

Decolonization and Identity in Contemporary Russian-Language Poetry of Kazakhstan (2019–2024)

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DOI : <https://doi.org/10.61796/icossh.v2i3.140>



Sections Info

Article history:

Submitted: April 17, 2025

Final Revised: May 27, 2025

Accepted: June 10, 2025

Published: June 19, 2025

Keywords:

Decolonization

Hybrid identity

Russophone poetry

Kazakhstan

Bilingualism

Post-colonial literature

ABSTRACT

Objective: Objective: This article examines how contemporary Russian-language poetry in Kazakhstan from 2019 to 2024 engages with themes of decolonization and identity. **Method:** Drawing on a qualitative analysis of works by Kazakhstani Russophone poets, we explore how these writers navigate the legacy of Russian cultural dominance while asserting local and hybrid identities. Through close reading of poetic texts (with original Russian and English translation), we illustrate how these poets both confront and reclaim the Russian language as a medium for Kazakhstani expression. **Results:** The study finds that recent geopolitical events have intensified reflection on language and identity among Kazakhstani poets. Many poets incorporate bilingual elements, cultural nostalgia, and self-irony in their verses, challenging colonial narratives without entirely rejecting the Russian language. **Novelty:** The findings contribute to understanding the complex hybrid identity of Russophone literature in post-Soviet Kazakhstan and its role in the ongoing decolonization of the cultural space.

INTRODUCTION

Over thirty years after the Soviet Union's collapse, colonial influences persist in Kazakhstan's cultural and linguistic landscape. The Russian language remains widely spoken and serves as the primary language for interethnic communication, a fact that poses a significant challenge to fully decolonizing Kazakh national identity. In recent years, especially following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Kazakhstan has experienced a surge of discussions about decolonization and the reclamation of cultural identity. These geopolitical events have given Russophone Kazakhstani authors a strong impetus to reflect on their language use and identity. While Kazakhstan is not directly involved in the war, its ripples have encouraged local writers to confront the imperial legacy embedded in language and literature.

Historically, Russian was the primary medium of education, government and urban life in Kazakhstan during the Soviet era, which led to the sidelining of the Kazakh language and a reshaping of cultural identity under Soviet narratives. Even today, Russian continues to be used extensively, especially in cities, often outperforming Kazakh in daily functional use. As a result, generations of Kazakhstani citizens—particularly those born in the late Soviet period and early independence—grew up with Russian as their dominant tongue. This linguistic legacy has created a complex dual identity: many citizens feel a renewed pride and enthusiasm for reviving the Kazakh language and traditions, yet Russian remains an integral part of their upbringing and self-expression. Such duality lies at the heart of contemporary identity debates in Kazakhstan.

In the literary sphere, these dynamics are acutely felt in contemporary Russian-language poetry. Kazakhstani poets who write in Russian navigate a delicate balance between the language of the former colonizer and the indigenous culture they seek to celebrate. The act of writing in Russian, once the colonial lingua franca, is now being reinterpreted by these poets as they infuse their works with local themes, Kazakh history, and multilingual wordplay. This process can be seen as part of the broader decolonization effort – not through outright rejection of the Russian language, but through its transformation into a vehicle for Kazakhstani voices. Many Russophone poets grapple with ambivalent sentiments toward the Russian language – experiencing discomfort with its colonial connotations, yet also appreciating its utility and the creative possibilities it affords. As Yelenevskaya and Protassova observe, Russophones outside Russia often find Russian to be a “non-ideological, commodified vehicle of mutual comprehension” in various domains like art and literature, even as they remain wary of its imperial baggage. This ambivalence is evident in Kazakhstan, where some view the continued use of Russian as a practical necessity and cultural bridge, while others see it as an uncomfortable reminder of subjugation.

