

Eurasian Research

ISSN: 2519-2442

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Eurasian Research Journal
Winter, 2025 Volume 7 • No. 1

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Eurasian Research Journal

Winter, 2025 Vol. 7 • No. 1

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Eurasian Research Institute (ERI),
2024 (print and electronic)

Indexed in

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Distributed by
Eurasian Research Institute
Almali district, Mametova 48, 050004,
Almaty, Kazakhstan

Typeset in Almaty
Printed and bound in Kazakhstan, Almaty

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<https://doi.org/10.53277/2519-2442-2025.1-01>

IRSTI 11.25.91

ISSN 2519-2442, KAZAKHSTAN

Research Article

**GEOPOLITICS OF THE GLOBAL SOUTH: SIMILARITIES IN THE
FOREIGN POLICIES OF KAZAKHSTAN AND BRAZIL**

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Received: 02.09.2024

Accepted: 14.10.2024

ABSTRACT

Over the course of the 21st century, the study of the Global South has evolved beyond a state-centric and strictly geographical conception. This framework now encompasses cultural, philosophical, and social dimensions, as well as the impacts of globalization on countries experiencing similar challenges within the global capitalist system. From a geopolitical perspective, the Global South has been employed as a category to classify countries, many formerly categorized as the “Third World,” that have sought to establish a more equitable international order characterized by cooperation and mutual respect since at least the 1960s. This article, adopting a geopolitical Global South perspective, aims to present the development and convergence of the diplomatic agendas of Brazil and Kazakhstan, particularly since the first term of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva in 2003. The primary conclusion of this study is that, despite their geographical distance, Brazil and Kazakhstan have developed convergent diplomatic relations that can contribute to strengthening economic ties, renewing the multi-lateral system, and enhancing the role of Global South diplomacy in mediating contemporary geopolitical crises.

Keywords: Brazil, Kazakhstan, Global south, Geopolitics, Foreign policy.

For citation: Dias Dos Santos, C. (2025). Geopolitics of the Global South: Similarities in the Foreign Policies of Kazakhstan and Brazil. *Eurasian Research Journal*, 7(1), pp.

INTRODUCTION

The city of Brasília, the capital of Brazil, and Astana, the capital of Kazakhstan, are located on different continents, separated by a distance of 13,390 kilometres. Despite this geographical distance, Brazilians and Kazakhs possess, albeit to varying degrees, similar characteristics. Economically, the primary sector serves as a crucial force for development. In terms of foreign policy, both nations exhibit concordant positions on several global issues, including the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, support for the rights of the Palestinian people, and opposition to the use of sanctions as a form of punishment.

However, the rapprochement and affinity between Kazakhstan and Brazil occur within a broader context, beginning in the early 2000s, characterised by the global rise of countries commonly referred to as the “Global South”, particularly by American and European researchers. During this period, there is also a recognition of the intensification of cooperative relations among these nations, grounded in principles of horizontality, non-interference, and non-conditionality, known as South-South Cooperation (Rizzo, 2019: 9).

South-South Cooperation and its foundational principles date back to the Cold War period and the emergence, in the 1960s, of the multilateral mechanism known as the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) comprising countries that sought to avoid alignment with either side of the conflict in order to safeguard the autonomy, sovereignty, and self-determination of peoples (Medeiros and Pereira, 2015: 1-2). This group of states was also popularly referred to as “Third World countries”.

Moreover, in the transition from the twentieth to the twenty-first century, the countries of the Global South, sharing similar experiences with the effects of capitalism and globalisation, have gained prominence through the disruption of the hierarchical logic of International Development Cooperation and their emergence as middle-income nations within the global economic landscape (Mawdsley, 2017: 2). Countries such as Brazil, Russia, South Africa, China, India, Mexico, and Kazakhstan are among those that stand out in this context.

Kazakhstan and Brazil intensified their relations from the onset of Lula da Silva’s first term (2003-2007), during which the Brazilian government began to adopt as part of its foreign policy guidelines the pursuit of international balance and the strengthening of ties with countries previously classified as “emerging” (Vigevani and Cepaluni, 2007: 274).

In addition to strengthening bilateral relations within the framework of South-South Cooperation, emphasising the promotion of economic, particularly commercial and agricultural, and humanitarian cooperation, Kazakhs and Brazilians are politically and economically coordinating to facilitate a more harmonious international system in which they can advocate for their interests, whether shared or divergent.

The mutual support between Brasília and Astana can be observed, for instance, through their actions in international organizations such as the United Nations (UN), the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), as well as during conferences like Rio+20, which took place in June 2012, in Rio de Janeiro, with the participation of nearly 200 countries (Gov.br, 2012). Additionally, Brazil’s

support for the “Green Bridge Partnership Program” proposed by the Kazakh government during the event further exemplifies this cooperation.

This study is structured around two objectives. First, it will explore the concept of the Global South, examining its origins, evolution, geographical and conceptual boundaries, and associated advantages and challenges. Second, it will present the development of diplomatic relations between Kazakhstan and Brazil, highlighting their shared geopolitical interests and convergent approaches to global issues.

Finally, we will conclude the text by outlining the future of the relations between Kazakhstan and Brazil. In light of the increasingly complex challenges of the World-System, how might the agenda between these countries advance? Which issues could unify their interests and intensify the alliance between the South American regional leader and the Central Asian regional leader?

AN EXAMINATION OF THE GLOBAL SOUTH: ORIGINS AND SIGNIFICANCE

Even though the state-centred notion of the Global South, based on a geographic “North-South” dichotomy, is useful for analyzing the compatibilities in the foreign policy practices of Kazakhstan, it also generates extensive debate about who the actors are and what it means to be part of this region of the world.

In a more intense debate, the Global South can have multiple representations, transcending strictly geographical notions. In sociology, for instance, this concept influences discussions regarding sociological trends and the interpretations of the world derived from this discipline.

The universalist movement, typically comprised of sociologists from wealthy countries, tends to adopt more generalist interpretative readings, often neglecting the local context and adhering to the traditional methodological rules of the discipline. In contrast, the particularist approach, more commonly employed by sociologists from states historically exploited by major capitalist powers, advocates for the use of concepts, methodologies, and ideas that extend beyond the traditional scientific practices dictated by affluent nations (Kislenko, 2020: 117).

Furthermore, the concept of the Global South can be employed to understand social transformations and struggles, unequal relationships, and conflicts among various actors, thereby challenging the construction of a hierarchical geographical imaginary, which is manifest in the binary distinctions between North and South, Western and non-Western, developed and developing countries (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2015: 4).

The concept of Global South, through a qualitative lens, can be understood as a term regularly used to designate regions that have experienced and continue to experience the most significant political, economic, and social shocks of globalization, which are not necessarily located in the geographical south of the world (Kislenko, 2020: 121), and, therefore do not adhere to a fixed and precise territorial logic. Alternatively, it can be understood as “an idea and a set of practices, attitudes, and relations. It is a disavowal of institutional and cultural practices associated with colonialism and imperialism” (Grovogui, 2011: 177).

The idea of the Global South, whether understood in a classificatory sense, as noted by Kislenko, or in an emancipatory light, as elucidated by Grovogui, is

commonly associated with the post-Second World War period, a time characterised by historical, geopolitical, and economic contexts marked by independence movements, anticolonial and anti-imperialism struggles, such as Pan-Arabism, Pan-Africanism, and Zapatismo, as well as the pursuit of autonomy by countries historically colonised and exploited by the Global North (Muhr and Neves, 2018: 358).

Internally, the development and construction of post-colonial present contradictions, and in many cases, the movements that contributed to the independence process, fighting for equitable development, have been overshadowed by a governmental elite supported by industrial capital and agrarian elites. On the international stage, through the New International Economic Order (NIEO), these countries sought a more balanced relationship in light of the economic and technological disparities with wealthier nations (Nilsen, 2016: 277).

From a geographical perspective, the first significant movement of the Global South was the Bandung Conference, held in April 1955 in Indonesia, which brought together leaders from 29 Asian and African states to advocate for autonomy and interests, as well as to devise development strategies in the context of a world polarized by the Cold War. The conference was significant as it laid the foundations for the establishment of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in 1956 during the Brioni Summit, and later, in 1964, the Group of 77.

Throughout the 1960s, the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and the Group of 77, also referred to as Third World countries, took form and established guiding political and economic principles that defined their respective roles in the international arena. Solidarity, complementarity, cooperation (also known as South-South Cooperation), equal and reciprocal relations, and non-interference were among the principles deliberated during the Non-Aligned Conferences in Belgrade in 1961 and Cairo in 1964, as well as in the Charter of Algiers in 1967.

By the end of the twentieth century, the economic dimension of the multilateral cooperation platforms (NAM and the Group of 77) gained greater prominence over their political weight, especially with the end of the Cold War and the bipolar World Order (Kislenko, 2020). The term “third World”, used to describe states that were not allied with either side, “become an all-encompassing category reducing the governments, economies and societies of Africa, Asia, Latin America and Oceania to a set of variables distinct from and inferior to the ‘First World’” (Berger, 1994: 270).

The spirit of solidarity, cooperation, and mutual respect established among these countries from the Bandung Conference gave way to a globalisation increasingly driven by neoliberal economic practices, the Washington Consensus, and triangular cooperation forms oriented by Global North agencies (International Monetary Fund (IMF), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), which attempt to steer South-South relations by providing “best practices” for development that may occur voluntarily or coercively (Muhr and Neves, 2018: 358).

However, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, emerging states in Latin America, Asia, and Africa with intense economic growth, similar social challenges, and marginalization within the global capitalist system (Dados and Conell, 2012: 12) attracted the interest of academic and political spheres in the

Global North, equivalent to the economically developed countries of Europe, North America, and Oceania (Odeh, 2010: 340).

The primary reason for the increased attention towards the countries in these regions was the manner in which they fostered commercial, social, and economic relations among themselves, contributing to a new form of human development and integration among the states occupying the so-called global “periphery” during a time of deep financial crisis in the Global North, “altering the economic geography of the world” (Gray and Gills, 2016: 558).

In 2013, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) stated in the report “The Rise of South” that from 1980 to 2010, the share of emerging Southern countries in global trade increased from 25% to 45%. During the same period, South-South trade dynamics expanded from 6% to 26%. The UNDP defined that “At the same time, the ‘rise of the South’ is contributing to a more diverse architecture for development assistance. This architecture not only involves new actors but also challenges, as well as complements, traditional forms of North–South development cooperation.” (United Nations Development Programme, 2013: 20).

Despite attempts by economically wealthy countries to interfere in the dynamics of relations and multilateral cooperation among Southern states, the increased interaction among them during the financial crisis of the early twenty-first century is not necessarily surprising. The multilateral cooperation platforms that emerged from the Global South between the 1990s and 2010 served as a primary integrative instrument for these countries during the period of global economic instability.

China, for example, deepened its relationship with its neighbours through the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), officially established in 2001 but with origins dating back to the 1990s, following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. In 2002, on the African continent, the African Union (AU) emerged, with its roots in the Sirte Declaration of 1999. In Eurasia, countries cooperated through the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC), which was later replaced by the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU).

In this context, the multilateral mechanism of the Global South that has gained the most prominence in recent years has been BRICS+, initially formed by Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, but which has recently expanded to include Iran, Egypt, Ethiopia, and the United Arab Emirates as member states.

The primary objective of BRICS+, through cooperation, is to promote reform in global governance and support emerging economies. This is achieved by proposing changes and alternatives to multilateral mechanisms such as the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) (Gov.br, 2023a).

It is axiomatic that BRICS+ aims to construct new pathways and opportunities for development for emerging nations through a ‘de-Westernisation’ of the world (Jurema, 2023). Consequently, other countries intend to join the bloc in the coming years or at least intensify their trade relations with its members.

Countries such as Kazakhstan, Cuba, and Nigeria are among these examples (Omirgazy, 2023; Tass, 2024; Klomegah, 2024).

The economically strong countries of the Global North exhibit different reactions to the admission of new members to BRICS+. While Germany and the United States attempt to downplay the group's growth, claiming it is not particularly significant (Pieper, 2023), France has recognised that this could represent a risk of fragmentation and an alternative to the current World Order model (Tass, 2023).

If in the past the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) had a limited role and was undermined by the triangular cooperations conducted by the Global North, the Global South, primarily through BRICS+, does not seek to develop an anti-Western World Order or to effect profound changes in the capitalist system. In fact, the South defends multilateralism and its renewal by distancing itself from Europe and the United States as centers of economic power, creating more diverse and horizontal economic and political perspectives (Jurema, 2023; Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Tafira, 2018: 139).

Finally, the Global South, which, as we have seen throughout this section, can correspond to multiple elements of a social, economic, political, cultural, and geographical nature common to territories whose relations with the centre of global capitalism have been unequal and exploitative, continues its pursuit of a multipolar, equitable, and just international system, even though there are disagreements on certain points of the contemporary global agenda.

KAZAKHSTAN AND BRAZIL: STRUCTURAL CONVERGENCES AND DIALOGUES IN FOREIGN POLICY

Until the mid-twentieth century, Brazil and Kazakhstan existed in 'different worlds'. The Kazakhs, until 1991, were part of the Soviet Union, considered the then 'second world.' During much of this period, Brazilians were governed from 1964 to 1985 by a civil-military dictatorship that was established with the support of the United States.

As a result of the similar political, social, and economic transformations experienced by Brazil and Kazakhstan during the transition from the last century to the current one, both countries began to face related challenges and issues that allow us to understand them as part of the same 'world', the Global South.

After the Cold War, both countries underwent economic reforms dictated by the economic guidelines set forth by financial institutions centred in the United States, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and others. This model of economic development sponsored by these institutions, came to be known as the Washington Consensus, the basic principles of which included reducing the state's role in economic life, implementing austerity policies, and promoting privatization.

Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, Kazakhstan and Brazil implemented a series of economic reforms to meet the demands of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other creditors. Some examples include the establishment of national currencies pegged to the dollar (the real in Brazil and the tenge in Kazakhstan) and the privatisations of public enterprises. In Brazil, this was carried out by the Collor government in 1990 through the National Privatisation

Programme (PND), and in Kazakhstan, it was initiated in 1991 by the Kazakh State Property Committee (Vaz and Melo, 2020: 44; Kazbekov et al., 2015: 6; Larsson, 2010: 3-6).

Socially, both countries also face common challenges, such as the fight to reduce the population living in extreme poverty, which stands at 5.9% or 12.7 million people in Brazil (Gomes, 2023) and 5.3% or 1.06 million in Kazakhstan (Qazstats, 2024a), as well as efforts to decrease unemployment rates and eradicate violence against women. In 2022, more than 200,000 women in Brazil registered domestic violence complaints (Brazilian Security Yearbook, 2023), while in Kazakhstan, this number was 80,000 (Mussabekova et al., 2024: 2).

Kazakhstan is the ninth largest country in the world by land area, covering 2,724,900 km², with an approximate population of 20 million people and a GDP per capita of US\$ 2,862.76 (Qazstats, 2024b). In contrast, Brazil is the sixth largest country in the world by land area, spanning 8,510,417 km², with a population of 203 million and a GDP per capita of US\$ 9,636.01 (IBGE, 2024; IBGE, 2023).

The primary driving force behind the foreign trade of both Kazakhstan and Brazil is the extraction and exportation of commodities (Amitrano and Araujo, 2024: 1; Qazstats, 2024c). Both countries are significant producers of grains. In the 2023/24 harvest, Kazakhstan ranked among the top twenty wheat producers in the world, while Brazil was one of the three largest producers of corn (USDA, 2024).

Furthermore, their respective territories contain reserves of natural resources such as oil, natural gas, gold, uranium, and deposits of rare earth elements (REEs), which are considered important for the production of clean technologies. Bilateral relations between Kazakhstan and Brazil began in the 1990s.

On 26 December 1991, Brazil was one of the first countries to recognize Kazakhstan's independence. On 22 September 1993, Brasília and Astana officially established diplomatic relations, which were consolidated in the following years through a series of measures that brought the two countries closer together (Embassy of the Republic of Kazakhstan to the Federative Republic of Brazil, 2024; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024a).

The strengthening of these relations occurred at the beginning of the 2000s when Kazakhstan sought to become one of the 50 most competitive countries in the world, implementing a series of reforms to achieve this goal. During this same period, a leftist politician, Lula da Silva, assumed the presidency of Brazil for the first time in many years. At that time, both countries aimed to gain more global prominence and shared compatible geopolitical principles.

Historically, Brazil has consistently upheld the fundamental principles of its diplomacy, which include the pursuit of peaceful conflict resolution, the defence of multilateralism, and respect for the sovereignty of other states. The government led by the Workers' Party (PT) redirected the country within the global geopolitical dialogue, striving to realise and advocate for "greater equanimity in international relations" and "a more humane and inclusive model of globalization" (Amorim, 2005: 1)

Since its Independence, Kazakhstan has sought to maintain a multi-vector foreign policy, fostering a mutually beneficial and equal dialogue with its partners. The country's advantageous geographical location allows for the development of a decentralized geopolitical approach that is not focused on any specific region of the world. Consequently, a part of Kazakhstan's foreign policy discourse is to present the country as a bridge between the East and the West, Muslims and Christians, and the North and the South (Nazarbayev, 2014: 15; Nazarbayev, 2019: 98).

In 2023, during an interview with the Chinese channel CGTN¹, the President of Kazakhstan, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, reiterated this position by stating his desire to place Kazakhstan "at the heart of the Eurasian continent" and to establish a balanced, multidirectional foreign policy, aiming to create and contribute to peaceful relations with as many countries as possible.

In 2006, Brazil opened its first and only embassy in Central Asia in the city of Astana. This gesture was reciprocated by the visit of the then-President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, to Brazil in 2007. During his visit, Nazarbayev thanked Brazil for its support of Kazakhstan's bid to join the World Trade Organization (WTO) and expressed support for Brazil's accession to UNSC (Agência Senado, 2007).

