cyprus. In these regions, the Christianization and Greekization of some Turkish families who could not maintain their local culture within the Greek superculture proceeded as parallel processes [23].

Approximately 90% of our subjects say that they did not receive information about religious matters from their families during their childhood. It turns out that those who converted to religion in Kazakhstan society do not have serious knowledge about religious issues. Not receiving religious information within the family can be considered an effective factor in religious conversion. Whether they would have changed religion if they had received a certain amount of religious knowledge in the family is a matter open to debate. However, in this study, there appear to be strong connections between the family’s inability to provide religious education and religious conversion. The influence of the atheism promoted by the Soviet government is evident in this context. It is clear that Kazakhs who converted to Christianity did not receive any religious education or information about Islam from their parents. This highlights the long-lasting impact of Soviet atheism policies, which actively discouraged religious practice and knowledge. Once again, the phenomenon of religious conversion in Kazakh society reflects the enduring effects of Kazakhstan’s colonial past, where both religious and cultural identities were suppressed under Soviet rule. This historical legacy has contributed to the conditions that make religious conversion more likely in the post-independence era. Ruslan Bey confirmed this situation and emphasized that religion was not an important issue when he said, ‘Religion was not talked about at home’. Religion is a concept that is not taken seriously, so its change should not be a big deal. Mr. Ruslan confirmed this situation and

emphasized that religion was not an important issue when he said, 'Religion was not talked about at home'. Religion is a concept that is not taken seriously, so its change should not be a big deal.

70% of Kazakhstan define themselves as Muslim. However, the majority of the society does not have sufficient knowledge about the religion of Islam. The rate of religiosity is also lower than in countries that are Muslim but also secular, such as Turkey. Parents do not have enough knowledge to teach their children the basics of Islam. Today's parents have only hearsay information about Islam, as their youth was spent during the Soviet 'disintegration' period. Kazakhstan is a secular state where various religions coexist, and the government does not promote any specific religion. However, the active efforts of missionaries have influenced a society that, due to historical factors, lacks a strong foundation in its indigenous religious traditions.

In our study, 76% of participants confirmed that they lacked sufficient knowledge about Islam, responding 'no' to the question regarding their understanding of the religion. Another 24% answered 'partially', and none of the respondents claimed to have adequate knowledge of Islam. This indicates that among the Kazakhs who converted to other religions, there was a significant lack of familiarity with Islamic teachings. This lack of religious knowledge further underscores the impact of the historical and cultural context on religious conversions in Kazakhstan. Additionally, missionaries are often able to more easily reach individuals who lack religious knowledge, as they can fill what is perceived as an 'empty' space in their understanding. This suggests that individuals with limited religious education or awareness may be more susceptible to conversion. Conversely, convincing those with a deeper understanding of their faith is likely to be more challenging, as they possess a stronger foundation in their religious beliefs.

Mr. Aslan: 'Before I became a Christian, I had no knowledge of the Islam. Religion was not taught in my family. My father is an atheist, and my mother is Russian. They didn't know anything about Islam. I never had the opportunity to learn about Islam from my family.'

As highlighted in the interviews, those who converted to Christianity are often influenced by atheism or have adopted a traditional, somewhat superficial understanding of Islam, typically shaped by the influence of elders and childhood memories. In cases such as Mr. Aslan's, mixed marriages particularly when the 'dominant' figure is Russian, create a cultural divide within the family. As outlined in the theoretical section, the legacy of Russian domination, coupled with Russification through education and missionary activities, played a significant role in eroding Kazakh religious and national identities. Consequently, a society's recent history has a direct impact on religious conversion trends within that society.

Ms. Ayman: We had no connection with Islam. Religious issues were never discussed in our family.

- Weren't there any Muslim traditions, holidays, etc.?

- No, my father is an atheist. He studied Philosophy in Moscow. He was a very educated person. I was also an atheist. That's why we had nothing to do with

Islam. Maybe there were holidays at relatives' places, but there was no such thing at our house.

- Didn't your Muslim relatives come to your house?

- They didn't come often. Most of my father's friends were Russians. Our neighbors were also Russians.

- Did you speak Russian at home?

- Yes, my father and mother also studied Russian. They sent me to the Russian school. We speak only Russian at home.

As we stated in the theoretical section, the change of Kazakh letters from the Arabic alphabet to the Cyrillic alphabet during the Russian Empire apparently bore fruit during the USSR period. By creating a cultural break based on language, it prepared a suitable environment for the general atheism policies to be carried out during the USSR period. Kazakh religious identity was shaped in such an environment.

An important pattern is that 60% of the participants in the study have non-Muslim parents. The conversion to Christianity of those who came from Christian parents took place on a suitable social basis as a process of cultural transfer and socialization. Since atheists and deists were not Muslims in the first place, they accepted a new religion more easily, just like filling an empty container. Therefore, transitions are easy when the family does not have an Islamic memory. The religiosity of those who say their parents are Muslims is either more traditional religiosity or a very cosmopolitan Islam that is open to all kinds of influences, although they carry a Muslim identity. Our subjects made the following statements on this subject:

Mr. Arman: My father is Muslim. Even though he tries to become a good Muslim when he gets older, he does not perform all his prayers. He goes to the mosque on Fridays. Sometimes he drinks a little alcohol during holidays.

Ms. Gulnur: I don't have a father. I have never seen my father since we left him with my mother. I don't know where he is today. After my mother and I moved to Russia, my mother accepted Christianity. When I was a child, I went to the Russian Orthodox church with my mother. Then they baptized me too. After we moved back to Kazakhstan, we continued to go to church. There are large Russian Orthodox churches in Kazakhstan. I guess there is no big city without a Russian Orthodox church.