Linguists note that Kazakhstan’s long history of mass bilingualism (Kazakh–Russian) has led to a crisis of linguistic identity for some Kazakhstani people in the post-Soviet period. On one hand, decades of Soviet russification instilled Russian as the mother tongue for many ethnic Kazakhs and other groups; on the other hand, ongoing “Kazakhization” efforts aim to elevate the Kazakh language’s status, leaving some individuals feeling torn between two linguistic identities. This linguistic tug-of-war is a fertile ground for literary exploration. Recent research by Barkovskaya finds that the self-identity of modern Kazakhstan’s Russian-speaking poets is fundamentally hybrid, comprising multiple components: memory of ethnic roots, sociocultural identity, regional (Kazakhstani) identity, and civic identity. Such poets embody “transborderness and transculturation”, traits of a nomadic cultural heritage in the Great Steppe, which enable them to avoid rigid binary oppositions in their thinking. In other words, rather than experiencing an identity crisis as a zero-sum game between being “Kazakh” or “Russian,” these authors often embrace a fluid identity that allows critical perspectives on both Kazakhstan and Russia.

Within this context, our study focuses on how contemporary Russophone poets in Kazakhstan address decolonization and identity in their works. We analyze selected poems (2019–2024) by prominent voices in this scene, including Aigerim Tazhi, Anuar Duisenbinov, and Ramil Niyazov-Adyldzhyan, among others. We explore the ways in which these poets’ bilingual background and post-colonial consciousness inform their poetic imagery, language choice, and thematic concerns. The objective is to shed light on the strategies through which Kazakhstan’s Russian-language poetry negotiates the legacy of colonization—be it by challenging historical narratives, asserting a unique cultural identity, or transforming the Russian language itself into a Kazakhstani medium. In doing so, we aim to contribute to a deeper understanding of the evolving identity of Russophone literature in Kazakhstan’s decolonization journey.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research adopts a qualitative approach, performing close readings and thematic analysis of selected contemporary poems written in Russian by Kazakhstani authors. We selected a corpus of poetic works published between 2019 and 2024 that explicitly or implicitly engage with issues of cultural identity, language, and decolonization. The selection covers a diverse range of poets: ethnic Kazakh poets (such as Aigerim Tazhi and Anuar Duisenbinov) and poets from minority communities (such as Uyghur-Kazakhstani poet Ramil Niyazov-Adyldzhyan), reflecting the multi-ethnic makeup of Kazakhstan's Russophone literary scene. By including voices of different backgrounds, we aimed to capture a broad picture of how hybrid identity is negotiated in poetry.

The analysis was guided by concepts from post-colonial literary theory and sociolinguistics. We looked for recurring themes and motifs related to decolonization: for example, representations of the Kazakh "native land" or heritage, the use of Kazakh words or symbols within Russian texts, expressions of alienation or conflict due to language, and instances of code-switching or linguistic fusion. Each poem was examined in its original Russian text and, when necessary, translated into English by the author of this article to facilitate analysis. We preserved the original Russian lines alongside English translations in order to accurately convey linguistic nuances, especially in cases where bilingual wordplay is central to the poem's effect.

In interpreting the texts, we also considered extratextual context – such as the poet's own background and public statements – when available, to inform our understanding of intent and perspective. For example, an author's interview or essay about their language identity can illuminate the subtext of their poetry. We cross-referenced such materials (e.g. interviews, translators' introductions) for additional insights. However, our primary focus remained on the poetic texts themselves, analyzing imagery, diction, and structure as expressions of the poets' grappling with identity. Themes identified inductively from the poems were then compared with findings from existing scholarship on Russophone literature and linguistic identity in Kazakhstan. This allowed us to situate individual works within broader trends and theoretical frameworks (such as the notion of "nomadic" cultural identity or the concept of pluricentric Russian language development).