In a speech delivered during the meeting with President Nazarbayev in Brasília, Lula da Silva stated that the occasion symbolised "a historical milestone in the relations between two peoples who are beginning to know each other better" (Presidential Library, 2007) and that Kazakhstan and Brazil were "forging their future, as two peoples determined to sovereignly chart their destinies" (Presidential Library, 2007).

In 2009, President Lula da Silva visited Astana and, in his speech, emphasized that Kazakhstan and Brazil shared the common objective of building

"[A]n agenda that contributes to reducing power asymmetries and democratizing international decision-making bodies. We share the idea of multipolar world and the importance of revitalizing international institutions" (Ministério das Relações Exteriores, 2022).

Indeed, Brazilians and Kazakhs have shown harmony and mutual support in their actions and stances on the geopolitical agenda over the past decades. Their actions demonstrate the countries' pursuit of building a multipolar world, considering diverse centres of power and alternative geopolitical narratives to those dominant in the Global North.

On a regional scale, the similarities begin with the common goal that Brazil and Kazakhstan have of integrating the regions where they exert influence. At the beginning of the century, Brazil sought to unite Latin America through multi-sectoral infrastructure projects, as well as addressing issues of security, defence, and energy (Santos, 2014: 1).

Lula da Silva was the main advocate for the creation of organizations such as the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), which aimed to connect South American countries economically, socially, politically, and structurally, and the

1 Exclusive with President of Kazakhstan Tokayev. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YkSTOWRX2js&t=7s>. Accessed: 02.06.2024.

Initiative for the Integration of the Regional Infrastructure of South America (IIRSA), which sought to integrate the region through the energy, transport, and telecommunications sectors, with partial funding from the Brazilian National Bank for Economic and Social Development (BNDS).

However, in recent years, under the far-right government of Jair Messias Bolsonaro and his foreign policy entirely focused on the United States of America, alongside continuous attacks on important trading partners such as China, Brazil lost geopolitical space and influence. The country's return to regional leadership occurred with the re-election of Lula da Silva to the Palácio do Planalto in 2023.

Brazil has been endeavouring to (re)value cooperation, integration, and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) and to revive UNSASUR, which was nearly defunct after the end of left-wing governments in South America. Furthermore, Brazil has sought to position itself as a mediator, proposing peaceful resolutions to Latin American geopolitical crises, such as the attempted coup in Guatemala, ensuring fair elections in Venezuela, and the dispute between Caracas and Georgetown over the Essequibo region which is rich in oil (Belém Lopes, 2024: 92-99).

In turn, Kazakhstan, in its early years of Independence, began its process of assuming leadership in regional integration. In 1992, the Kazakh President, Nursultan Nazarbayev, took the first step in this direction by proposing the creation of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA), a forum composed of Asian countries, aimed at serving as a channel for dialogue to maintain stability on the continent.

In 1994, Kazakhstan also proposed the creation of a union to economically integrate the region, which was initially rejected but later adopted in 2000, through the establishment of the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC). Throughout the 1990s, Kazakhstan also sought to integrate the region through defense and security by creating a joint peacekeeping battalion with Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, called "Centrazbat".

Like Brazil, Kazakhstan also seeks to position itself as a mediator of regional conflicts. During the Tajik Civil War in the early 1990s, it deployed military personnel to assist with the security of the Tajik-Afghan border and hosted a round of negotiations concerning the conflict in 1995 in Almaty (Iji, 2010: 7-8).

Since 2017, Astana, the capital of Kazakhstan, has hosted rounds of talks between the parties involved in the Syrian armed conflict, seeking a diplomatic resolution to the confrontation. These negotiation rounds are known as the Astana Process (Nabiev and Nafikov, 2021: 203). In 2024, Kazakhstan also took the initiative to organize a meeting in Almaty between the Foreign Ministers of Azerbaijan and Armenia, so the parties could negotiate a lasting peace (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia, 2024).

At the international level, Brazilians and Kazakhs establish more convergent diplomatic interactions. This can be empirically observed through various elements and actions that the countries adopt on the global scale. Let us begin with the two major ongoing conflicts in the world, between Russia and Ukraine, and Israel and Palestine.

Despite differing positions on whether or not to adopt UN resolutions regarding Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which by November 2023 had claimed the lives of 10,000 civilians (UN News, 2023), Brazil and Kazakhstan, both significant partners of Moscow, advocate for a resolution based on the United Nations Charter and International Law, respecting Ukrainian territorial integrity and sovereignty. On this occasion, President Tokayev stated that without peace, development cannot be achieved and that countries should resolve the situation through a common path at the negotiating table to end hostilities as soon as possible (Official website of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2022).

The Kazakh leader offered assistance in mediating the conflict and stated that "a bad peace is better than a good war" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2022). The Brazilian government, at that time led by Jair Bolsonaro, called for the suspension of attacks and for the armed conflict to give way to dialogue based on the Minsk agreements, taking into account the interests of the involved parties.

When Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva returned to power in January 2023, he advocated for the creation of a group including other Global South countries, such as India, Indonesia, and China, as well as the parties involved and other geopolitical forces from the Global North, to bring an end to conflict. Throughout 2023, Kazakhstan continued to send humanitarian aid to affected Ukrainian civilians.

Kazakhstan and Brazil did not recognise the referendum arranged by separatist forces in Donetsk and Luhansk in eastern Ukraine, nor the independence granted by Putin after the onset of the conflict (Kussainova, 2022; Coletta, 2022). During the 77th session of the UN General Assembly, Tokayev stated that

"There is nothing more important now than to return to the foundational principles that lie at the root of this universal organization. In particular, we must rethink the linkages between three primordial principles: the sovereign equality of states, the territorial integrity of states, and peaceful coexistence between states" (Official website of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2023).

Tokayev reinforced his position with the Ukrainian President, Volodymyr Zelensky, in a call that took place in 2024. Meanwhile, the Brazilian leader, in a speech delivered at the Portuguese parliament in 2023, defended Ukrainian territorial integrity. He stated that:

"Brazil understands the apprehension caused by the return of war to Europe. We condemn the violation of Ukraine's territorial integrity. We believe in an international order based on respect for international law and the preservation of national sovereignties" (Gov.br, 2023b).

In October 2023 the Palestinian group Hamas carried out an attack on Israelis and foreigners. Tel Aviv responded with a full-scale invasion and destruction of Gaza, citing the annihilation of Hamas as justification. By November 2024, 43,391 Palestinians had been killed and 11 Israeli hostages remained in Gaza (The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2024).

Brazil and Kazakhstan recognise Palestine as a sovereign state and maintain that resolving the conflict involves a two-state solution (Palestinian and Israeli) coexisting harmoniously (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024b; Ministry of For-

eign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2024). The countries also voted in favour of adopting United Nations General Assembly Resolutions ES-10/21 and ES-10/22. Resolution ES-10/21 called for ‘an immediate, durable and sustained humanitarian truce leading to a cessation of hostilities’ (United Nations General Assembly, 2023a: 2). Resolution ES-10/22 focused on three main points:

1. Demands an immediate humanitarian ceasefire
2. Reiterates its demand that all parties comply with their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law, notably with regard to the protection of civilians
3. Demands the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages, as well as ensuring humanitarian access (United Nations General Assembly, 2023b: 1)

Brasília and Astana share concerns regarding the humanitarian crisis created in Gaza following the attacks conducted by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). In 2023, Brazil sent at least two humanitarian shipments to Palestine containing health kits, water filtration equipment, and food (Agência Gov, 2023). Kazakhstan also provided \$1 million in humanitarian assistance (Teslova, 2023).

Furthermore, Kazakhstan and Brazil oppose the use of economic sanctions as a form of punishment, similar to what the United States has historically done with Cuba, and more recently, with the support of European countries, has done to Russia. In 2023, during a press conference in Germany, in the presence of German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, President Tokayev stated that

“When it comes to sanctions, I have noted in recent sessions of the United Nations General Assembly and in other speeches that sanctions, as a form of confrontation, are entirely counterproductive from the perspective of revitalizing international relations, which have eroded as a result of the escalation of the global situation” (Bayramli, 2023).

The Brazilian government has already demonstrated correspondence with the Kazakhs on this issue. This is evident, for example, in Lula da Silva’s speech during the opening of the 78th session of the UN General Assembly:

“The international community needs to make a choice. On one side, there is the escalation of conflicts, the deepening of inequalities, and the erosion of the rule of law. On the other side, there is the renewal of multilateral institutions dedicated to promoting peace. Unilateral sanctions cause significant harm to the populations of the affected countries. In addition to failing to achieve their stated objectives, they hinder processes of mediation, prevention, and peaceful resolution of conflicts” (Gov. br, 2023c).

Brazil and Kazakhstan also collaborate on other issues, including participation in UN peacekeeping missions. Brazil has a history of deploying troops to missions such as those in Haiti in 2004 and Lebanon in 2011. Kazakhstan recently embarked on its first independent UN peacekeeping mission in 2024, monitoring the Golan Heights. Both countries have also adopted a cautious approach to the Ukraine conflict, opting not to provide weapons to Ukraine to avoid further escalation with Russia.

Given the parallels presented in this section, can the relations between Kazakhstan and Brazil be expanded? If so, in what areas? We will explore this in the next section, where we will conclude the text.

CONCLUSION: THE EVOLVING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN KAZAKHSTAN AND BRAZIL

Over the years, high-ranking representatives have held Brazil-Kazakhstan Political Consultation meetings to discuss bilateral relations between the countries. In 2013, the then Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan, Erlan Idrissov, visited Brazil, where he inaugurated the Embassy of Kazakhstan in the country.

On that occasion, Idrissov and the Brazilian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Luiz Alberto Figueiredo Machado, discussed matters of mutual interest and the relationship between the two countries. Cooperation in areas such as renewable energy, the agricultural sector, increasing bilateral trade, UN reform, nuclear disarmament, and “sustainable development” were among the topics discussed (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2014).

Despite a persistent trade deficit, which increased from – \$43,161,694 million in 2014 to – \$21,913,573 million in 2023 (Comexstats, 2024), neo-extractivism could bolster bilateral trade between Kazakhstan and Brazil. In the field of nuclear energy, for example, Brazilians and Kazakhs could more intensively explore the trade of uranium. Kazakhstan, the world leader in natural uranium mining, partnered and traded with Brazil’s Nuclear Industries (INB) between 2018 and 2022, contributing to the operation of the nuclear power plants in Angra dos Reis, Rio de Janeiro (Petronoticias, 2020; Institute for Energy and Nuclear Research, 2018).

The Kazakhs can also strengthen their friendship with Brazilian agribusiness, which is the fourth largest consumer of fertilizers in the world (Embrapa, 2018). Given Brazil’s low fertilizer production, Kazakhstan could become the main supplier of, for example, Sulphur, which is very important for Brazilian agriculture. In recent years, Kazakhstan has competed with the United States for this position (World Integrated Trade Solution, 2024).

The Brazilian side offers technology developed by the Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation (Embrapa). In recent years, Kazakhstan has been seeking to establish partnerships of Kazakh agriculture (Embrapa, 2019). During the visit of Kazakhstan’s First Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, Kairat Umarov, to Brazil in May 2024, the parties committed to maintaining dialogue on a possible agricultural research exchange (Embassy of the Republic of Kazakhstan in the Federative Republic of Brazil, 2024).

Another important factor in this relationship is the operator of Eurasian Resources Group (ERG), of which 40% is owned by the Kazakh government, in the state of Bahia, in the Northeast Brazil. The company owns the Pedra de Ferro Mine, is constructing the Porto Sul Port and Services Complex, and won the concession granted by the Brazilian Federal Government for the operation and development of the West-East Integration Railway (FIOL). Through these ventures, ERG, and consequently the Kazakh government, will control the network of communication and transportation of minerals in part of Brazilian territory, as they are responsible for the extraction of hematite and itabirite and, soon, for

their transportation via FIOOL to the Porto Sul Port and Services Complex, from where they will be distributed to their main customers.

However, it is important to highlight that the neo-extractivism of this commercial relationship has devastating effects. The Pedra de Ferro Mine project, for example, has caused serious territorial consequences in the interior of Bahia. The Oswaldo Cruz Foundation (Fiocruz), through the Map of Conflicts, Environmental Injustice, and Health in Brazil, has already identified some of the consequences of ERG's activities.

In addition to accidents and food insecurity caused to quilombola communities and family farmers in the region, the institution also lists the main socio-environmental impacts of mineral extraction at Pedra de Ferro as changes in the traditional regime of territorial use and occupation, contamination or poisoning by harmful substances, and contamination of water and soil (Mapa de Conflitos, 2022).

Brazilian agribusiness, a major beneficiary of fertilizers from Kazakhstan, has also generated serious environmental consequences within the national territory. Despite being the sector responsible for Brazil's economic growth, in recent decades its activities have led to social, physical, chemical, and natural impacts, such as soil degradation and increased deforestation in the Cerrado and the Amazon, in the Midwest and North regions of the country (Gomes, 2019: 66-67).

In an increasingly polarised world, the countries of the Global South, although having heterogeneous ideas on some points, have been seeking to establish a more robust preservation of multilateralism. In 2023, for example, the fifth round of Kazakh-Brazilian political consultations was held in Astana, where both parties agreed on the importance of converging in decision-making within multilateral organizations. On this occasion, Brazil also expressed support for Kazakhstan's initiatives to establish the International Agency for Biological Safety and the UN Regional Sustainable Development Goals Centre for Central Asia and Afghanistan in Almaty (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2023).

Brazilians and Kazakhs can further contribute to the defense and renewal of multilateralism and multilateral organizations, integration, and the common interest of the Global South. This can be achieved through strengthening BRICS+, with Kazakhstan's elevation to the status of a partner state within the bloc, and by contributing to the construction of a multipolar financial architecture, as recently advocated by Dilma Rousseff, president of the New Development Bank. They can also collaborate in the mediation of conflicts and even in the development of global policies to address humanitarian and migration crises in the Global South, as experienced both at the Kazakh border, with the recent Afghan crisis, and at the Brazilian border, with Venezuelan refugees.

The development of this relationship, which marked its 30th anniversary in 2023, is set to unfold in numerous ways. Together, Kazakhstan and Brazil can contribute to the mutual development of their economies and the exchange of experiences in addressing social and environmental challenges, even if this is paradoxical, as we have seen in the case of the Pedra de Ferro Mine, in addition to, of course, establishing a more democratic international system.

Ethical Commission Approval

This study did not require approval from an ethics committee as it did not involve human participants, animals, or sensitive personal data. All data used in this research were obtained from publicly available sources.

Conflict of Interest Statement

There is no conflict of interest with any institution or person within the scope of this study.

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<https://doi.org/10.53277/2519-2442-2025.1-02>

IRSTI 04.41.61

ISSN 2519-2442, KAZAKHSTAN

Research Article

**DOES LOVE REALLY HAVE NO BOUNDARIES? ANALYZING
THE MOTIVATIONS BEHIND KAZAKHSTANI WOMEN'S
MARRIAGES TO TURKISH MEN**

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Received: 16.12.2024

Accepted: 30.01.2025

ABSTRACT

This study explores the motivations behind the marriages of Kazakhstani women to Turkish citizens and examines the broader implications of these unions, particularly regarding the emigration of highly qualified young Kazakhstani women of reproductive age. Employing a qualitative research approach, the study is based on in-depth interviews with 23 Kazakhstani women who have married Turkish men. The collected data were analyzed through text analysis to identify key patterns and drivers of these cross-national marriages. The findings reveal that the motivations for these marriages vary significantly. While love and emotional attachment play a crucial role, other factors such as economic stability, social security, and the perception of Turkish men as responsible family-oriented individuals also contribute to these marriage decisions. Additionally, sociocultural similarities between Kazakhstan and Türkiye, family influence, and religious alignment emerge as important determinants. Some women see marriage to a Turkish citizen as a means of personal development and access to better economic opportunities, while others emphasize the support, reliability, and traditional values they find in their Turkish partners. Given the growing trend of international marriages, the study highlights the need for further sociological and demographic research to assess the long-term impact of such unions on Kazakhstani society. It also calls for policies that address the social and economic factors influencing marriage migration.

Keywords: Foreign marriages, International marriages, Kazakh women, marriages, Türkiye, Kazakhstan, Kazakh-Turkish marriages.

For citation: Nakipbayeva, Z. (2025). Does Love Really Have No Boundaries? Analyzing the Motivations Behind Kazakhstani Women's Marriages to Turkish Men. *Eurasian Research Journal*, 7(1), pp.

INTRODUCTION

Thanks to today's technological developments, the restrictions of time and space have largely been eliminated, and the possibility of individuals coming together from different cultures has increased. Cultural interactions have increased through technological developments, increased global transportation (e.g., the development of transportation facilities), and the relocation of economic centres. For example, individuals travelling to other countries in the scope of tourism activities have the opportunity to meet individuals from different cultures; cultural interaction takes place in this way. When individuals from different cultures meet, they can decide to become a family, and so intercultural marriages happen. Although such intercultural marriages have occurred in many societies in the past, this case continues to increase in the global world (Ersoy Celik and Sala, 2021: 138).

In the scientific literature, it can be noted that heterogeneous marriages are defined differently due to socio-cultural, geographical, legal, and other factors. For example, when examining all the studies related to these marriages in the literature, it has become clear that they are referred to by different terms. For instance, in Kazakhstani literature, marriages between South Korean men and Kazakhstani women of Korean descent are referred to as "international marriages" (Yem, 2013), while in Türkiye, marriages with all foreign brides are referred to as "foreign marriages" and "mixed marriages" (Altun and Dinc, 2016). Turkish-German marriages are called "mixed marriages" (Saglam, 2006), and marriages between Russian and Turkish citizens are named "transnational marriages" and "hybrid marriages" (Deniz and Ozgur, 2013). In Russia, marriages of Russian women with foreigners, as well as all marriages with foreigners, are referred to as "international marriages with a foreign spouse" (Koludarova, 2010), "marriage with a foreigner" (Koludarova, 2015), "international marriage with a foreigner" (Korneeva, 2006), while marriages between citizens of Asian countries and citizens of other countries are referred to as "cross-border" (Pochagina, 2008). Marriages between Russian men and Turkish women (Korosteleva and Nas, 2011), and marriages between South Korean and Russian citizens are also referred to as "mixed marriages" (Tangalycheva and Tsoy, 2011). In addition, studies conducted in English have referred to marriages between citizens of Asian countries (South Korea, North Korea, Japan, and China) either among themselves or with citizens of other foreign countries as "international marriage" (Piper, 2003; Morgan et al., 2007; Lee, 2008; Jones and Shen, 2008; Seah, 2012). Marriages between Filipino and American citizens (Rosario, 2005) are also termed "international marriage," while marriages of women from post-Soviet countries with Turkish men are referred to as "cross-border marriage" (Bloch, 2010).