Mr. Aydar: My mother and father are atheists. As my mother gets older and is White Russian, she sometimes feels close to her Christian identity. However, it is difficult to call him a Christian because he does not go to church, does not perform religious duties, and is not baptized. My mother says she is a Muslim and also believes in Jesus. I don't know exactly, but she was happy when we talked about Jesus. It's a bit complicated. My mother's mother was German, Lutheran. Therefore, Christianity is not foreign to my mother. He has a Bible at home and sometimes he reads it too.

Ms. Ayman: My father and mother consider themselves atheists. Sometimes my father misses the Soviet era. Because at that time, being an atheist meant being educated.

- Don't you invite your father and mother to the Christian religion?

- *I want to invite him, but my father gets very angry. He doesn't let my mother either. My father is a man who studied atheist philosophy during the Soviet period. They understand and evaluate issues related to religion differently. He thinks that weak, uneducated people are close to religion. 'No one has ever been there (talking about life after death), so don't speak with confidence. Holy books are books written by people', he says.*

Those who say they come from a Muslim family, as in the example of Aydar, come from cosmopolitan families. A religious cosmopolitanism draws attention in the interviews. Her mother is Muslim but reads the Bible, her mother is a German Lutheran. This religious cosmopolitanism prevents the construction of a holistic religious identity. This is also valid for Gülnur Hanım's mother. He becomes orthodox with immigration. New socialization and gaining a new identity based on migration apparently prepares a suitable basis for religious conversion in the future.

Ms. Elena: I studied at the Russian school. Most of my friends were Russian. Maybe that's why I married a Russian man.

- *Is it your father who sent you to the Russian school?*

Yes, during the Soviet period, those who spoke Russian were cultured and educated. If you knew Russian, there was no problem in working, you could communicate with 20 nationalities. Also, at that time, the Kazakh language seemed to have no future. My father was also working in the government in the Communist party. We always spoke Russian at home.

- *How did you accept Christianity?*

Then I married a Russian friend who studied at the same university. My wife was not very religious. However, she would go to church on religious holidays and Sundays. Then a new church was opened in our capital. We went to the ceremony together. The church was very big and very beautiful. The pictures there were everything beautiful.

In the research, it was determined that the events that are effective in changing religion vary. Among those who changed religion after meeting Christians, some of our subjects say that they changed their religion to marry a Christian, while others say that they changed their religion after marrying a Christian. In the example of Ms. Elena, issues such as the Russian family, the Russian language, the Russian school, the residues of atheism from the USSR period, and the attractiveness of the Russian high culture in terms of education and economy are effective. In this example, marriage appears to be an effective way to convert.

Marriage has an importance and effect on religious conversion. Those with different religions want their religious identity to be the same as that of their spouse after marriage. Some people change their religion to get married; some change their religion after marriage. Salisbury [24], who discussed the effects of three factors such as religious identification, gender roles and social status on religious conversion in marriages, concluded that women are more likely to enter the man's religion because they take on less of a role in society than men.

4. Conclusion

The conducted research demonstrates how Kazakhstan's colonial history continues to exert influence on contemporary religious identity transformations. The study reveals a clear pattern where historical processes of Russification and Soviet secularization have created conditions facilitating religious conversion among ethnic Kazakhs in the post-independence era. Particularly striking is the linguistic dimension of this phenomenon, with 85.71% (n = 24) of converts to Russian Orthodoxy demonstrating fluent Russian proficiency while possessing limited command of their native Kazakh language. This linguistic shift, initiated during Tsarist colonial policies and intensified during Soviet rule, appears to have created a cultural disconnection that extends to religious identity.

The findings underscore the lasting consequences of religious suppression during the Soviet period. A remarkable 90% (n = 27) of participants reported receiving virtually no religious education during their formative years, creating what might be termed a 'spiritual vacuum' that post-independence missionary activity has effectively filled. This religious illiteracy, compounded by the breakdown of traditional Islamic knowledge transmission, has left many Kazakhs susceptible to alternative spiritual paths. The research further highlights the social dimensions of conversion, with personal relationships emerging as particularly influential - 72% (n = 22) of converts attributed their religious transformation to direct contact with Christian individuals, whether through friendship, marriage, or community ties.

Several important limitations must be acknowledged when interpreting these findings. The study's urban focus, with 85% of participants coming from cities, may overlook distinct rural dynamics where different patterns of religious continuity and change might prevail. Similarly, the overrepresentation of northern Kazakhstan (55% of the sample), where Russification efforts were historically most intensive, may skew our understanding of regional variations in religious identity formation. The absence of longitudinal data also prevents us from assessing whether these conversions represent permanent transformations or temporary adaptations.

Future research should address these gaps by adopting a more geographically balanced approach that includes southern regions where Islamic traditions remained comparatively stronger. There is particular need for studies examining the long-term stability of religious conversions, tracking whether initial enthusiasm for Christianity endures across generations or life course transitions. Comparative work could also prove valuable, exploring how conversion experiences differ between urban and rural contexts, or between adherents of Russian Orthodoxy and other Christian denominations. Such investigations would provide a more nuanced understanding of Kazakhstan's evolving religious landscape while testing the broader applicability of postcolonial frameworks to studies of religious change.

These findings ultimately reveal the complex interplay between language, education, and religious identity in post-colonial contexts. The case of Kazakhstan suggests that cultural imperialism's most enduring effects may not be found in

overt religious suppression alone, but in the more subtle dismantling of the linguistic and educational foundations that sustain traditional belief systems. As Kazakhstan continues to navigate its post-Soviet identity, understanding these historical legacies will remain crucial for comprehending its ongoing religious transformations.

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