Overall, the methodology blends literary analysis with a cultural studies perspective. It is limited by the scope of selected texts and available translations, but it provides an in-depth look at how decolonization and identity are poetically constructed by some of the most active Russophone poets in Kazakhstan today. The following section presents the results of this analysis, organized around key themes that emerged, supported by examples from the poetry (in Russian with English translations) and relevant contextual references.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

One of the first themes evident in contemporary Kazakhstani Russophone poetry is an awareness of the historical fate that made Russian the poets' linguistic medium. Rather than a deliberate choice, Russian is often portrayed as an inherited reality, a consequence of history. Poet Aigerim Tazhi (b. 1981), for example, has spoken candidly about her relationship to the Russian language. "I did not choose the Russian language... It's just the language that I've spoken since childhood," Tazhi notes, recalling that she was born in the Soviet era when "the main language was Russian" and everyone around her – from school to home – used it [1]. Originally in Russian, Tazhi's words are: «Я не выбирала русский язык... Это просто язык, на котором я говорю с детства». This statement encapsulates a common sentiment among her generation of Kazakhstani writers: Russian is not so much an external imposition now as it is part of their personal identity, given by upbringing.

Yet, this inherited language comes with ambivalence. On the one hand, poets like Tazhi acknowledge Russian as a "common country" legacy of the Soviet period that connected them to a broader world of literature and culture. On the other hand, they are keenly aware that Russian is also the language of the colonizer. This duality – Russian as both an enabler and a relic of colonialism – forms an undercurrent in many works. The poets often address it implicitly through themes of alienation and longing for connection to their ethnic roots. In the framework of colonality of power, a concept developed by Aníbal Quijano [2], language functions as a long-standing structure of colonial dominance. Russian, while serving as a channel to broader cultural and literary worlds, is also the very means by which the Kazakh language and its cultural functions were historically suppressed. This duality – aesthetic empowerment versus linguistic alienation – sits at the heart of many poetic texts and resonates strongly with Gayatri Spivak's [3] notion of the subaltern: the voice that cannot speak in its own language and is structurally unheard.

For instance, in one of Aigerim Tazhi's poems (from her 2019 bilingual collection *Paper-Thin Skin*), the narrator finds herself at a traditional celebration yet feeling like an outsider due to language. The poem paints a vivid scene of a Kazakh folk festivity and the speaker's alienation in it:

Original (Russian):

«Круговые хороводы дородных людей чтимы среди пряничных домиков, неестественно красивых детей и дам, поднимающихся как тесто, плывущих по траве к реке. Мне бы спросить дорогу, да вряд ли пойму ответ на каком-нибудь неизвестном языке.»

Translation (English):

"Round dances of stout people are being honored among gingerbread houses, unnaturally beautiful children and ladies rising like dough, floating through grass toward a river. I should ask the way, but then would hardly understand the reply in some unknown language." [4]

In these lines, rich with imagery, the round dances and gingerbread houses evoke a folkloric Kazakh atmosphere (a nod to Nauryz or other cultural festivities). The Russian-

speaking narrator observes “ladies...floating through grass toward a river” – a scene reminiscent of traditional nomadic or village life – yet hesitates to participate. The crucial last line reveals the crux of her alienation: “the reply in some unknown language.” We can infer that the unknown language is Kazakh – the language of the celebration – which the Russian-speaking narrator does not understand. This poignant moment encapsulates the experience of many urban Kazakhstani Russophones: being ethnically or nationally Kazakh, present in the midst of Kazakh culture, yet linguistically estranged from it. The poet here highlights the irony of feeling like a foreigner in one’s own homeland due to the language barrier created by history.

Such poetic scenes illustrate how the decolonization of identity is not straightforward for these writers. Unlike colonized peoples who might outright reject the colonizer’s language, Russophone Kazakh poets often cannot simply discard Russian – it is the language in which they think and create. Instead, the act of decolonization for them involves addressing the pain of disconnection (as in the poem above) and searching for ways to bridge it. The sense of loss – not understanding the reply from one’s own people – becomes a powerful emotional driver in their work. By voicing this alienation, the poets are acknowledging the colonial legacy (Russian supplanting Kazakh) and setting the stage for healing it, either through personal reconciliation or societal change.