Although researchers have used these definitions for marriages between citizens of different countries, they have named them differently according to the focus of their studies. For example, researchers focusing on culture have referred to these marriages as "intercultural marriages"; those studying migration and identity have called them "cross-border marriages," "transnational marriages," or "interethnic marriages"; while researchers focusing on citizenship and geographic boundaries have used terms such as "marriage with a foreigner" or "foreign marriage." In this study, since it focuses on the citizens of two countries, marriages between Kazakhstani and Turkish citizens are discussed and

referred to as “marriage with a foreigner/foreign marriage” from the perspective of citizenship. However, in this study, based on the definitions of Koludarova (2015), Korneeva (2006), and Altun and Dinc (2016), the term “marriage with a foreigner” has been deemed appropriate for marriages between Kazakhstani and Turkish citizens. The term “marriage with a foreigner” is conceptualized, similar to the definitions of Irastorza and DeVoretz (2009), Koludarova (2015), and Korneeva (2006), as “marriages between citizens of two different countries.”

Although the main topic of the article, “Marriage with a foreigner,” has become more common in Kazakhstan since the 1990s, it can be emphasized that there is a lack of sufficient scientific research and statistical data on this subject in the Kazakhstani literature. However, marriages between individuals from two different cultures, referred to as “mixed marriages” or “international marriages,” have been widely discussed in the Kazakhstani literature.

It is important to emphasize that the topic of mixed marriages is not a newly emerging issue for the multi-ethnic independent Kazakhstan. Aubakirova and Zhunusova (2017: 49) have highlighted that in the last decade of the 20th century and at the beginning of the 21st century, the marriage processes in Kazakhstan underwent significant changes. In this context, in their opinion, marriages with foreign citizens can be considered as a new aspect of marriage. Now Kazakhstanis are marrying citizens from all continents of the world, including Africa, South and North America, Australia and Eurasia (Aubakirova and Zhunusova, 2017: 48). Based on these researchers, it is possible to state that the nature of marriages in Kazakhstan, particularly mixed marriages, is undergoing qualitative changes. In other words, during these periods, a new type of mixed marriage emerged, involving marriages between citizens of two different countries. This topic has been frequently covered in the Kazakhstani media over the last 10 years with headlines such as “Marriages with foreigners increased in Kazakhstan”, “Why do women from foreign countries want to marry Kazakh men?”, “The pain of mixed marriages”, and “Men in the Southern Region marry foreign women more often”. They discuss the increasing number of marriages with foreigners in Kazakhstan after the years of independence, along with their causes and consequences. Although this is a frequently debated topic in newspapers and online media, according to Yem (2013), there is a lack of sufficient research and statistical data on “marriages with foreigners” in the Kazakhstani literature. It can especially be noted that there are no studies on marriages with foreigners involving women from countries that gained independence after the dissolution of the Soviet Union (Yem, 2015).

The topic of marriage with foreigners was first addressed as a scientific research topic in the Kazakhstani literature by Yem (2013, 2015). Yem (2013: 65) emphasized that as a result of the economic, social, and cultural relations that began to develop between ethnic Koreans in Kazakhstan and South Korea in the late 1990s, marriages emerged between Kazakhstani ethnic Korean women and South Korean men. In his study, Yem (2013) highlighted that gender imbalance is one of the key factors contributing to these marriages, which he refers to as “interethnic marriages.” In other words, as a result of the birth policies in South Korea, the number of men of marriageable age is lower than that of women, while in Kazakhstan, the number of women exceeds that of men. This disparity has led to marriages based on the demand-supply relationship in both countries. On the other hand, according to the researcher, one reason why ethnic Kazakh-

stani women marry Korean men is their desire to marry men who adhere to Korean traditions.

Although the issue of international marriages has not been widely discussed in the Kazakhstani scientific space and statistical data has not been systematized, scholars from the Eurasian region show interest in this problem, particularly in the motivations for entering such marriages, as evidenced by the results of the analysis of scientific literature. For example, researchers Anashkina and Pogodina, in one of their works, also emphasized the diversity of reasons for the marital emigration of Russian women, including issues of the post-Soviet society (economic, social, demographic), national and cultural characteristics, demographic problems in Western European countries, psychological and cultural needs and demands of some men in Western society, and finally, the opportunities provided by an open society (2011). Koludarova (2010, 2015), in turn, criticizes the quality of the Russian marriage market. She believes that the shortage of men, their early mortality, and deviant behaviour are the main reasons that motivate women to look for partners abroad.

According to Kartashova's research, the main reason for entering marriage in the modern world is love, the desire to be with one's soulmate and share joys and sorrows with them (2009: 133). Other researchers (Nomura, 2007; Suzuki, 2007) view this issue more broadly and link the increase in the number of international marriages to global processes such as military actions, international trade, student exchanges, tourism, the decreasing cost of travel, and migration. Pogodina (2009), Tyuryukanova (1996), Tsallagova (1996), Altun and Dinc (2016), and Deniz and Ozgur (2013) also note the significant role of tourism in the rise of international marriages, combined with migration.

This article attempts to understand and analyze the reasons that motivate Kazakhstani women to marry Turkish citizens. It also offers practical recommendations for reducing the number of cases of emigration among young, qualified Kazakhstani women of reproductive age who marry foreigners.

METHODOLOGY

Russian scholar Petrenko (2011: 75) emphasized that knowledge is not a passive reflection of reality, but is constructed based on the individual's interaction with the world, and it depends on the individual's motivations, the language of explanation, the operational tools used, etc. As a result, the culture of society and the personal characteristics of the individual shape their "worldview". In this study, the author attempts to understand the reasons for entering into marriage with a foreigner, thus aiming to construct their reality based on their own interpretations. Therefore, it can be said that the theoretical foundation of this research is based on social constructivism. Constructivism is an approach in which knowledge is not seen as a passive reflection but as an active construction of cognitive objects and events in the subject's consciousness. This approach includes ideas about language and the socio-historical conditions of consciousness, as well as theories of multiple alternative methods of conceptualizing events and the pluralism of truth. The main idea of constructivism is that knowledge is not a reflection of reality, but an active construction of representations of the world in the subject's consciousness (Ulanovsky, 2009: 37).

The article was prepared as part of a study conducted by the author for use in their dissertation in 2019. In-depth interviews were used for data collection. The obtained data were coded based on text analysis. A total of 22 women participated in the study, selected using the snowball sampling method based on criteria such as age, place of residence (Kazakhstan and Türkiye), professional characteristics, and others. Of the 22 women surveyed, 9 live in Kazakhstan and 13 in Türkiye.

The analysis of the socio-demographic situation of the study participants shows that their age range is between 29 and 55 years. The average age of women at marriage is 26-27 years. In this context, the youngest age of marriage for women was 19 years, while the oldest was 33 years. Looking at their marital experience, it can be noted that women have been married from 5 months to 25 years. Most women have an average marriage duration of 9-10 years. In this context, it can be said that the majority of participants (9 people) have been married for 6-10 years, five people have been married for 1-5 years, four people have been married for 11-15 years, and four people have 16-25 years of marital experience. The number of children in the marriage ranges from 1 to 4 children. Although those with 3 children (2 families) and 4 children (2 families) were in the minority, it was noted that 2 families had no children.

Looking at the participants' education level, it can be emphasized that the majority have higher education. Fourteen women hold bachelor's degrees, and four have master's degrees. Two participants are continuing their doctoral studies in Ankara, Türkiye. Two participants are high school graduates. Additionally, among the participants, there are those who received their education both in Türkiye and abroad. Four participants received their education in Türkiye before marriage, while two participants were educated in the UK and the USA.

Although the majority of participants had higher education, it was noted that most of them (10 women) did not work in fields related to their education, and seven women were not employed at all. It can be said that only four women work in areas related to their education. It is clear that the employed women are working in the clothing and cosmetics sales industry, in their own business related to electronic libraries and language courses, as freelancers in the private sector, as cooks, singers, and sellers. Additionally, one participant is pursuing a doctoral degree.

It was also noted that the longest marriage duration for women is 25 years. This indicates that Kazakh-Turkish families are not a new phenomenon for modern society, but rather a phenomenon that began during the years of Kazakhstan's independence.

Since the study is based on a qualitative approach, no hypotheses are formed, and surveys are not prepared in advance. However, during the research, problem questions are created, which open the way to the main questions. The research questions of this study are constructed as follows: How do women describe the reasons for marriages between Kazakh women and Turkish men? What do Kazakh women think about the prospects of their own marriage? How and where did they meet their future husbands?

The coding was determined based on the women's place of residence (Kazakhstan or Türkiye), age, as well as order number. For example, the code KzK2,

34 years old refers to an excerpt from the conversation of the second registered woman, who lives in Kazakhstan and is 34 years old, according to the list of transcriptions.

THE DEPICTION OF THE REASONS FOR MARRIAGES BETWEEN KAZAKHSTANI WOMEN AND TURKISH MEN FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF WOMEN

The Attractive Characteristics of the Man: He Was a Huge Mountain Standing Behind Me. Currently, marriages are primarily based on free partner choice, personal feelings, and responsible decision-making. According to research, the main reasons for marriage today are love, the desire to be with the person they love, and to share “joys and sorrows” with them (Kartashova, 2009: 133).

Based on this explanation, it can be said that the feeling of mutual love and affection plays an important role in the decision of Kazakhstani women living in Kazakhstan or Türkiye to marry Turkish men. More specifically, the attractive characteristics of Turkish men led Kazakh women to feel love and affection for them. Kazakhstani women, who had never considered marrying a foreigner before, began to take notice of Turkish men’s qualities after getting to know them more closely, and eventually fell in love. As a result, these women, who developed feelings of love or affection, no longer viewed Turkish men as foreigners. Therefore, for these women, their marriage is not seen as a marriage with a foreigner. In general, from the women’s statements, it can be understood that marriage is considered an irrational act if there is no feeling of love and affection involved.

“If there is no love, then marriage doesn’t happen. Love is important. Let’s call it a marriage with the love I deem suitable. Love is important in this marriage” (KzK2, 34 years old).

When Kazakhstani women were asked about the reasons that played an important role in their marriage to a Turkish man, it was noted that they characterized the men they married as kind-hearted, humane, helpful, and good people. Based on this explanation, it can be said that the emergence of love or sympathy for Turkish men and the subsequent decision to marry were strongly influenced by the men’s kind-hearted, helpful, and humane character. In this context, women who know Turkish men as helpful reported that they support people in need or try to solve their problems, even if they do not know them.

The Turkish man’s sense of responsibility toward the family also emerged as a feeling of love or sympathy among Kazakhstani women, which later played an influential role in their decision to marry. More specifically, the participants paid close attention to the man’s behaviour and responsibility toward the family when evaluating their marriage decision. This is because the participants’ primary goal was to establish a strong family. Therefore, before marrying a Turkish man, the participants observed his behaviour and views regarding the family. In this context, for almost all of the participants, the Turkish man’s devotion to his family and responsible behaviour played a significant role in approving the marriage decision. Especially for women, the Turkish man’s ability to care for his family and wife significantly influenced their decision to marry. “He is a real man, responsible to his family, and devoted to his family” (TrK8, 36 years old).

Kazakhstani women, when considering marriage with a Turkish man, have paid attention not only to his responsibility towards the family but also to his responsibility towards children. The participants believed that in the future, their children should be raised in a family where both the mother's and father's roles and functions are fulfilled. In this context, when evaluating a Turkish man as a potential spouse, the women also considered whether he had the ability to be a good father. Additionally, participants who were influenced by negative examples in their social environment decided to marry, thinking that Turkish men could be good fathers to their children. In this regard, some Kazakhstani participants seemed to compare the behaviour of Turkish and Kazakhstani men towards children based on their responses. Overall, during the interviews, it was noticed that the Kazakhstani participants saw Turkish men as having the potential to be "good fathers" "Another thing I like about Turks is that they do not abandon their children, they can abandon women, never children" (KzK4, 33 years old).

"In Kazakhstan, there was a lot of such a situation at that time, men did not take care of their children after divorce. My sister had a similar situation, they divorced. Then her husband did not even come. I mean, I saw many men who were irresponsible. This was very important to me. A man should be responsible for his child and family, he should take care of them. I think I made the right choice in this regard" (TrK 11, 30 years old).

After Kazakhstani women met Turkish men, they began to see their potential as good spouses and good fathers and started to feel a sense of trust. In other words, after witnessing the responsible behaviour of Turkish men towards their families, Kazakhstani women trusted that they could be happy in marriage with them. As a result, the image of the Turkish man as a "trustworthy man" in the eyes of women played an important role in their decision to marry.

Kazakhstani women who value the personal qualities of Turkish men have noticed that they provide support in all matters before marriage. Therefore, the material and, particularly, emotional support shown by the man after a meeting has also been an important factor in the participants' decision to marry. In other words, a man who is considered as a potential spouse positively influences a woman's decision to marry when he helps her solve problems, realize her dreams and goals, and is by her side when she is sick. It is possible to explain how important it is for women, who have to bear all the responsibility and be strong before encountering their husbands, to have a man who can take on all the burdens and provide support in their decision to marry, using the example of participant TrK3 (50 years old). While describing this situation, TrK3 (50 years old) characterized her Turkish husband with the expression "he was someone I could lean on."

"I have been attending boarding schools since I was very young, away from my mother and father. Therefore, from the age of 7 or 8, I can say that I reached this point by doing everything on my own, making my own decisions, and scratching my way up. So, when I met my husband and married him, he was like a huge mountain standing behind me. I felt a sense of relief, thinking that finally, I wouldn't have to do everything myself, that I had someone who was my supporter, my helper, someone I could trust and love. Honestly, that was a huge help and support for me; I

felt relieved. Until I turned 26, I faced many difficulties, but I dealt with all of them alone. Then, after my boyfriend stood by me and married me, I can honestly say I found peace. He was someone I could lean on” (TrK3, 50 years old).

Among women who marry Turkish men, there are participants who have the principle of “never marrying a foreigner”. However, the supportive character of Turkish men has led to the breaking of this “never” principle. More specifically, the participant TrK9 (29 years old), who is currently studying in Türkiye, experienced difficult times at a certain point in her life. Before meeting her Turkish husband, TrK9 (29 years old) emphasized that she considered herself a “nationalist” and therefore thought she would “never marry a foreigner”. However, during a turning point in her life, the participant mentioned that her Turkish husband was always by her side at that time, offering support. According to the participant, while trying to overcome these difficulties, the support provided by the Turkish man was a significant factor in breaking her previous “never” principle and in her decision to marry.

In addition, participants have mentioned that one of the reasons for marriage is that the Turkish man they are going to marry helps them solve their problems. According to the participants, aside from the Turkish man’s ability to face problems rather than avoid them, his ability to take responsibility and solve their issues has been a positive factor in evaluating him as a potential spouse. As emphasized earlier, for the participants, the ability of the person they are going to marry to take responsibility for his family and wife has been an important factor. This helps explain why participants value this characteristic of the man when making their marriage decisions. In this context, some participants have shared that the man they are going to marry not only helps solve their problems but also the problems of their family, and this has had a significant influence on their decision to marry. More specifically, participant TrK11 (30 years old), who came to Istanbul to meet her future husband’s family before marriage, realized his problem-solving qualities. Additionally, the participant considered these qualities of the man as responsible behaviour toward his family and wife, and this led her to decide to marry him.

Kazakhstani women have also placed importance on the gender roles of the person they are going to marry. For women, the masculine characteristics of men have been significant. These masculine traits have influenced women’s decisions to marry. When explaining their reasons for marriage, women often describe the man they marry as “he is a real man” or “he has a masculine character,” emphasizing that this was a key factor in their decision to marry. “In other words, the masculine traits of a man are very important. And with a subtle sense, a woman feels whether she can trust the man or not” (TrK13, 38 years old).

Understanding Each Other with the Man: As Long as Minds Are Aligned. In the previous section, it was mentioned that love and the desire to spend life with someone they love are prominent reasons for marriage today. However, researcher Kartashova (2009: 134) notes in her study that when participants were asked about the reasons for marriage if the answers included “spiritual closeness” and “shared views and interests,” they would choose these concepts, disregarding the “love” motif, and select “spiritual closeness” and “shared views and interests” instead.

Based on this explanation, it can be said that for Kazakhstani women marrying Turkish men, the motifs of spiritual closeness, shared views, and common interests play an important role. When considering marriage to a Turkish man, Kazakhstani women also value whether they are compatible with him. For women, being able to get along with the man they are going to marry, finding common ground and shared interests, and having similar outlooks on the future have all been influential factors in their decision to marry.

Before marriage, the Turkish man became a good friend with whom the Kazakhstani woman could share everything. This was an influential factor for women who had never considered marrying a foreigner before. For these women, being in harmony with their spouse was considered more important than their ethnic background when it came to marriage. In this context, participants who prioritized mutual understanding in their marriage decisions emphasized that they were able to share their thoughts and perspectives with their husbands.

Family and Family Approval: Similarities, Good Relationships. One of the important reasons for Kazakhstani women marrying Turkish men is the family factor. More specifically, the socio-economic status of the man's family, personal relationships within that family, structural and cultural similarities between her own family and the man's family, and the approval of her own family have all played a significant role in the decision of Kazakhstani women to marry Turkish men.