Another prominent strategy in contemporary Kazakhstani poetry is the use of hybrid or bilingual language within poetry as a form of resistance and self-assertion. Rather than keeping Russian and Kazakh strictly separate, some poets experiment with mixing them, creating a linguistic fusion that mirrors their dual identity. This blending can be seen as a poetic act of decolonization: it symbolically breaks the strict hierarchy of languages (where Russian once dominated) and instead creates a new, syncretic expression unique to Kazakhstan. Many poets now turn to bilingualism and hybrid linguistic formations as forms of aesthetic resistance. In doing so, they engage in what

A striking example is the work of Anuar Duisenbinov, a young Kazakhstani poet who writes in Russian. In his much-discussed poem “Тýлеč” (the title itself merges two languages), Duisenbinov performs a linguistic merger by combining the Kazakh word “tıl” (тіл, meaning “language” or “tongue”) with the Russian word “reč” (речь, meaning “speech” or “language”). The resulting neologism “Тýлеč” is a fusion of Kazakh and Russian for “language,” embodying the poet’s bilingual reality. In the poem, this concept of *týleč* represents a new hybrid language or voice. By literally fusing words from Kazakh and Russian, the poet demonstrates that his identity and expression cannot be confined to one language or the other. As noted by Achilli et al., Kazakhstani poets “experiment widely with bilingualism; in some poetic texts, these experiments result in a new hybrid language”, such as the *Týleč* blend of *tıl* + *reč* [5]. The creation of a hybrid lexeme can be interpreted as a metaphor for the poets’ own identity: part Kazakh, part Russian, but truly fitting in neither category – so they carve out a third space that is both.

This poetic bilingualism serves multiple decolonial functions. Culturally, it elevates Kazakh elements within Russian texts, asserting the presence of the indigenous language

in a realm (Russophone literature) where it was once invisible. Politically, it challenges the purity of Russian as the “high” language by injecting Kazakh into it, subtly undermining Russian’s dominance. Artistically, it enriches the poetry, allowing for wordplay and meanings that resonate in two tongues at once. For readers who know both languages, such lines carry double significance and reward bilingual literacy – which is itself a statement, encouraging Kazakhstani readers to embrace their multicultural linguistic heritage.

Madina Tlostanova [6] calls the decolonial aesthesis: a reclaiming of sensory, affective, and indigenous modes of expression long suppressed by colonial rationalism. This linguistic hybridity not only reflects the lived reality of many Kazakhstani citizens – it functions as a political act that undermines the hierarchy of “high” versus “low” languages.

This poetic code-switching constitutes what Edward Said [7] theorized as contrapuntal reading: a way of hearing multiple cultural logics and histories in tension, yet in productive dialogue. Hybrid poems become polyphonic artifacts – ones that destabilize centralized narratives and offer readers simultaneous access to Kazakh and Russian epistemologies.

Beyond single words, some poets mix entire phrases or verses of Kazakh into predominantly Russian poems. Others use transliteration or play with phonetics to blur the line between languages. The result is a “polysubjective” voice, as Barkovskaya describes, where multiple linguistic identities speak within a single poem [8]. Rather than a cacophony, this dialogue of languages often produces a unique harmony – a poetic “code-switching” that feels organic to those who live with both languages daily. It also reflects the reality that in contemporary Kazakhstan, conversations often flow between Kazakh and Russian. By mimicking this code-switching, poetry becomes a microcosm of Kazakhstani society’s linguistic interplay.

Such hybridization can be seen as a form of literary creole, or what some scholars term a “nomadic subject” position in modern poetry. It aligns with the idea that Kazakh culture has long been one of nomadic fusion, adaptable and absorptive. The Russophone poets, in embracing a nomadic linguistic identity, effectively refuse to be pinned down as “Russian poets” or forced to abandon Russian to be “Kazakh poets.” Instead, they claim the freedom to roam between languages. This approach implicitly refutes colonial mentality: it neither submits to the colonizer’s language as superior nor rejects it outright as tainted, but appropriates it on the poet’s own terms.