Although Kazakhstani women may not view the Turkish man they are going to marry as a foreigner, they understand that the marriage will involve a different socio-cultural structure. In a marriage with a different socio-cultural background, Kazakhstani women have been aware that they will undergo transformations, such as changing their country, and social environment, being away from their family and friends, and adapting to a new setting. However, not all women marrying Turkish men have considered these transformations in their new lives. Generally, those women who were uncertain about this thought realized after marriage that they would migrate to Türkiye and live there. In this context, Kazakhstani women have understood that after moving to Türkiye, their new family will be their husband's Turkish family. On the other hand, some participants have been in a dilemma, considering whether to marry or not. Therefore, it is clear that these women took the man's family into account when evaluating marriage with a Turkish man. Kazakhstani women with this perspective decided to meet their future husband's family before marriage and assess the situation based on the family's circumstances and the relationships between the man and his family.

In this context, Kazakhstani women living in Türkiye or those who had the opportunity to come to Türkiye found it appropriate to visit their future husband's family first in order to finalize their decision to marry. On the other hand, women who were unable to visit Türkiye met their husband's social environment in Kazakhstan (relatives, siblings, and friends) and assessed their decision based on the relationships within that environment.

The positive impressions Kazakhstani women had after meeting the Turkish man's family and relatives played a role in their subsequent marriage decisions. In this context, women not only valued elements such as the warm welcome,

close relationships, and friendliness within the man's family, but also paid attention to the socio-economic status of the family and social environment.

Additionally, among the participants, there were those who found similarities between the family structure and upbringing of the Turkish man and their own family. From the responses given during the interviews, it became clear that the similarity between the Turkish man's family and the participant's own family was an important factor in their decision to marry him. This explanation is supported by the statements of participants TrK4 (38 years old) and TrK5 (36 years old). For example, participant TrK4 (38 years old) highlighted the similarity in the upbringing within the families as an important factor in her decision to marry the Turkish man, while participant TrK5 (36 years old) emphasized the similarity in the family structures, in addition to the upbringing, as a significant reason.

As previously mentioned, Kazakhstani women had never considered marrying a foreigner before meeting Turkish men. Therefore, when a Turkish man proposed marriage, it took these women a long time to approve the decision. The reason for the delay in their decision was their reluctance to leave their familiar life, social environment, and especially their country, and move abroad after marriage. It is important to note that this explanation does not apply to all women. More specifically, women who were undecided about marrying a Turkish man included those who had never considered marriage to a foreigner before and those who had negative past marriage experiences. In this context, it can be said that the influence of the woman's family played a role in positively evaluating the decision to marry a Turkish man for those women who were unsure. In other words, the support provided by their families was crucial for Kazakhstani women who were uncertain about their decision to marry a Turkish man in ultimately reaching a marriage conclusion.

The Man's Economic Strength: There Was Love, But There Was Also Calculation. The economic factor has been one of the important reasons for Kazakhstani women marrying Turkish men. In this context, it can be said that women place importance on two elements: first, the man's economic situation, and second, his economic behaviour.

Kazakhstani women do not hide the fact that they value the economic situation of the Turkish man and his family when considering marriage. For example, for participant TrK11 (30 years old), who met her husband while she was a student, the financial support provided by him and his family, in addition to her sympathy for him, was an important reason for her to consider marriage. Furthermore, participant TrK11 (30 years old) expressed that she did not want to experience the difficult economic times she went through during her childhood in her own marriage.

“...He helped me a lot while we were seeing each other. He and his family. I was working in a restaurant at the time. His father paid my university tuition, telling me ‘Don't work, focus on your studies.’ Since my father had passed away, I only had my mother, and I had to work because my mother's pension wasn't enough to support my education. They helped me a lot. I just wanted to be a well-off wife, like every woman dreams. Because we grew up in financial difficulty. We are from a large family, and my mother raised us on her own. There were many struggles. That's

why I didn't want a life filled with such difficulties. I never wanted that. So, when I saw that his family was in a good financial situation, I wanted to marry him. But if I hadn't liked my husband, I wouldn't have cared about his good financial situation, I wouldn't have married him. I think it was the combination of both reasons that made me choose him. It turned out that way, luckily " (TrK11, 30 years old).

Additionally, participant TrK5 (36 years old) explained several reasons why she considered the financial situation of the Turkish man she was going to marry. After marrying the Turkish man, she realized that moving to Türkiye and adapting to the new social environment would take some time. Therefore, considering that she would leave her work life and social environment in Kazakhstan to move to another country, she aimed to secure her life in that country through her future husband's financial situation. More specifically, participant TrK5 (36 years old), who had a stable job in Kazakhstan and earned her own living without relying on anyone, understood that finding a job in Türkiye would take time and that she would rely financially on her husband. Therefore, she decided to make use of her free time during the adaptation process in Türkiye by starting an education to improve herself. Additionally, she mentioned that she was responsible for her child from a previous marriage and that she needed to think about his future as well.

On the other hand, Kazakstani women have placed more importance on the Turkish man's ability to earn money rather than his financial situation. In other words, for these women, it was not the man's good financial status that mattered, but his ability to make money and his hardworking nature. This group of women did not aim to build a marriage based on great wealth, but instead focused on creating an economically stable family that could meet the needs of their children and themselves at a sufficient level.

"There was logic. He would be a good husband and a good father, he knows how to earn money, and he won't let me go hungry. ... Maybe I chose my husband because of this. Because my husband can make money from nothing. He won't let me go hungry. He is hardworking. Even if we are in a tough situation, he won't let me go hungry. This is the main reason I chose my husband" (TrK2, 33 years old).

Looking at the socio-demographic situation of Kazakstani women, it is clear that they were employed in stable jobs in Kazakhstan before marrying a Turkish man. Therefore, for participants who were able to earn their own money, it was not as important what job the man held or how much he earned. However, it was significant that the man had a job, meaning his employment status was an important factor.

In addition, the generous character of the Turkish man has also been a factor influencing the marriage decision of Kazakstani women. This explanation is supported by the responses given by women during interviews, where they characterized the Turkish man as "not stingy." In this context, it can be said that the Turkish man portrayed himself as a generous person during the initial stages of their acquaintance in order to win the Kazakstani woman's heart. More specifically, the flowers, gifts, financial support, etc., that the Turkish man brought to win the woman's affection created the impression in the women's minds that he could be a good partner in the future.

The relationship between the participants' economic motives, their ages, and their marriage experiences has also been examined. In this context, no significant relationship was found between the participants' economic motives and their ages. However, when looking at the relationship between economic motives and marriage experience, it is evident that women who married in the last ten years placed more emphasis on economic motives. Among participants with more than ten years of marriage experience, there were no women who highlighted economic motives as playing a role in their decision to marry.

Last Chance to Marry or Aging: "Your Age Is Passing," "You Won't Find a Good One," "My Family Kept Saying". The age of Kazakstani women has also been an influential factor in their decision to marry a Turkish man. More specifically, Kazakstani women, while considering marriage to a foreigner, were aware of whether their age was suitable or had passed for marriage. In this context, women who were already conscious of their age, societal influences also played an important role in shaping their decisions. In this section, two other reasons are discussed as influencing factors in the marriage decision based on the woman's age. The first is the reactions of the woman's family regarding her age, and the second is the absence of Kazakstani men around her who were proposing marriage or taking serious steps toward a relationship.

When looking at the age of women who married Turkish men, it is noticeable that their average marriage age is around 26-27 years. It can be understood from their responses during the interviews that this age had an influence on their decision to marry. Generally, women who married between the ages of 26-30 made the decision to marry after realizing that their age was suitable for marriage. In other words, the participants who considered marrying a foreigner were aware that their age was appropriate for marriage both socially and health-wise, and that there was no serious person around them offering marriage proposals.

"I was 29 years old. I had to get married. I didn't have that many serious reasons. I mean, the important thing was that I was at the age to get married. 29 years old! Until that time, there hadn't been a man who wanted to marry me" (TrK10, 35 years old).

For Kazakstani women, it has been found that the character of the man they will marry and the ability to get along well with him are important. For them, it has been significant to spend the remaining part of their lives with a good man with whom they can communicate effectively. This explanation can be better illustrated by the example of participant TrK7 (37 years old). Participant TrK7 (37 years old) is one of those who made the marriage decision based on the age factor. When thinking about marriage with a Turkish man, the participant considered him to be a good person with whom she could get along. Therefore, the participant decided not to miss the opportunity to marry this man.

The influence of their families on Kazakstani women's marriage decisions has also been a significant factor. In this context, it has been noted that the mothers and fathers of the women intervened in their marriage decisions and tried to have an influence on their choices. This family pressure has not had a positive effect on the participants' socio-psychological well-being. Therefore, the opinions of the family regarding the participants' age and marital status have been influential in their decision to marry.

Based on all these explanations, it can be said that Kazakstani women who consider age as an important factor in their marriage decisions with Turkish men are actually aiming to establish a solid family. On one hand, these Kazakstani participants realized that their age was either perfect for marriage or that they were late in making the decision, while on the other hand, they were aware that there were no Kazakstani men around them who were ready for a serious relationship or who had proposed marriage.

Religious Affiliation: From Ourselves. Religion, the understanding of religion by individuals and society, and their religious affiliation have been and continue to be one of the most significant foundations of identity in human history (Popova & Vereshagina, 2015: 55). Religion plays a crucial role in the formation, shaping, transformation, and external perception of social identities, both on an individual and collective level. Especially religious beliefs, which form a system of values and create a strong consciousness that influences life practices, can determine the conditions under which social groups coexist. Sometimes, despite coming from very different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, communities may be considered as a whole due to shared religious beliefs (Goker, 2015: 101). According to Kastoryano (2000: 136), religion emerges as a response to the loss of reference when entering a new society, thereby establishing social bonds. In this sense, religion is regarded as an effective integrative force in the cohesion of the group.

Kazakstani women who identify as Muslim consider the religious affiliation of the Turkish man when making marriage decisions. The fact that women take religion into account as an important factor in their marriage decision can be linked to their desire to align themselves with a group based on religious identity, as Kastoryano (2000: 136) suggested. For instance, when examining the reasons for the marriage of participant KzK6 (39 years old), it is evident that the woman evaluated the man based more on his faith than his ethnicity. In other words, for the devout participant KzK6 (39 years old), the man being Muslim was an important factor. This participant believed that life in marriage would be difficult for a religious woman if she were married to a man who was not religious.

In addition, for another participant, KzK7 (37 years old), who considers herself Muslim but does not regard herself as devout, the Turkish man's being Muslim played an influential role in her marriage decision. In this context, the role of religious identity in the woman's decision is confirmed by her explaining the Turkish man as "one of us" due to his being Muslim.

Kazakstani Culture: He loves Kazakhs very much. Among Turkish men, there are those who have either visited Kazakhstan at least once or worked in the country for a short or long term before establishing a relationship with a Kazakstani woman. The fields of work for these individuals have included art, education, and construction. Therefore, these Turkish men have knowledge and experience about Kazakhstan and its culture, and they do not feel foreign to Kazakh culture.

This situation has positively influenced Kazakstani women who are considering marriage to a Turkish man. The women believed that they would not face cultural difficulties in their marriage with a Turkish man. For example, a Kazakstani woman from Kazakhstan (TrK12, 55 years old), who continues to promote the

culture of the Turkic world in the field of arts, mentioned that her Turkish husband had worked in Kazakhstan before their marriage. For this participant, who introduced herself as a nationalist of the Kazakh people, her Turkish husband's knowledge of Kazakh, familiarity with Kazakh traditions, and deep love for Kazakhs played a significant role in her decision to marry him.

Additionally, another participant, TrK5 (36 years old), who married a Turkish man, mentioned that she discussed the rules of marriage with her husband before their wedding. During these discussions, the participant expressed her desire to continue the Kazakh culture in their marriage. In this context, it was a significant factor for her that her Turkish husband, who had not visited Kazakhstan before and had no prior knowledge of Kazakh culture, accepted the continuation of Kazakh culture and relationships with Kazakh friends in their marriage, which would be lived in Türkiye. This acceptance was an important reason for her decision to marry.

“I told him, ‘I won’t give up on my own culture and traditions just because I’m marrying you. For example, if we get married tomorrow and have a child, I will do everything according to Kazakh tradition. I will meet with Kazakhs and my friends.’ I made it clear to him that after marrying him, I would not be entirely dependent on him. I told him, ‘I won’t let you say “I own you, do whatever I want.” If you want to marry me, you will accept me like this” (TrK5, 36 years old).

Kazakh women who met Turkish men in Kazakhstan did not plan to disrupt their own lives and migrate to Türkiye. Therefore, they discussed this matter among themselves before marriage. For instance, participant KzK8 (36 years old) explained to the Turkish man she was going to marry that she could not live in another country besides Kazakhstan and that she wanted to continue her marriage in Kazakhstan. In this context, the Turkish man agreeing to continue living in Kazakhstan played a significant role in the participant's decision to marry.

An example of the influence of the family on a Kazakhstani woman's marriage decision can also be seen in the statements of participant KzK2 (34 years old). More specifically, although this participant's family accepted her marriage to a Turkish man, they did not want her to migrate to Türkiye. Therefore, her family set the condition that the marriage with the Turkish man should continue in Kazakhstan.

Fate: For example, when I was a child playing or singing songs on stage at school, I used to sing Turkish songs. Fatalism is generally defined as the belief that everything that happens in life is predetermined by a supernatural power, that the destiny set in advance cannot be changed, and that one cannot escape this predetermined fate by making an effort or taking action. It is accepted as an inevitable aspect of life, where the individual cannot control their own life and has no choice but to follow the course of events set by fate (Kasapoglu, 2008; Rougier, 2011; Sobol-Kwapinska, 2013; cited in Kaya and Bozkur, 2015: 937).

In the framework of Kaya and Bozkur's (2015) explanation, the fatalistic perspective of Kazakhstani women on marriage with Turkish men can be clarified. These women have linked the reasons for their marriage to fate. For example, participant TrK10 (35 years old) interpreted her inability to marry until the age

of 29 and the lack of any marriage proposals before that as a reality determined by fate, followed by the appearance of a Turkish man.

Another participant, TrK1 (34 years old), who views her marriage to a Turkish man as solely determined by fate, believes that her marriage was decided by a supernatural force. In other words, for this participant, who had never previously considered marrying a Turkish man, the only reason for her marriage at a young age is seen as fate. She describes a connection between her childhood activities—singing Turkish songs, dancing to them—and later marrying a Turkish man. She explains that this relationship between her actions and marriage happened without her conscious will, and she cannot find any rational explanation other than fate for these events.

“I can say it was fate. Because I never thought that I would definitely marry a Turkish man. For example, when I was a child playing or singing songs on stage at school, I would sing Turkish songs. I would dance to Turkish songs. But this wasn't done with the intention of marrying a Turkish man, it wasn't something planned. It was just something that came from within me. Now my friends joke and say, 'You must have known back then you were going to marry a Turkish man.' But I never had the thought that I must marry a Turkish man” (TrK1, 34 years old).

Participants who had previously thought “I will never marry a Turkish man” also could not explain their marriage to a Turkish man except as fate. For example, participant TrK2 (33 years old), who studied in Türkiye before marriage, returned to Kazakhstan solely to avoid marrying a Turkish man. However, after meeting a Turkish man in Kazakhstan and marrying him, she explained her decision to return to Türkiye as a life path determined by fate. Similarly, participant TrK9 (29 years old) had the belief that “no, I will never marry a Turkish or a foreigner” before meeting a Turkish man, but after migrating to Ankara for education, meeting a Turkish man, and marrying him, she attributed this to fate.

CONCLUSION

The marriages of Kazakhstani women who participated in this study with Turkish men were formed after they met Turkish men, especially in the work environment, and were influenced by their characteristics, leading to the transformation of these friendships into marriage decisions. The women attributed the reason for the transformation of their friendship with Turkish men into marriage to their belief that they could achieve a good and quality marital life in the future and that they could reach this goal through marriage to a Turkish man. In the marriages of Kazakhstani women with Turkish men, the reasons for their decisions include the men's “good character, understanding, supportive nature, being of the same religion, respecting Kazakhs and Kazakh culture, the approval of their family and friends, being educated, thinking they could live a prosperous life with a modern partner, believing that they could have opportunities for self-development, and especially their belief that they could fulfil similar gender roles in both countries, especially those of ‘wife,’ ‘bride,’ and ‘mother.’” On the other hand, the acceptance in both Kazakh and Turkish cultures that “a woman should not be of an advanced age for marriage” and the desire not to be left unmarried, along with their “fatalistic” approach, have played a significant role in their marriage decisions. Whether they lived in Türkiye or Kazakhstan, Kazakhstani women describe their marriages to Turkish men as marriages based

on “love” and “sympathy.” However, despite this definition, it can be said that Kazakhstani women also evaluate their marriages with Turkish men from a rational perspective, considering what these marriages will bring to their lives.

Before meeting Turkish men, Kazakhstani women generally believed they would marry a Kazakhstani man and continue their marriages in Kazakhstan as Kazakh brides, following the traditional norms of monogamous marriages in their culture. They even held a firm stance, thinking “I will never consider marrying a foreigner.” However, their perspectives changed after meeting Turkish men. These women compared their marriages with Kazakhstani men to those with Turkish men and noted that Kazakhstani men were not yet ready to take on responsibilities for building a family. They also pointed out that Kazakhstani men often saw themselves as superior to women in family life. As a result, they believed they could be unhappy in marriages with such men. It is worth noting that among the surveyed women, there were quite a few divorced individuals, and all of them entered their first marriages in Kazakhstan with representatives of their own nation.

Additionally, similar to traditional Turkish culture, the traditional belief that Kazakhstani women should marry before getting older is also prevalent. This belief emphasizes the importance of Kazakhstani women marrying before they get too old (before remaining single). To avoid societal pressure regarding the appropriate marriage age and to ensure they marry before reaching an age deemed unsuitable for marriage by society, Kazakhstani women view the Turkish men they meet as potential spouses.

In this study, an important reason for Kazakhstani women’s marriages to Turkish men is that, as single women, they were overwhelmed by numerous duties and responsibilities in their home country. They hope that Turkish men can share these burdens with them. In this context, Kazakhstani women believe that, instead of trying to solve their problems on their own, Turkish men will support them in overcoming these issues. On the other hand, Kazakhstani women also hope that through marriage to Turkish men, they will be able to overcome the financial difficulties they face.