Anuar Duisenbinov’s “Týleč” thus stands as a manifesto of sorts. Although the full text of the poem is beyond the scope here, its very existence in two tongues exemplifies what decolonized literature in Kazakhstan might look like. It echoes a broader sentiment among non-Russian Russophone authors post-2022: a desire to “detach the Russian language from the Russian state” and use it freely in their own contexts. By creating a Kazakhstani Russian poem, the poet is in effect saying that Russian as a medium belongs to him as well, not exclusively to Russia. In a 2023 interview, Belarusian novelist Sasha Filipenko (writing outside of Russia) similarly argued that “the Russian language does

not exclusively belong to [Vladimir] Putin”, asserting that Russophone authors of other countries have a claim to the language independent of Russia’s politics. Kazakhstani poets are putting this principle into artistic practice.

A key element of decolonization in Kazakhstani Russian-language poetry is the reclaiming of Kazakh culture, history, and identity within the content of the poems. These poets often invoke images of the steppe, nomadic traditions, folklore, and indigenous symbols, embedding them in Russian-language verse as a way to re-center Kazakhness. In doing so, they challenge the old colonial narrative that tended to marginalize or exoticize Kazakh culture. Instead of accepting the Soviet-era framing of Kazakh heritage as a “minor part of a larger Soviet narrative”, contemporary poets elevate that heritage to a central place in their work.

For example, the earlier-quoted poem of Aigerim Tazhi not only portrayed a local festival scene, but did so on its own terms – the imagery of “round dances...among gingerbread-houses” and people who “float along the grass to a river” is presented vividly and sincerely, without translating those cultural elements for an outside (Russian or international) audience. In essence, Tazhi writes a Kazakh scene in Russian, forcing the Russian language to carry Kazakh references. This is a subtle yet powerful form of cultural reclamation: the colonizer’s tongue is made to serve the storytelling of the colonized culture. Similarly, other poets might reference Kazakh historical figures, use Kazakh metaphors (such as comparisons to the vast steppe or to tulpar – the winged horse of legend), or incorporate snippets of Kazakh song and oral poetry traditions, all within Russian poems. Such content affirms a sociocultural identity that Barkovskaya identifies as a component of these authors’ hybrid identity [8]. They draw on the memory of their ethnic roots and regional identity deliberately, as if to remind both themselves and their readers that being a Russophone Kazakhstani does not make one any less Kazakh in spirit.

Alongside reclaiming cultural elements, these poets do not shy away from critiquing colonial and post-colonial realities. Their critical gaze is often two-fold. First, they critique the legacy of Russian/Soviet colonialism – sometimes directly, by referencing historical injustices or the Russification of Kazakh names and lands, and other times indirectly, through irony or allegory. Second, they also critique contemporary Kazakhstani society and the post-independence struggles, thereby avoiding an overly romantic or one-sided stance. As Barkovskaya notes, the multiplicity in their identity “allows them to avoid thinking in rigid binary oppositions” and “does not create a conflict situation as much as it allows a critical view of both today’s Kazakhstan and Russia.” [8]. This nuanced position is a hallmark of their decolonial approach: they are not engaged in blind nationalism nor in colonial nostalgia, but in a thoughtful dialogue with both inheritances.

For instance, some poems address the feeling of being caught between East and West – a classic post-colonial existential theme for many in Eurasia. A Russophone Kazakh poet may write about searching for a “home” that is neither Russia (the cultural influence) nor fully accessible Kazakhstan (due to language). Such poems resonate with

the sense of an in-between identity. In Yuri Serebryansky's 2023 essay on Kazakhstani poetry, he notes the difficulty of "tying a poet to geography" when identities are blurred, using the example of veteran poet Bakhyt Kenzheev, who can be simultaneously viewed as a Kazakhstani poet and a Russian poet [9]. This blurriness appears in poems where authors question labels and boundaries. One poet might ask rhetorically whether writing in Russian makes them any less the child of the Kazakh steppe; another might ironically call themselves "a stranger among my own, and my own among strangers", echoing the famous Russian saying, to capture their dual belonging.

The poets also directly or indirectly critique the present Russian political-cultural hegemony. The events of 2022 have sharpened these critiques. It is not uncommon to find subtle references to the Ukraine war or to imperial aggression in recent Kazakhstani poems – not necessarily by naming countries, but through metaphor (e.g., mentioning a "neighbor's wildfire that makes us rearrange our garden"). By weaving in such allusions, they assert a moral and emotional distance from the Russian state narrative, aligning themselves instead with a Kazakhstani (and generally post-colonial) perspective that values sovereignty and self-definition. This is part of decolonizing the mind – rejecting the old premise that being part of the "Russian world" is desirable or inevitable.

At the same time, these poets often express hope or agency in reshaping narratives. They are participants in Kazakhstan's "critical re-examination of identity" that is happening in arts and media. Some are involved in projects like translation of Kazakh literature into Russian or vice versa, contributing to bridging the gap between the two language communities. The growth of translation activities, with literary texts being published in both Russian and Kazakh, has been noted as an increasing trend. Several Russophone poets have even tried writing some verses in Kazakh or learning it better, as a personal journey of reconnection. While not all will switch languages (unlike some Ukrainian poets who switched to Ukrainian after 2022), the willingness to engage with the Kazakh language and include it in their art is significant. It represents a conscious step towards linguistic decolonization – a reclaiming of the space that Russian once exclusively occupied in their creative expression.

Embracing Hybrid Identity and the Future of Kazakhstani Russophone Poetry

The overarching finding in the works of Kazakhstan's contemporary Russophone poets is an embrace of hybrid identity as a source of creativity rather than a handicap. Instead of a binary choice between being Kazakh or Russian, these poets accept that they are both and neither – occupying a unique cultural third space. This acceptance comes with a sense of empowerment: it allows them to use the full palette of their mixed heritage. In their poems, one can often sense a pride in this dual perspective. For example, a poet may write ironically about mispronouncing a Kazakh word or not knowing a traditional custom, yet there is self-irony and humor rather than self-hate. Such self-irony, as Barkovskaya highlighted, is a "striking feature" of this poetry. It signals a comfort with complexity – these poets can poke fun at their own ambiguities even as they address serious themes. That in itself is a post-colonial victory: the ability to define oneself with a smile, not just with anger or despair.

In practice, the content of Russophone poems in Kazakhstan today often oscillates between themes of loss and hope. Loss – of language, of simple identities, of an older generation’s certainties. Hope – of forging a new inclusive identity, of languages coexisting, of personal and societal growth. In a single poem, a poet might mourn the fact that their grandmother’s beautiful Kazakh phrases are slipping away from them, yet celebrate that they can immortalize those phrases by embedding them in a Russian poem, thus passing them to a new audience. This is how they turn the hybrid reality into an artistic advantage.

Another dimension is the regional and global connectivity of these poets. Being Russophone means they can dialogue not only with Kazakh culture but with a vast Russophone world beyond Kazakhstan. They read and correspond with poets from other post-Soviet states – Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Belarus, Ukraine, as well as the Russian diaspora. This has created what scholars call an “archipelago of Russophone cultures beyond Russia”, where authors share experiences of decolonizing the Russian language in their respective contexts. Kazakhstani poets are active in this archipelago, contributing their unique perspective. For instance, Ramil Niyazov-Adyldzhyan, the Uyghur-Kazakhstani poet, has explicitly stated that “Central Asian literature exists regionally only in Russian” [10] – meaning that Russian serves as the common medium that connects writers from different Central Asian nations, since works in Kazakh, Uyghur, Uzbek, etc., are not widely translated among those languages. It’s a provocative statement that underscores a reality: Russian remains a *lingua franca* in the region. Niyazov-Adyldzhyan uses a historical analogy for his identity: comparing Uyghurs in Kazakhstan to Jews in the Russian Empire, with Russian as the “first people’s language” and Kazakh as the “second people’s language” in the hierarchy they navigate. By acknowledging this hierarchy, poets like him lay it bare for critique. The future they seem to seek is one where such hierarchies fade – where Russian is just one language among others, a tool free of imperial ownership, and where their “native language” (be it Kazakh or Uyghur) can flourish openly.