On the other hand, Kazakhstani women believe that the political and economic situation in Kazakhstan strengthens their concerns about the future, and in this regard, they view marriage to a Turkish man from a more developed country like Türkiye as an advantageous option. For Kazakhstani women who are worried about their future, marriage to a Turkish man represents a chance to live in a more developed country, to improve themselves, and especially to start a higher quality of life. However, the situation is somewhat different for women who continue their marriages in Kazakhstan. Even if these women marry Turkish men, they wish to continue living in Kazakhstan and have succeeded in making their Turkish husbands accept this desire. As seen from the findings, Kazakhstani women have been able to make this arrangement because their Turkish husbands have stable jobs and earn money in Kazakhstan.

The literature analysis shows that marriages with foreigners are not only a trend in Kazakhstan’s or Turkish society. This is a global process, linked to the development of migration and digital technologies, which is actively growing. However, for a country like Kazakhstan, with a population of about 20 million, this signifies not only a demographic crisis but also a loss of the social and pro-

fessional potential of citizens leaving the country. Therefore, it is essential to record statistics on the number of women who migrate to other countries with the purpose of marrying foreigners and to track annual trends.

Ethical Commission Approval

This study involving human participants has completed and fulfilled the ethical guidelines requirements. The participants provided written informed consent before taking part in the study and were informed about its objectives.

Conflict of Interest Statement

There is no conflict of interest with any institution or person within the scope of this study.

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<https://doi.org/10.53277/2519-2442-2025.1-03>

IRSTI 14.35.01

ISSN 2519-2442, KAZAKHSTAN

Research Article

SOCIAL ASPECTS OF HIGHER EDUCATION CHOICE BY
KAZAKHSTANI SCHOOL GRADUATES:
A SOCIOLOGICAL MEASUREMENT

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Received: 14.09.2024

Accepted: 11.12.2024

ABSTRACT

The article analyses educational plans and higher education choices by school graduates from different school types, such as private (fee-based) and public (free of charge) schools. Theoretical analysis of social aspects of higher education choice within categorical and modernist approaches is presented. The research aims to understand how graduates from private and public schools make their decisions about higher education. The results of structured interviews conducted with school graduates are presented. The sample contains school graduates representing different socio-economic groups. Respondents are graduates from urban and rural areas, private (paid) and public, general and advanced schools. The sample size is 150. During the research, it was determined that the decision to choose a higher education institution depends on the family's socio-economic status. The higher the family's socio-economic status, the more ambitious the choice of a school graduate becomes. On the one hand, the process of higher education choice is formed based on the principle of rationality considered in economic theories and, on the other hand, based on social opportunities and limitations defined in sociological theories. Thus, school graduates try to make rational decisions considering social opportunities. The research aims to find out how social opportunities and constraints affect school graduates' higher education choices.

Keywords: School graduates, Social aspects, Higher education choice, Schools, Success in higher education.

For citation: Shnarbekova, M. (2025). Social Aspects of Higher Education Choice by Kazakhstani School Graduates: A Sociological Measurement. *Eurasian Research Journal*, 7(1), pp.

INTRODUCTION

Higher education choice is a complex process. In studying this process, scholars pay particular attention to social aspects such as class differences in access to higher education programs and opportunities determined or limited by economic and financial resources (Archer et al., 2003). The choice of higher education is affected by parents, their educational level, place of residence, as well as institutional and family habits. School graduates have different attitudes and distances to these factors, which are reflected in the choice of higher education (Maras, 2007). Due to the implementation of the policy of increasing access to higher education in many countries, the issue of higher education choice has become a topical issue in sociological research at the international and local levels.

The relevance of studying the choice of higher education is determined by the fact that a diploma in higher education is mandatory for entering the labour market (Jackson, 2007). The university's rating and reputation positively affect the employment of its graduates in high-ranking positions in the labour market (Shavit et al., 2007). The existence of a relationship between the choice of higher education and social class actualizes the study of social features of opportunities and achievements in the field of education. The influence of the social background on the choice of higher education has been actively studied at the scientific level since the 1970s. According to Hudson and Williams, as society develops, the social classification of the population increases due to the differentiation of access to material resources, education, life opportunities and health care (Hudson et al., 1994). In the framework of sociological studies, the educational system is defined as a central factor in the creation and revival of social class because the educational system plays a special role in the modernization and maintenance of dominance (for the upper and middle classes) and limitations (for the lower class). In educational studies, the issue of social class is often considered based on interrelationships with higher education opportunities and educational attainment.

The conceptualization of "social class" and "higher education" is determined by the reality or artificiality of expanding educational opportunities. The theoretical approaches determining the relationship between social class and higher education institutions can be divided into two groups. The first group includes "categorical", "modernist" and quantitative approaches. The second group includes "processual", postmodernist or "qualitative" approaches.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social aspects of choice within categorical and modernist approaches

Researchers adopting these approaches view social class as a subject of quantitative study and regard it as an immutable constant (Crompton, 1998). American neo-Marxists Bowles and Gintis described education as a class tunnel under the concept of the "principle of conformity". According to them, even though educational institutions aim to create equal opportunities for all, they create the capitalist nature of the division of labour in the labour market by preparing school graduates for class-based professions (Bowles et al., 2002). Such attitudes are related to the fact that the low academic performance of school graduates from the lower class in the higher education system is considered a result of class characteristics of school preparation. In this sense, the class differentiation of

higher education indicators can be identified as an integral component of capitalism. Thus, in order to significantly expand the opportunities for higher education, it is necessary to introduce significant changes in the structure of society. However, such opinions cannot explain the circumstances of school graduates from the lower class getting higher education and enrolling in higher education. Within the framework of these theories, the reasons for the change in the level and indicators of higher education among low-class youth in different historical periods and the differences in the level of higher education among various categories of low-class youth are not explained.

While Marxist and Weberian theorists paid special attention to the formation process of class differences and social inequality, functionalists define the educational institution as an integral part of the process of meritocratic stratification. Within functionalism, the definition of social class is akin to Darwinism: in industrial societies; “natural selection” determines social class. In the context of higher education, functionalists attribute the low academic achievement and low enrolment rates of low-income youth to their low ability levels. In turn, low income determines their general enrolment chances if they are high-ability students. Thus, unequal access to higher education is defined not as a social problem that needs to be solved but as a natural aspect of modern society. The opinions of functionalist theorists have been criticized for their meritocratic determinism despite many factors that prove the existence of structural inequalities by nationality, gender, and social class (Bradley, 1996: 184). Functionalists have also been criticized for emphasizing only individual characteristics, not considering the behaviour patterns characteristic of certain socio-economic groups in the higher education system.

Despite the critical views of functionalist theorists, the basic functionalist concept of meritocracy and the functionalist reasoning vis-à-vis the low academic performance of low-class youth – because of their low or no abilities – are the basis of some views and are discussed in the debates about the issue of increasing access to higher education.

Professional classification within the categorical approach

Despite the widespread use of categorical directions defining social class, critics have argued that “categories of social class” were not considered within these directions (Foster et al., 1996: 53). Modernist/categorical approaches classify social classes according to professions. Within the framework of the categorical direction, 7 categories of social class are classified based on professional classification:

1. Managers and senior specialists
Managers and entrepreneurs of large organizations
Highly qualified specialists
2. Specialists and managers with middle-level qualifications
3. Temporary workers
4. Small entrepreneurs and self-employed persons
5. Low-ranking advisers and leaders
6. Semi-skilled workers
7. Unskilled workers

Researchers who use professional classification to determine the social status of school graduates face various difficulties. For example, when assessing a student's social status, questions arise: "Is the professional direction he is studying taken into account, or is the professional activity of his parents taken into account?" The Administrative Center for US Universities and Colleges sets the age limit at 21 to address this issue. In determining the social class representation of school graduates younger than 21 years old, the professional activity of their parents is considered, and for school graduates over 21 years old, their future profession is considered. However, using such a method in the conditions of modern society and non-traditional families, characterized by the possibility of changing professions often, might cause difficulties.

In addition, the classification of professional activity is based on men's standards, and accordingly, additional difficulties may arise in assessing the social status of women. In the context of the family, fathers and mothers may be engaged in different prestigious occupations, which may interfere with determining the family's social status. Bradley suggests that in an ordinary low-class family, the man may be a factory worker, and the wife may work as a secretary, thus representing different professional classifications (Bradley, 1996).

Critical analysis of categorical-positivist approaches

Postmodernist and poststructuralist approaches have severely criticized categorical positivist approaches to describing social status. According to these approaches, social class is not limited to professional activities, class positions are not homogeneous, and its quantitative assessment causes several difficulties. The theorists of the postmodern direction do not consider the influence of social class on inequality but the influence of a person on the process of identifying himself with a certain social group. Issues such as feelings of identification and self-consciousness are not considered within the framework of categorical directions (Williamson, 1981: 19).

Conceptualization of social aspects of choice within postmodernist and poststructuralist approaches

According to postmodernist and poststructuralist directions, the acquisition of higher education by the lower class is carried out based on the influence of a complex set of social, economic, cultural, as well as structural factors including material and discursive inequality. In the framework of postmodernism, the following issues are being conceptualized:

1. Rethinking Inequality: a theoretical analysis of the role of higher education and class identity and inequality in generating unequal access.
2. Risk, habitus and capital: changes in the structure of social-class identity characterized by patterns of consumption and taste.
3. Many unique features: internal interrelationship of social class with social characteristics such as life experience, nationality, and gender.
4. Ambiguous definitions: practical difficulties in defining social class within postmodern trends.

In analyzing social practices in higher education, it is important to consider the role of educational institutions in forming these practices. Higher education in-

stitutions contribute to forming mutual relations between higher education and society. These relations, in turn, are reflected in the strategies of school graduates in choosing higher education. Thus, it is necessary to consider the forms of higher education and social aspects in analyzing the educational opportunities for different social classes (Williamson, 1981: 30).

Postmodernist approaches define not only the social class but also classify class differences in education. Postmodernist theorists argue that there is no clear, unequivocal definition of social-class identity and experience. In the context of contemporary society, determining the characteristics and dimensions of the lower class creates difficulties, and researchers emphasize class differences in higher education, considering the blurred boundaries of class identity and difference.

The amount of social, economic, and cultural capital determines an individual's socio-economic status. In addition to social class and socio-economic status, socio-economic variables such as age, gender, and nationality also affect human behaviour patterns and personality traits (Ostrove and Cole, 2003). They are a person's taste for food and clothes, behaviour style which affects their values and worldview, and even physical and mental health (Kraus and Stephens, 2012). Although the concepts of social class and socio-economic status are used interchangeably, they are separate constructs. The current socio-economic situation determines socio-economic status and, accordingly, is variable, especially in countries with wide opportunities for economic growth. Social class is determined by socio-cultural origin therefore it is stable and it does not change from generation to generation (Jones and Vagle, 2013). Thus, a representative of the lower class may have a relatively high socio-economic status even while working in the "blue-collar" profession. The concept of social class is stable compared to socio-economic status and it is associated with power.

The effect of cultural values on higher education choice of school graduates

Cultural values are also one of the important factors influencing the choice of higher education for school graduates. Culture is the collective consciousness that distinguishes one group of people from another. Assessing countries based on cultural characteristics allows us to determine their inclination toward collectivism or individualism (Hofstede, 2011). Western countries, such as Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, adhere to the values of individualism, emphasizing independence, self-confidence, personal freedom, and autonomy. In contrast, Asian and African countries are more oriented toward collectivism, where people see themselves as part of interdependent social connections and strive for the common good (Sinha, 2014). Differences in cultural orientations toward individualism and collectivism can explain differences in the choice of higher education among school graduates (Amit and Gati, 2013).

In individualistic societies, it is customary for school graduates to choose higher education based on personal preferences and competencies. In collectivist societies, however, school graduates are expected to adhere to family and societal norms, and they often follow a pre-determined higher education choice that aligns with the expectations of parents or society (Oettingen and Zosuls, 2006).

In the past twenty years, globalization has increased the interaction between individualistic and collectivist cultures. Higher education choice by school grad-

uates from different cultural contexts—collectivist (where the emphasis is on kinship) and individualistic (where the focus is on autonomy)—involves different standards. Thus, making a decision about higher education can be quite challenging.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In the framework of this study, a wide range of indicators was used to describe the socio-economic situation, which includes the professional activities of school graduates' parents, their level of education, place of residence etc. Given that most school graduates do not have a stable income, work and a certain educational level, the socio-economic characteristics of the family were considered instead. The article presents the results of structured interviews conducted with school graduates. Structured interviews were conducted with graduates of urban and rural, private (fee-based) and public, general and advanced schools representing different socio-economic groups. The research sample was purposefully formed. The sample included 150 respondents. A certified SPSS program analysed the obtained data and conducted statistical tests. Structured interviews contain 30 questions divided into 3 sections. The first section of questions was related to socio-demographic characteristics such as gender, age, place of residence, school type where she/he studies, their parents' education level, and their occupations. The second section of questions was about their educational plan, such as which universities they wanted to study, which major they were considering, which country they had in mind, which factors were most vital for choosing a university to study, and their personal interests. The final section was about the main constraints in making educational choices, the role of parents in this process, the goal of having education, and the source of funding. The questions were semi-structured, which allowed us to get more comprehensive answers. The study was conducted in 2023 in three cities, such as Almaty, Astana Taraz and surrounding rural regions. All participants provided informed consent to take part in the study and were assured of their anonymity throughout the research process. Using structured interviews to study educational choice among school graduates is justified as they provided consistent, reliable data. They allow for a focused exploration of key factors like family influence, career goals, and personal interests. The method is efficient, ensures comparability, and facilitates easy analysis while maintaining ethical standards like anonymity and participant comfort. Information about school graduates who participated in the study is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. *Information about School Graduates who Participated in the Study*

Variables	Values	N	%
		150	100%
Gender	Male	80	53%
	Female	70	47%
School type	Secondary school	36	24.1%
	Gymnasium/lyceum	87	58.2%
	Private school	27	17.7%
Place of residence	Big city	68	45.3%
	Small city	22	14.7%
	Rural areas	60	40%
Nationality	Kazakhs	85	56.7%
	Russians	40	26.7%
	Other nationalities	25	16.6%
Parental education	Both parents do not have higher education	20	13.3%
	One of the parents has higher education	51	34%
	Both parents have higher education	79	52.7%
Marital status of family	Married (including civil marriage)	129	86%
	Divorced	10	6.7%
	Widowed	11	7.3%

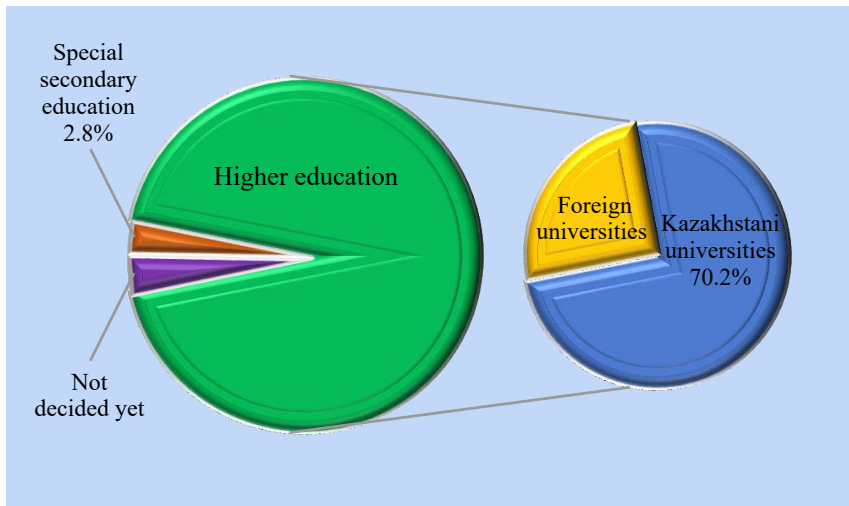
Source: Data collected by the author in 2023

FINDINGS

Educational plans of school graduates

Most school graduates plan to get higher education, among them: 70.2% consider Kazakhstani higher educational institutions, and 23.6% said they planned to study in foreign higher educational institutions. Only 2.8% of school graduates are considering receiving special secondary education, and 3.4% do not yet have specific plans. Details are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Educational Plans of School Graduates



Source: Data compiled and analysed by the author based on primary data collected in 2023

Goals of obtaining higher education

Such research results show that the process of obtaining higher education is considered a standard, even mandatory, period after graduation by school graduates. Therefore, there is a need to understand the motives of their desire to obtain higher education. “For what purpose do you want to get higher education after finishing school?” – the question was asked to school graduates planning to get higher education. Analysing the answers to this question allows us to create a hierarchy of motives for seeking higher education. The top three goals of obtaining higher education include the aims of “getting an education in an interesting profession”, “becoming a specialist in demand”, and “finding a well-paid job”. These goals were identified as the primary motivation for continuing education after school for more than half of school graduates. For example, 59% of school graduates aspire to pursue higher education in a profession they are interested in, 56.8% view it as a means to increase competitiveness in the labor market, 56.6% see it as essential for engaging in successful work, 50.5% aim to advance in a professional career, and 48.7% seek to engage in interesting work. Additionally, 43.6% of school graduates aimed to pursue higher education primarily to obtain a diploma. This indicates that the institutionalized form of cultural capital, defined as educational competencies, i.e., higher education diplomas, has become increasingly important in modern society. 34.6% of school graduates define higher education as necessary for everyone, which indicates that education is highly important among school graduates. However, there are also school graduates who see higher education as an opportunity to gain public respect (29.0%), establish useful contacts, and expand acquaintances (24.4%). The share of school graduates who are interested in the professional activities of their parents and intend to continue their professional path is low, only 2.5%. The results of the study are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. *Goals of Obtaining Higher Education*

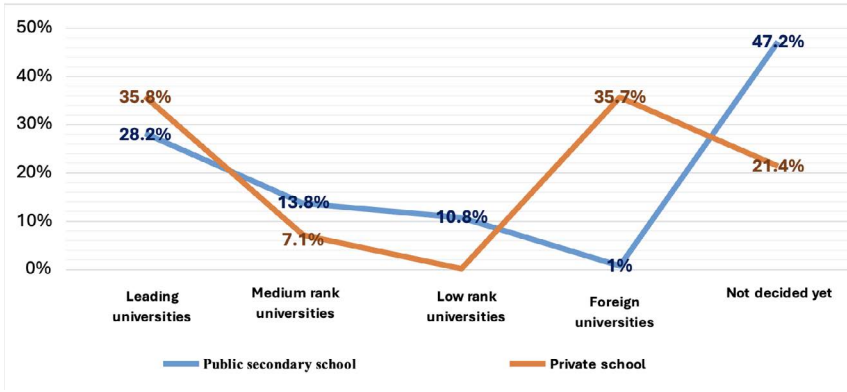
№	Goals to get higher education	Share in %
1	to increase their competitiveness in the labour market	56.8%
2	to engage in successful work	56.6%
3	to advance in a professional career	50,5%
4	to engage in interesting work	48.7%
5	to get a diploma	43,6%
6	higher education is necessary for everyone	34,6%
7	to gain public respect	29.0%
8	to establish useful contacts and expand acquaintances	24.4%
9	to continue parents' professional path	2.5%

Source: Data compiled and analysed by the author based on primary data collected in 2023

School types and choice of university

When choosing a higher education, school graduates begin to think about an educational institution after deciding to continue their studies after graduation. Choosing a higher education institution is socially based because it is carried out in a social space characterized by various material and symbolic conditions. In the process of differentiating the strategies of school graduates from different social groups in choosing a higher education institution, the universities were grouped into four groups: “leading”, “medium”, “low” and “foreign”. Initial educational capital is formed at school and is often determined by the type of school. In this regard, it is important to analyse the higher education choice of school graduates based on the type of school they are studying at. The results of differentiating the relationship between the choice of a higher education institution and the type of school attended by graduates (general secondary and advanced private schools) showed the presence of several statistically significant differences. The majority of public secondary school graduates do not have high aspirations to study abroad. Private school graduates tend to study at foreign and prestigious national universities and do not consider studying at lower-ranked universities as an option. The details of the study are presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Higher Education Choice Based on the Type of School of Graduates Studied



Source: Data compiled and analysed by the author based on primary data collected in 2023

Criteria for choosing a university

To understand what criteria are essential in choosing a higher education institution for school graduates, the following question was asked: “What do you pay attention to when choosing a higher education institution?” Analysis of the results demonstrates that 62.8% of school graduates focus on the possibility of obtaining quality education, 50% on the availability of an interesting profession, 38.4% on the university rating, and 29.6% on its reputation when choosing a higher educational institution. Based on such answers, it can be stated that school graduates determine quality education by certain higher educational institutions and their rank.

DISCUSSION

This study investigates the process behind higher education choices among school graduates, with a focus on socio-economic status, school type, family influence, and cultural values. The results align with previous research (Archer et al., 2003; Shavit et al., 2007), reinforcing the idea that these factors significantly shape school graduates’ higher education aspirations and decisions.

The findings show that most school graduates intend to pursue higher education. Graduates from private and specialized schools were more likely to aim for prestigious institutions, supporting the notion that educational trajectories are often shaped by the type of school attended (Maras, 2007). The differentiation in educational aspirations between students from rural and urban areas also mirrors earlier research that emphasizes how place of residence and access to resources impact higher education choice (Hudson et al., 1994).

Cultural values, particularly individualism versus collectivism, are also crucial in understanding educational choices. In individualistic societies, where autonomy is valued, students tend to prioritize personal interests and career aspirations in their university selection. Conversely, in more collectivist societies, family expectations and societal norms often heavily influence decisions (Sinha,

2014). The study confirms this pattern, as school graduates from collectivist backgrounds are more likely to align their educational choices with family and societal expectations. Meanwhile, those from individualistic backgrounds tend to prioritize personal goals, as highlighted by Amit and Gati (2013).

The study's findings regarding goals of obtaining higher education demonstrate that securing a well-paying job, increasing competitiveness, and pursuing a personally meaningful profession reflect broader socio-economic realities. Additionally, the role of institutional reputation and quality of education emerged as key criteria for university selection. School graduates mentioned these factors, alongside career opportunities, as determining aspects of their choice, which echoes the findings of Shavit et al. (2007).

CONCLUSION

During the process of choosing a higher education place, several factors should be considered, including socio-economic constraints, social acceptance and various forms of self-exclusion. One of our essential goals is to understand the differences in the choice process of high school graduates from different social groups when choosing higher education and their subsequent results. It is necessary to pay special attention to the choice of a higher education institution because it is related to the lifestyle choice and the tastes and aspirations formed in a particular social environment. The share of school graduates who plan to get higher education is quite high. Youths have a massive tendency to acquire higher education. Various higher education institutions and professions are leading to the complexity of higher education choices. School graduates emphasize the possibility of "high income" and "career growth" when evaluating the profession, which indicates the dominance of pragmatic motives. However, factors such as "social importance of the profession" and "possibility of developing one's potential" are among the top five important criteria for school graduates. This indicates that "interest orientation" has increased career choices by graduates. The majority of school graduates plan to get an education but are not sure which specialty they are going to study. The uncertainty of school graduates about their future profession shows that the importance of choosing a profession has been slightly displaced by the desire to obtain higher education. School graduates make educational and professional choices based on the principle of rationality considered in economic theories, on the other hand, based on values and attitudes, social possibilities and limitations defined in sociological directions. That is, school graduates make rational decisions based on their goals and interests, considering the possibilities of their families, their own abilities, and other social factors. Findings contribute to a broader understanding of how the school type that graduates attend impacts their educational plans and university choice process.

The study provides valuable insights into the complex decision-making process of school graduates during higher education choices. It reinforces the significance of socio-economic background, family, and cultural values, as well as institutional factors such as reputation and quality of education. Future research should aim to expand this understanding by exploring these variables in different global contexts, considering new educational trends, and incorporating a broader range of demographic factors.

Ethical Commission Approval

This study involving human participants has completed and fulfilled the ethical guidelines requirements. The participants provided written informed consent before taking part in the study and were informed about its objectives.

Conflict of Interest Statement

There is no conflict of interest with any institution or person within the scope of this study.

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<https://doi.org/10.53277/2519-2442-2025.1-04>

IRSTI 21.31.55

ISSN 2519-2442, KAZAKHSTAN

Research Article

**THE INFLUENCE OF DIGITALIZATION ON RELIGIOUS IDENTITY:
SOCIO-POLITICAL CONTEXT**

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Received: 12.09.2024

Accepted: 23.01.2025

ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the process of religious identity formation in the context of increasing digitalization and changes in the socio-political environment. The findings show a shift in religious authority structures; the traditional hierarchies are being replaced by new decentralized digital networks and user-generated content. From the present study, it becomes clear that social media and other digital communication tools help form hybrid religious identities, combining traditional religious practices and the new digital culture. Three ways in which digitalization affects religious identity are through virtual community formation, algorithmic content curation and interactive ritual practices. The study also examines how socio-political factors, such as the state regulation of digital spaces and content, influence the digital expression of religious identity. The comparison of cultures reveals different trends in the adoption of digital religious practices in various political systems and cultural environments. Quantitative and qualitative methods, including analysis, synthesis, historical-formal methods and generalization, were used in this study to analyze the relationship between digital technologies and religious identity formation. The study analyzed the advantages and disadvantages of Internet-mediated religious practices in various churches while making specific reference to the Republic of Kazakhstan. Thus, the results show how the development of technology influences modern religious identity and interpersonal religious relations and, therefore, contributes to the discussion of digital religion and social change.

Keywords: Digitalization, Religious identity, Social cohesion, Political aspects, Interreligious dialogue, Social networks.

For citation: Seitakhmetova, N., & Zhandossova, S. (2025). The Influence of Digitalization on Religious Identity: Socio-political Context. *Eurasian Research Journal*, 7(1), pp.

INTRODUCTION

New technologies have brought about the most significant change in current religious practices and activities, changing how religious groups develop and sustain their religious identity. When religious organizations deal with the virtual and real worlds of the church, scholars observe the growing tendency to transform the way theological information is presented, accepted and interpreted in the digital environment. The use of social media and other digital resources in religious activities has increased the competition for the spiritual market while simultaneously challenging the church's conventional chain of command and authority.

The youth are very talented at incorporating the digital world with their spiritual activities and thus have found new ways of expressing their religion that do not involve physical presence in the churches. The contemporary religious landscape is characterized by the convergence of different forms of worship as churches strive to adapt their traditional practices to the new generation of worshippers and the digital age. This technological revolution has also affected interfaith relations and religion, as digital media has expanded the possibilities for engagement and interaction between different religions on an international level.

The pandemic has been a key accelerant, forcing churches and other places of worship around the world to shift their activities online and, in the process, transform the way they conduct their business and maintain their community in the future. These trends occur against the background of political and social complexities, where religious movements use digital space to effect change, organize communities, and respond to the political environment. The use of digital technologies in shaping religious identity is an area of growing interest to scholars seeking to understand how and why religious groups and individuals are evolving in the digital age.

This article contributes to the discussion of the effects of digitalization on religious identity and, additionally, offers suggestions to politicians and sociologists on how to use digital technologies to enhance the relationships between different religious groups.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Both foreign and domestic researchers have been studying this topic. So, the researchers Turganbayeva and Seitakhmetova (2023) studied the features of Islamic identity in the context of Kazakh society's national identification. The article considers the expediency of creating one's own identity model in Kazakh society, which will be based on traditional Islam's cultural and communicative capabilities and guidelines. The authors studied the impact of cultural globalization on Islamic identity, highlighting both the positive and negative sides of such influence.

Recent scholarship has highlighted the unique characteristics of religious digitalization in Kazakhstan. Nyazbekov, Lifanova, Kazmukhanov, Tasybekova and Byerdimurat (2023) examine the specific features of traditional religions' digitalization in modern Kazakhstan, emphasizing how digital platforms mediate religious practices while maintaining cultural distinctiveness. Their research reveals the complex interplay between traditional religious values and contemporary digital expression.

In her scientific work, Mukhatayeva (2021) considered the problems of religious radicalism in Kazakhstan. The study reveals the main stages of the formation of radicalism based on religion and analyzes internal and external factors that can lead to terrorism in the country. The author examines the influence of new worldviews on the formation of extremist beliefs.

A group of Kazakh scientists, Aimaganbetova, Adilova, Sadykova and Baimoldina (2022), studied the psychological characteristics and structure of the religious identity of Kazakh youth. The authors studied citizens' attitudes to a particular religion through their attitude to collectivist or individualist culture. A notable contribution to understanding gender dynamics in digital religious discourse comes from Tasbolat (2024), who conducts a discourse analysis of religious authority and gender norms in Kazakh social media. The study explicitly examines Rizabek Battaulay's patriarchal views, providing insights into how traditional gender norms are reinforced or challenged in digital religious spaces.

Campbell and Tsuria's (2021) seminal work provides a comprehensive framework for understanding religious practice in digital media. Their edited volume explores how digital technologies reshape religious expression, community formation, and authority structures. They argue that digital spaces are not merely platforms for religious communication but active agents in transforming how religion is practiced and understood.

In his article, Evolvi (2022) suggests studying religion and the Internet through the analysis of the concept of «digital religion». The paper examines different approaches to the study of digital religion, both material and spatial. The author uses specific examples to show how innovative technologies can be used in traditional religious events and describes specific online rituals that are used exclusively in a virtual environment without analogues in the material world.

The scientific work of Kurganskaya and Dunaev (2020) is devoted to the study of the peculiarities of Kazakhstan's religious identification in the era of digital technology development. The authors note that in recent years, the role of religion in Kazakh society has increased significantly. At its core, the increase in the religiosity of the population does not carry any destructive overtones except for the emergence and spread of extremist religious movements.

Umbet and Akmadi (2024) contribute to this discourse by analyzing the digital construction of religious identity in contemporary settings. Their research demonstrates how digital platforms serve as spaces for negotiating and expressing religious identities, particularly in multicultural contexts like Kazakhstan.

A few scientists have been studying this issue in particular, such as researchers Lifanov and Lifanova (2022), who studied in detail the processes of virtualization of religion and the influence of digital technologies on religious identification. The paper identifies two main forms of virtualization of religion and

indicates that digital analogues of religious information are gaining increasing support. According to the authors, the virtual environment has a very strong influence on the identity of citizens since it significantly expands opportunities in religious terms.

Sagimbayev (2023) analyzes Kazakhstan's state policies in the field of religion. In the modern world, religion plays a very important role in building domestic policy and ensuring the stability of the State. At this stage of development, the scientist characterizes politics as tolerant and consistent with a secular state.

In his scientific work, Gálik (2019) studied the peculiarities of human identity in cyberspace. The author points out that identity is not static but dynamic and constantly evolving. Cyberspace is a kind of mirror that reflects a person's real essence. At the same time, virtual identity is not completely virtual because it is associated with a person's real cognitive abilities.

Authors Abdurrohman and Fitriana (2023) discuss in their article the role of digital literacy in strengthening religious moderation and indicate that the development of digital technologies affects religious views and worldviews from different perspectives. So, on the one hand, the Internet space provides convenience and comfort for deepening knowledge and understanding of faith. However, on the other hand, the Internet can be used as a source of teachings that deviate from real religious values, such as radicalism, extremism and intolerance. Nord and Petzke (2024) offers valuable perspectives on religious education in the digital age, albeit from a German context. Their work provides comparative insights for understanding how digital transformation affects religious education across different cultural contexts.

Thus, researchers in their scientific works support the view that virtual space radically changes the concept of religious identity. With the Internet space, new forms of consumption of religious information are emerging and the very perception of religion as such is changing.

METHODOLOGY

The research methodology employed a comprehensive multi-method approach integrating both theoretical and empirical frameworks. The synthesis method facilitated the identification and analysis of overarching patterns in Internet usage and advanced technologies' role in identity formation, particularly within religious contexts. A historical-formal analysis was conducted to examine the evolutionary trajectory of religious identity formation in Kazakhstan, incorporating both diachronic and synchronic perspectives on state-religion relations. Systematic generalization techniques were applied to conceptualize religious identity within digital spaces and elucidate the characteristic implications of technological advancement on religious practices. The study utilized qualitative case analysis to examine specific instances of digital technology integration within religious communities, focusing on virtual worship spaces, online theological education platforms, and faith-based social media engagement. Comparative analysis was employed to evaluate the varying approaches to digital adoption across different religious organizations and denominations. Content analysis was performed on digital religious discourse to identify emerging patterns and themes in online religious communication. Observational research methods were implemented to document real-time interactions within virtual

religious spaces and communities. The methodology incorporated phenomenological approaches to understand the lived experiences of practitioners engaging with religion through digital mediums. Statistical analysis of online religious participation and engagement metrics was applied to quantitative data to support qualitative findings.

RESULTS

Today, digitalization processes increasingly impact all aspects of human life (Pelevin, 2024). Religion is no exception since religious life is being adapted to the virtual space. Along with the emergence of new forms and methods of information consumption, new religious practices are also emerging because of widespread digitalization. In the modern world, religion is still one of the main indicators of a person's place in society, but due to the very active processes of globalization and migration, difficulties with religious identity very often arise (Pelevin, 2024).

In the traditional sense, religious identity implies belonging to a particular religious group, and this type of identity plays a fundamental role in the formation of personal identification (Pelevin, 2024). In addition, religious identification, due to its immutability and belonging to a separate religion from birth, was very closely linked to national and ethnic identification. However, with the advent of Internet resources and a variety of virtual opportunities, the very essence of religious identity has changed, as has its purpose. Clearly, the emergence of the Internet space has a powerful impact on the formation of religious identity, especially for young and progressive people worldwide, including Kazakhstan. With the development of the Internet and new ways of transmitting information, religious customs and beliefs are also constantly being transformed. Nevertheless, despite this, religion has not lost its purpose and plays a vital role in developing culture and preserving national identity (Herdiansyah et al., 2023).

“Issues of self-identification are becoming more and more relevant all over the world in connection with the large-scale processes of globalization and the formation of a multicultural. Religious identity, as the attitude of oneself to a certain religion, is one of the decisive factors in the formation of a modern personality” (Pelevin, 2024).

According to sociological surveys, only 67% of citizens of the Republic of Kazakhstan consider themselves believers, only 20% of them indicate that they belong to a certain religious community and adhere to customs, whereas 47% of residents, although they consider themselves believers, do not participate in religious life. Thus, one can conclude that one's attitude towards believers is not a consequence of pronounced religious beliefs but due to long-established traditions.

With the advent of the Internet and all its possibilities, gaining personal identification in the religious sphere has become even more difficult. Initially, the Internet space was a source of information in the field of religion, including sermons, various scientific and analytical literature, as well as the positions of religious leaders and ordinary believers. However, over time and with the development of the capabilities of the global network, the information storage function has become insufficient for most believers. Internet users need not only to receive information but also to fulfill other needs in the field of religious consciousness,

such as prayers, confession, and pilgrimage. The Internet space not only provides all the possibilities for this but also significantly expands them. Due to the emergence of new prospects for the development of the religious consciousness of citizens, researchers note the active development of the religious online environment. Believers and clergy representatives interact in the virtual space as providers of certain content.

Modern scientific and technical means provide ample opportunities for modeling a new character in a virtual plane. Such a religious identity is considered an opportunity to expand everyday religious life (Campbell et al., 2022). The peculiarity of religious views is that identity in the religious sphere can change more than once and depends on ideological trends in the virtual environment.

Since the Internet space has a diverse impact on religious identity, Table 1 presents the main positive and negative aspects.