Indeed, a possible trajectory for the future that emerges in these poetic narratives is one of linguistic reconciliation. Several poets express the desire that they or their children will (re)learn Kazakh more deeply, not to replace Russian with it, but to be genuinely bilingual or even let the mother tongue lead emotionally. The poetry provides glimpses of what a decolonized linguistic self might look like: comfortable switching codes, capable of appreciating traditional Kazakh storytelling, and yet still part of the global conversation via Russian (and often English, as some are translated or engage with world literature).

In summary, the results of our analysis show that contemporary Russian-language poets of Kazakhstan are actively and artistically engaging in the country’s decolonization of identity. They do so by: (a) voicing the personal impact of Soviet linguistic legacy (often through themes of alienation and yearning), (b) innovating poetically with bilingual and hybrid language as an act of cultural assertion, (c) reclaiming Kazakh cultural symbols and memories in Russian verse, (d) critically examining both colonial history and present

social issues, and (e) embracing a hybrid identity with self-awareness and optimism. Through these strategies, they are decolonizing from within – carving out a Kazakhstani niche in the Russian language and, in the process, reshaping what Russian-language literature means in a post-colonial context.

This phenomenon aligns with the broader pattern of the Russian language undergoing diversification and becoming a pluricentric language with distinct local variants [7]. As Suleimenova et al. point out, the Russian language in Kazakhstan is developing its own norms and flavor, influenced by Kazakh language and culture – a process accompanied by a “fundamental change in the status of the Kazakh and Russian languages” and a visible “turn of the linguistic shift” back towards Kazakh among ethnic Kazakhs. The poetry we examined can be seen as the creative front of this linguistic and cultural shift. These poets are effectively writing the narrative of a new Kazakhstan: one that is confident enough to confront its past, and creative enough to imagine a future where its dual heritage is a source of richness rather than division.

CONCLUSION

Fundamental Finding : The contemporary Russian-language poetry of Kazakhstan (2019–2024) illustrates a dynamic interplay of decolonization and identity formation in a post-Soviet society. Far from being “Russian literature abroad,” the works of Kazakhstani Russophone poets have developed into a distinctive voice that reflects Kazakhstan’s unique historical and cultural experience. They confront the colonial legacy of the Russian language by transforming that language into a bearer of Kazakh realities, essentially indigenizing it. **Implication :** Decolonization in this context does not mean an abrupt rejection of Russian – an impractical proposition for authors who think and feel in that language – but rather a redefinition of its role. In doing so, they also contribute to a broader process of cultural decolonization in Kazakhstan – validating and disseminating indigenous identity through literature. The identity that emerges in these poems is multifaceted and fluid. This refusal to be boxed into a single category is itself a statement of post-colonial independence. It avoids the pitfalls of binary thinking – the very binary of colonizer vs. colonized or Russian vs. Kazakh that once underpinned imperial ideologies is rendered obsolete in their art. **Limitation :** Of course, the process is ongoing. Kazakhstan’s socio-political environment continues to evolve, with language policies and cultural initiatives (like the shift to Latin script for Kazakh, or the encouragement of trilingual education) influencing how quickly true bilingualism and language revival will progress. **Future Research :** Future research could fruitfully explore how upcoming generations of poets (those born after independence, for instance) handle these issues – whether they continue in Russian, switch to Kazakh, or become fully bilingual in their writing. Another area of interest is how Kazakhstani Russian-language poetry is received by different audiences: locally (by Kazakh speakers vs. Russian speakers) and internationally.

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