Table 1. *Features of the influence of digital technologies on religious identity*

Positive aspects	Negative aspects
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – complete freedom of worldview and religion; – the possibility of carrying out religious relations from anywhere in the world; – expanding the possibilities of obtaining information on religious topics; – the ability of spiritual leaders to spread information to a wider audience; – communication between members of the same religious group has no territorial restrictions; – religious views can change and transform, depending on a person's worldview. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – dissemination of extremist information; – expanding the ability of attackers to influence a wide audience, using religious teachings; – manipulation of the consciousness of citizens and incitement of inter-confessional hostility; – changing the essence of religious identity and blurring the boundaries between the virtual and real world; – the risk of loss of personal identity for people who are illiterate in the religious and digital sphere.

Source: Ferguson et al., 2021

Thus, it can be argued that the policy of peaceful interaction of different religious movements in one country is the most successful and practical for the state. Today, the Internet plays the role of a tool through which the population can receive religious information, communicate with like-minded people or carry out religious activities. Of course, new relationships that arise in the virtual space require special attention since they are developing very dynamically. But if technological progress cannot be stopped, then every effort must be made to ensure that religious relations in the Internet space are controlled and benefit

citizens. Undoubtedly, the Internet strongly influences a person's perception and worldview, which also forms religious views.

The emerging phenomenon of digital religious identity is associated with the emerging religious problem of «projected or constructed religious identity». The fact that religion has become an object of digitalization is due to the need to adapt to a new reality in which to maintain both tradition and the flock or the Ummah (Ummah (ﻣﺠﺘﻤﺎ)) refers to the collective community of Muslims worldwide, transcending geographical, cultural, racial and political boundaries. The term comes from the Arabic root word «umm» (mother) and carries connotations of unity, brotherhood/sisterhood, and shared beliefs), one must be relevant to time. Despite the discourse of resistance to digital transformation on the part of individual confessional communities, the process of transforming religion into digital reality is intensifying. A huge number of religious sites in the digital segment of Kazakhstan demonstrates the demand for digital technologies in the presentation of religious online projects. The problems that arise during the digital transformation of religions are primarily related to the formation of religious identities, which are becoming increasingly blurred. Spiritual security and its preservation depend on the preservation of religious and cultural immunity, which is formed based on a country's historically established religious landscape. The concern about the «dual meaning of digitalization» lies precisely in the plane of spiritual security since the spiritual and value attitudes contained in the global digital market of religious products are clip-based, of a different nature. Anonymity and quasi-religiosity in the Internet space promote both religious emancipation and excessive individualization. It is necessary to note the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the fragmentation of communication processes and the 'digitalization' of religious traditions and practices.

CONCLUSION

The consequence of global informatization is a very rapid development in the field of religious relations, which leads to risks of loss of identity and blurring of any boundaries between social groups. The influence of the Internet space on the development of religious identity is a decisive factor in the formation of modern identity since not only the way of communication is changing, but also the very essence and social role of religion changing as well.

As a result of the conducted research, the following conclusions were formulated regarding the impact of digitalization on religious identity in the modern socio-political context:

- One of the problems in the digital space in the field of religious identity formation is the problem of politicization of religious traditions and values. It should be noted that researchers on the relationship between politics and religion, such as Michel Foucault, Slava Zizek, Baudrillard, Uzlaner, and many others, have noted some constancy of this interaction. A historical digression into this problem shows the role of religion in the formation of even statehood in individual countries. In the XX and XXI centuries, politics has had a significant impact on religion, using religious value-based spiritual paradigms for far-from spiritual purposes. Max Weber's famous idea of the existence of the Protestant ethics in capitalism and vice versa still influences the processes of secularization. In Islamic countries, for example, especially after the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, religion became

the main factor in the formation of statehood. Islam in Iran is the foundation for developing society and Iranian identity. In the United States, as is well known, Christian rights have exerted and continue to influence political processes in the country. The separation of politics from religion is one of the conditions of modern secular society. Along with the rise of secularization, there is a religious upsurge, which, in the era of digitalization, has more opportunities to involve religion and religious traditions in politics. Religious discourse and the politicization of religion have an impact on religious identity. In these conditions, it is necessary for Kazakh society to preserve spiritual and cultural sovereignty. Digitalization in the process of religious identification should be based on the traditions of religions that have historically arisen here, which demonstrate a stable religious identity, a culture of religious culture based on tolerance and the ability to inter-confessional communication;

- the process of digitalization has a multidimensional impact on the formation and transformation of religious identity, modifying traditional practices and creating new forms of religious interaction;
- expanding access to a variety of information contributes to the pluralization of religious views and the individualization of beliefs;
- social media plays a significant role in consolidating virtual religious communities, but it can also be a tool of political influence and manipulation;
- the digital environment poses several challenges for religious groups, including information security and data reliability issues. Further research is needed to develop strategies for adapting religious communities to digital reality while preserving their fundamental values and traditions.

Based on the provided input, the analysis of the situation suggests that several challenges and opportunities characterize the current state of religious identity in the digital age. To address these issues effectively, the following scientific recommendations are proposed:

1. **Comprehensive Digital Literacy Programs.** Faith-based communities should be enabled to develop structured digital literacy programs for religious institutions and educational bodies. The modules should include critical thinking, source verification and digital manipulation techniques. The curriculum should be evidence-based and regularly updated to reflect emerging digital challenges and technological changes.
2. **Cross Platform Verification Mechanisms.** Standardized verification protocols for religious content across digital platforms should be developed and implemented by regulatory bodies. This framework should include automated detection systems for potentially harmful content while preserving legitimate religious discourse. Balanced and effective content moderation can only be guaranteed if technical experts, religious scholars and digital policy specialists collaborate in the implementation process.
3. **Integration of Multi-Modal Communication Strategies.** Religious organizations should use an integrated communication approach of traditional and digital channels. This should also involve the development of hybrid learning environments that combine instruction with digital resources and

are accessible yet do not compromise traditional values and practices. Empirical research methods should be employed in the regular assessment of communication effectiveness.

4. **Digital Content Management in Religious Context – Regional Governance Networks.** Formal networks for cross-border collaboration on the management of digital religious content should be established. These networks should provide for regular sharing of knowledge, development of resources and collective action in the society in the light of digital challenges. The implementation process should include standardized protocols for information sharing and joint initiative development among participating nations.
5. **Implementation of Evidence-Based Media Literacy Frameworks.** Media literacy programs taught at educational institutions should include practical tools for evaluating religious content, fact-checking methodologies, and understanding digital manipulation techniques. These programs should be based on empirical research and include source verification. Quantitative and qualitative research methods should be used to assess the effectiveness of programs.
6. **Digital Authentication Systems.** Research institutions should also concentrate on developing authenticating systems for religious content in the digital environment. This includes blockchain-based verification systems and digital signatures for accredited religious content providers. The implementation should involve technical experts and religious authorities to ensure that the system is credible and reliable from a religious point of view.

These recommendations should be implemented through a systematic, evidence-based approach with provision for regular monitoring and evaluation processes.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This research has been funded by the Committee of Science of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan (IRN No. BR21882302 Kazakhstan's Society in the Context of Digital Transformation: Prospects and Risks).

Ethical Commission Approval

This study did not require approval from an ethics committee as it did not involve human participants, animals, or sensitive personal data. All data used in this research were obtained from publicly available sources.

Conflict of Interest Statement

There is no conflict of interest with any institution or person within the scope of this study.

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<https://doi.org/10.53277/2519-2442-2025.1-05>

IRSTI 52.01.93

ISSN 2519-2442, KAZAKHSTAN

Research Article

**MINING, HEALTH, AND SOCIETY: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF
OCCUPATIONAL ACCIDENTS IN KAZAKHSTAN AND JAPAN**

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Received: 20.12.2024

Accepted: 28.01.2025

ABSTRACT

This study compares occupational incidents in the mining industries of Kazakhstan and Japan from 2018 to 2023. Kazakhstan's rising workplace accidents, particularly in coal mining, highlight deficiencies in safety management despite adopting global standards. In contrast, Japan benefits from advanced safety technologies and stringent protocols, resulting in significantly lower incident rates. The study analyses trends in incident types, such as falls and machinery-related injuries, using harmonized injury classifications. Findings reveal regulatory weaknesses and underreporting in Kazakhstan, while Japan faces challenges with aging infrastructure and disaster preparedness. The research emphasizes

Kazakhstan's need to enhance legal frameworks, training, and safety culture, while Japan must address infrastructure-related risks. Recommendations for both countries focus on improving occupational safety systems to meet international standards, providing key insights for policy reform in high-risk industries such as mining.

Keywords: Mining industry, Occupational injuries, Socioeconomic factors, Culture of safety, Kazakhstan, Japan.

For citation: Kazbekova, D., Ogami, A., Ando, H., Baigabylov, N., & Yensebayeva, A. (2025). Mining, Health, and Society: A Comparative Analysis of Occupational Accidents in Kazakhstan and Japan. *Eurasian Research Journal*, 7(1), pp.

INTRODUCTION

The mining industry is globally acknowledged as one of the most hazardous sectors, characterized by a significant incidence of occupational accidents and fatalities. Workers in this industry face numerous risks attributable to the complex and dynamic nature of mining operations, which frequently entail hazardous environments, heavy machinery, and challenging working conditions. This literature review synthesizes research findings from various studies to elucidate the causes, trends, and preventive measures associated with occupational accidents within the mining industry. Numerous studies have consistently underscored the increased risk of injuries and fatalities within the mining workforce. For instance, Sanmiquel et al. (2018: 462; 2021: 13122) conducted an analysis of occupational accidents within the Spanish mining sector and concluded that, despite advancements in safety protocols, the incidence rate of such accidents remains disproportionately higher than in other industries. Similarly, Stemn (2019: 151) documented a significant prevalence of injuries within the Ghanaian mining industry, underscoring the urgent need for improved safety measures. Cruz-Ausejo et al. (2024) reported that mining accounts for 8% of global fatal occupational injuries. Their study aimed to identify the sociodemographic and occupational characteristics that influence injury risks. Moreover, the review sought to ascertain the causative factors and health consequences of such injuries in order to develop enhanced preventive strategies for the sector. A systematic search of databases, including Scopus, Embase, and PubMed, was performed, resulting in a total of 123 studies, of which nine met the established eligibility criteria. The review was restricted to observational studies published between 2010 and 2022, encompassing a variety of mining environments worldwide. Given the limitations identified in the review, including language bias favoring publications in English, Spanish, and Portuguese, as well as a lack of data differentiating between fatal and non-fatal injuries, an examination of the Asian perspective – specifically from Kazakhstan and Japan – could yield a more nuanced understanding of occupational risks in mining. The distinctive conditions of Kazakhstan's mining industry, characterized by challenging environmental and geological factors, present both obstacles and opportunities for the integration of advanced occupational safety practices that are consistent with international standards. Japan's initiatives, spearheaded by organizations such as the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and the Japan Industrial Safety and Health Association (JISHA), seek to assist Kazakhstan's scientific

and technical community in adopting enhanced safety protocols. Japan's extensive experience in implementing stringent safety standards through regulatory frameworks and technological innovation can serve as a pertinent model for Kazakhstan. Japanese practices frequently incorporate comprehensive risk management strategies, regular safety training, and a systematic approach to monitoring worker health, all tailored to minimize accidents in high-risk sectors. For Kazakhstan, the integration of insights from Japan's approach to managing human and organizational factors – particularly in relation to night shifts and irregular schedules – holds substantial relevance. These factors are particularly pronounced in Kazakhstan's mining regions, where extreme weather conditions exacerbate occupational hazards. The inclusion of sociodemographic and biochemical data in occupational health research could further elucidate factors contributing to injuries, such as cumulative fatigue, reduced concentration, and physiological responses to high-altitude conditions. By leveraging Japanese expertise, Kazakhstan could establish a more comprehensive occupational health system. This system would not only prioritize physical protection measures but also emphasize injury prevention through regular health assessments and psychological support. As Kazakhstan's scientific community adapts these advanced practices, it could significantly contribute to the reduction of incidents within the mining sector, thereby aligning with global safety standards while addressing local needs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Mining accidents emerge from a complex interplay of human, equipment, environmental, and organizational factors, thereby creating a multifaceted risk landscape. Human error remains a predominant causal factor, with inadequate training and inexperience significantly contributing to occupational injuries (Mirzaei Aliabadi et al., 2019; Yashı and Bolat, 2019: 781). Notably, injuries frequently occur early in a shift, indicating that fatigue and diminished alertness heighten accident risks (De et al., 2020: 1124). Furthermore, equipment misuse and mechanical failures exacerbate these hazards. Heavy machinery, including conveyor belts, haul trucks, and dumpers, is commonly implicated in accidents during maintenance activities (Duarte et al., 2018: 84; 2019: 63; 2021: 21). Environmental hazards – such as poor ventilation, hazardous gases, and dust – further elevate the risk of injury. For instance, gas explosions in Chinese coal mines (Yin et al., 2017: 173) underscore the critical need for controlling environmental factors to enhance safety outcomes. Organizational deficiencies, including inadequate safety protocols, insufficient supervision, and poor risk assessment, significantly magnify the dangers inherent in mining operations. A deficient safety culture and organizational shortcomings significantly contribute to coal mining accidents in China (H. Zhang et al., 2021: 247; J. Zhang, Fu, et al., 2020: 78; J. Zhang, Xu, et al., 2020: 332; Y. Zhang et al., 2016: 189). Globally, the mining industry consistently reports high fatality rates, rendering it one of the most hazardous occupations (Hämäläinen et al., 2006: 137). Accident rates in developing countries remain disproportionately elevated, primarily due to inadequate regulatory frameworks (Takala, 1999: 640). Regional analyses indicate varying trends: while Spain has observed a decline in mining accidents, associated risks still exceed those of other industries (Sanmiquel et al., 2018: 462; 2021: 13122); India encounters specific job-related hazards within the coal mining sector (Senapati et al., 2020: 306); Ghana reports elevated injury rates, highlighting the

necessity for targeted research (Stemmn, 2019: 151). In Kazakhstan, alarmingly high levels of workplace accidents and occupational diseases necessitate the implementation of improved safety practices (Abikenova, Marcelloni, et al., 2023: 23; Yerdessov et al., 2022: jphr.2021.2169; Abikenova et al., 2023: 41; Taubayev et al., 2023: 4). Advancements in data analysis are indispensable for comprehending contemporary trends within the mining sector. The application of statistical methods and data mining facilitates the identification of patterns and risk factors (Noraishah Ismail et al., 2021: 105438). For instance, the observed correlation between elevated noise levels and increased injury incidence underscores the necessity of environmental monitoring (Shkembi et al., 2022: 35). Fostering a robust safety culture within mining organizations is of paramount importance. Addressing minor accidents, which can lead to significant consequences, necessitates a comprehensive commitment to safety at the organizational level (Jørgensen, 2016: 46). Furthermore, the implementation of tailored training programs for specific activities, such as the operation of heavy machinery, is essential (Duarte et al., 2019: 63). The integration of modern equipment and monitoring systems has demonstrated considerable potential in mitigating accident risks. Predictive technologies, such as hybrid classifiers, effectively anticipate coal mining accidents, thereby enhancing safety protocols (Javaid et al., 2023: 13211). Compliance with national and international safety regulations further strengthens risk management efforts. In Kazakhstan, stricter enforcement of safety laws and the implementation of mandatory health supervision could contribute to a reduction in accident rates (Abikenova, Aitimova, et al., 2023: 317). Health monitoring, particularly with regard to fatigue and workload management, represents another critical preventive measure, given the established correlation between extended working hours and increased injury risks (Friedman et al., 2019: 389). Mining accidents have repercussions that extend beyond physical injuries to encompass psychological effects, including trauma and stress. Injuries, particularly to the hands and wrists, can result in long-term disabilities, adversely affecting both health and financial well-being (Alessa et al., 2020: 104792). Vulnerable populations may experience heightened psychological distress; for instance, the excess mortality due to external causes among female miners in South Africa underscores the urgent need for mental health support (Wilson et al., 2020: 1875). Furthermore, mining accidents impose substantial economic burdens on both workers and companies. Compensation claims highlight significant costs associated with injuries, emphasizing the necessity of preventive strategies (Heberger and Wurzelbacher, 2024: 3067). Adherence to international safety standards, particularly those established by the International Labour Organization (ILO), remains critical in fostering safer practices across mining industries globally (Quiroz et al., 2023: 47). National initiatives, such as strategic insurance programs in Kazakhstan, are aimed at enhancing safety and reducing occupational risks (Smatlayev et al., 2023: 42). Ensuring mining safety requires a multifaceted approach that integrates human, environmental, organizational, and technological considerations, underscoring the importance of fostering a comprehensive safety culture to address the complex risk factors inherent in the industry. The mining industry is critical to the economies of both Kazakhstan and Japan. In Kazakhstan, mining is essential for the extraction of coal, uranium, copper, and various other minerals, positioning the country among the most resource-rich nations globally. However, the industry is characterized by elevated rates of occupational incidents. Despite ongoing

efforts to enhance safety-including the adoption of best practices derived from compulsory occupational accident insurance frameworks of developed nations and alignment with international standards (Abikenova, Aitimova, et al., 2023: 317; Smatlayev et al., 2023: 42) – Kazakhstan has witnessed a significant increase in mining accidents, with a 45% rise in the number of victims from 2018 to 2022 (Bakishev, 2024: 109). Additionally, the high rate of underreported injuries, averaging 15,2:1, exacerbates the situation (Bakishev, 2024: 109). These incidents have considerable material and social repercussions, highlighting the urgent need for enhanced safety protocols and preventive measures (Yerdessov et al., 2022; Taubayev et al., 2023: 4). Kazakhstan's resource mining industry, while being a global leader in mineral extraction, faces significant challenges related to environmental pollution and occupational health risks. Toxic elements present near mining sites pose serious health hazards to workers, and current occupational health policies and insurance frameworks do not adequately address these risks. This deficiency raises concerns regarding the effectiveness of Kazakhstan's regulations in safeguarding the mining workforce from hazardous substances. Conversely, Japan's mining industry, while smaller in scale, benefits from stringent regulations and advanced safety protocols, which contribute to a lower incidence of accidents (Molé, 2024: 955). The 14th Labour Accident Prevention Plan, implemented by Japan's Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (Higuchi, 2023: 12), addresses safety concerns across diverse sectors, including mining, with a focus on both the implementation of preventive measures and the reduction of incidents. Nevertheless, the existing Japanese scholarly literature tends to concentrate more on occupational accidents in sectors such as construction, public health, forestry, and transportation, reflecting the country's sectoral priorities, where these industries engage a larger workforce and exhibit higher rates of incident reporting (Kawasaki and Koroki, 2018). Research indicates that inattentiveness remains a significant contributor to occupational accidents across various industries in Japan, including mining (Wasaki and Takahashi, 2024). Accidents associated with inattentiveness tend to increase with age, reflecting the demographic shift towards an aging workforce. Addressing human error and inattentiveness through industry-specific safety measures is imperative. Japan's approach to reducing workplace accidents incorporates comprehensive safety measures, including proactive risk assessments, strict safety protocols, and legislative adjustments. For example, mandatory fall prevention systems have been implemented in the construction sector to address high-risk areas (Kawasaki and Koroki, 2018: 28). Furthermore, the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MLHW, 2023: 15) outlines «Prevention Measures for Occupational Accidents from the Perspective of the 14th Labour Accident Prevention Plan», highlighting Japan's focus on preventing accidents, particularly among elderly workers and women in the service sector. This plan aims to ensure that over 50% of enterprises implement robust fall prevention measures by 2027, reflecting Japan's commitment to minimizing behaviour-related accidents like falls and back injuries.

In Kazakhstan, predictive models are being explored to enhance workplace safety. Holt's mathematical model, implemented at Kazzinc LLP, has exhibited a notable predictive accuracy of 91.3% in forecasting workplace injuries (Abdugaliyeva et al., 2024:8). By leveraging historical injury data and adapting to changing production conditions, this model plays a critical role in refining safety protocols and reducing occupational risks within metallurgical environments.

A statistical analysis of occupational injuries in Kazakhstan's coal mining sector reveals that accidents are more prevalent among workers aged 50–59 and those with either less than one year or more than 31 years of experience (Abikenova, Aitimova, et al., 2023: 317). Additionally, a higher incidence of injuries occurs during nighttime shifts and winter months, underscoring the need for targeted safety strategies tailored to these high-risk conditions.

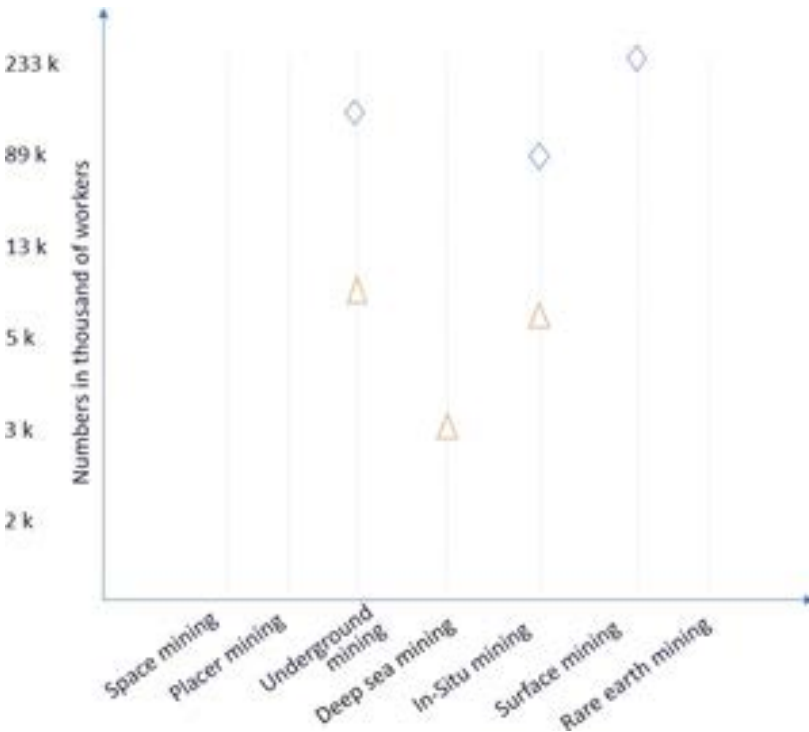
Comparative overview of mining operations in Kazakhstan and Japan

When analysing the mining sectors of Kazakhstan and Japan, it is essential to comprehend their geographic and industrial disparities. Kazakhstan, endowed with an abundance of natural resources, boasts extensive coal, mineral, and rare earth mining operations that make significant contributions to its economy. In contrast, Japan, characterized by a scarcity of natural resources, emphasizes underground and in-situ mining methods due to land and spatial limitations. These distinctions markedly influence the types and scales of mining operations, as well as the distribution of the workforce. This geographic divergence underscores the necessity of recognizing the varying mining methodologies and their corresponding workforce requirements across both nations.

Figure 1 illustrates two sets of data representing the number of workers employed across various types of mining in Japan (indicated by orange triangles) and Kazakhstan (indicated by blue diamonds). The mining types included are surface mining, underground mining, deep-sea mining, in-situ mining, placer mining, and rare earth mining. The y-axis quantifies workforce numbers in thousands. The data indicate that Kazakhstan has a larger workforce in sectors such as surface and rare earth mining, whereas Japan is represented in sectors such as underground and in-situ mining, albeit with generally smaller workforce sizes.

In the methodology of this study, the mining sectors in Japan and Kazakhstan were classified into large and medium scales based on the distribution of the workforce across various mining activities.

Figure 1. Mining Map of Kazakhstan and Japan



Source: The author's elaboration

The large-scale sectors in Kazakhstan, including surface and rare earth mining, employ significant workforces, with numbers reaching up to 233,000 workers. In contrast, Japan exhibits a concentration on medium-and small-scale operations, particularly in underground and in-situ mining, characterized by a comparatively smaller workforce size, approximately 20 thousand workers.

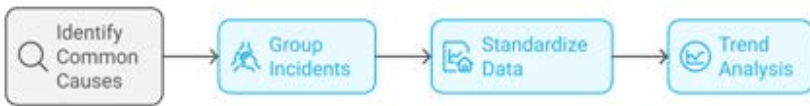
The mining industry has historically played a pivotal role in the development of various economic sectors in Japan. In earlier periods, revenues generated from mining activities facilitated the establishment of new manufacturing capacities in industries such as engineering, machinery production, and metalworking. These sectors, in turn, became integral components of Japan's industrial base, thereby supporting the development of the country's economy. Despite a decline in the number of active mines in recent decades, Japan remains a significant player in the global metallurgical industry. Currently, the metallurgy sector in Japan is heavily reliant on imported raw materials, such as copper and zinc concentrates. The country contributes approximately 10% to global copper production and around 8% to zinc production. These industries, which have evolved alongside mining, can be regarded as foundational to Japan's overall industrial landscape, particularly in metallurgy, machinery manufacturing, and the electronics sector, demonstrates a pronounced emphasis on safety and efficiency (JICA, 2024: 12).

METHODOLOGY

Building on the previously established classification of mining scales between Kazakhstan and Japan, we adopted a comparable methodology to harmonize occupational injury categories, thereby ensuring consistency across the distinct reporting systems of both countries. This harmonization facilitates effective comparisons of injury trends and addresses industrial safety priorities through a sustainable, data-driven approach. Such a framework has the potential to inform future policy improvements and enhance cross-border collaboration in occupational health and safety standards. Given the discrepancies in categorization between the two nations, the initial step involved identifying common injury types. Incidents were categorized according to shared characteristics (e.g., falls, collisions, exposure to harmful substances) with the objective of establishing uniform categories. This approach not only aids in trend identification but also supports the formulation of more robust, data-driven safety regulations. Furthermore, this methodology can serve as a sustainable framework for future research in occupational health and safety, promoting cross-country collaboration and the establishment of international safety standards.

In the provided Figure 2, the key steps are delineated into three distinct phases: identifying commonalities in the causes of injuries, grouping incidents into harmonized categories, and applying these categories for data standardization and trend analysis.

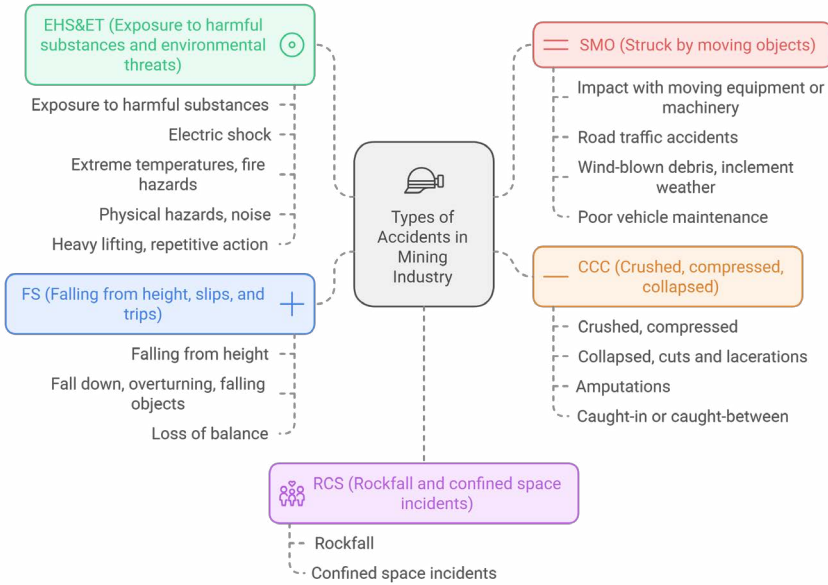
Figure 2. *Phases of Harmonization and Standardization of Occupational Injury Data*



Source: The author's elaboration

The methodology for classifying types of fatal and non-fatal accidents in the mining industry focuses on harmonizing data by comparing existing classification systems from Japan and Kazakhstan. Incidents are grouped based on their causes (e.g., falls, moving objects) and their effects (e.g., injury location), creating a unified matrix for better standardization (see Figure 3). This harmonization facilitates consistent monitoring and management of workplace safety, allowing for targeted interventions to mitigate risks and improve worker protection across the mining sectors of both countries.

Figure 3. *Classified Harmonization of Types of Fatal and Non-fatal Accidents in Mining Industry*

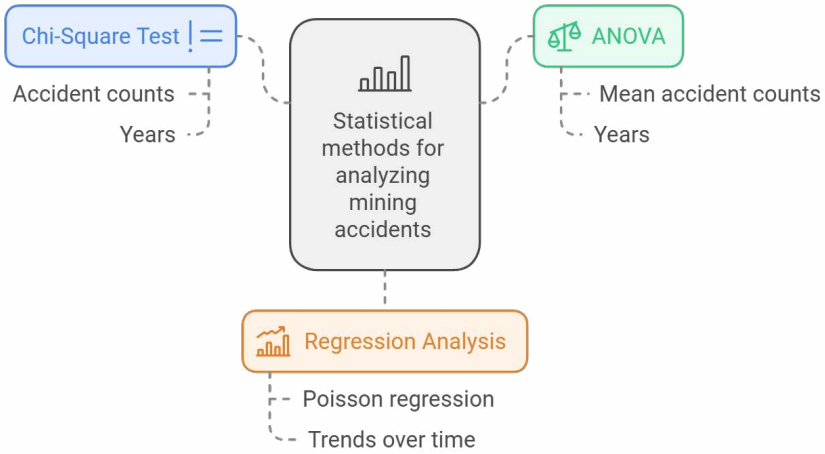


Source: The author’s elaboration

By standardizing the classifications of accidents across both countries, this study ensures a robust comparison of incident data, allowing for meaningful trend analysis. The harmonization of occupational injury categories paves the way for identifying key patterns in mining safety, providing a comprehensive foundation for the following results, which highlight critical differences and shared challenges between Japan and Kazakhstan from 2018 to 2023. These findings will inform recommendations for improving safety protocols in both countries.

Despite the fact that mining is a critical sector that significantly contributes to the economy, it is associated with high-risk working conditions. Monitoring workplace accidents is essential for the implementation of effective safety measures. This report aims to identify significant changes in accident counts over time across various mining industries in Japan from 2018 to 2023. We utilize Chi-Square tests, ANOVA, and regression analysis to assess trends and patterns, ensuring that all statistical assumptions are validated (see figure 4).

Figure 4. *Three Methods for Analysing Statistical Mining Injuries*



Source: The author's elaboration

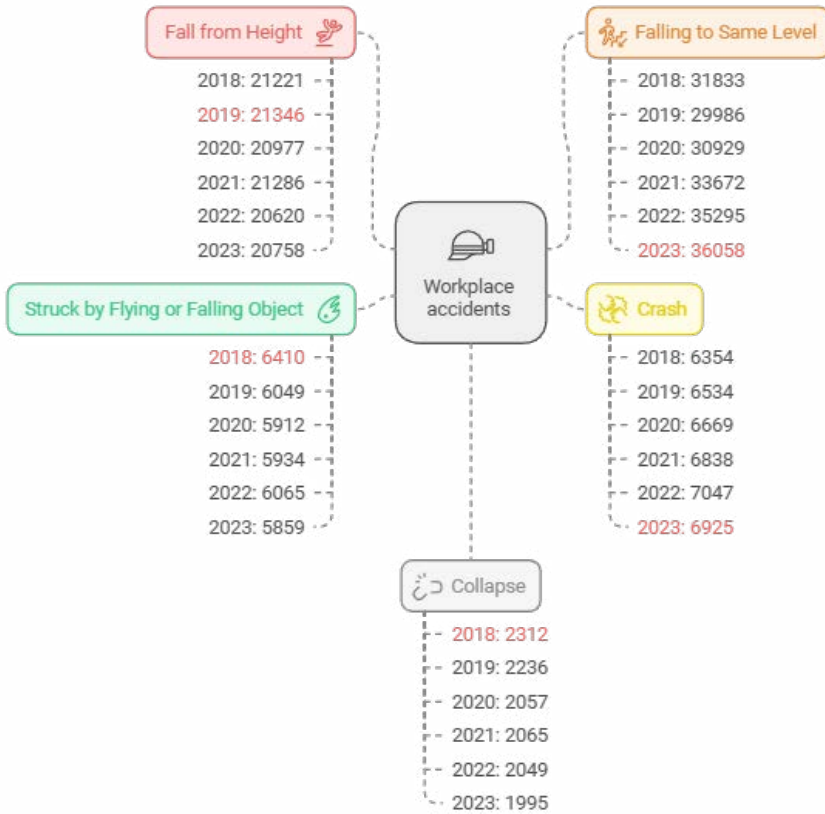
In this study, a series of statistical analyses were applied to evaluate the trends and patterns in workplace accidents over time. The Chi-Square Test was employed to determine whether the distribution of accident counts was independent of the years in which the accidents occurred. This test assesses whether the observed frequencies deviate significantly from the expected frequencies. To ensure the validity of the test, we confirmed that the expected frequencies were equal to or greater than five and that the observations were independent.

ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) was used to compare the mean accident counts across different years. This method allowed us to ascertain whether there were statistically significant differences in the average number of accidents over time. Prior to performing the ANOVA, we validated the assumptions of normality of the accident count data, homogeneity of variances to ensure similar variance across years, and independence of observations.

Statistical data on occupational injuries in Japan's mining sector

The data from the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) for Japan spanning the years 2018 to 2023 provides a comprehensive perspective on occupational accidents across various industries, including mining. In this context, occupational accidents are defined as incidents resulting in either fatal or non-fatal injuries, as well as work-related illnesses that necessitate an absence of four or more days. It is noteworthy that the inclusion of COVID-19 cases significantly impacted the increase in reported incidents during 2020 and 2021, with 131,156 and 149,918 cases recorded, respectively. In contrast, data following 2022 indicates a return to pre-pandemic levels (see figure 5).

Figure 5. Total Occupational Accidents in Japan from 2018 to 2023

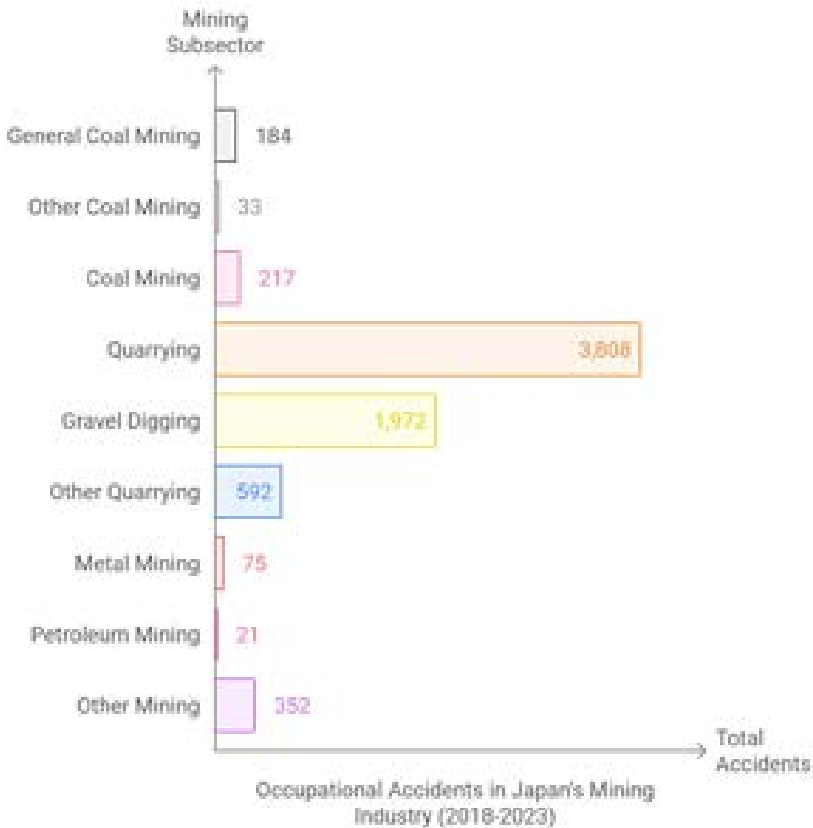


Source: JISHA statistical data (2023)

The total number of occupational accidents fluctuated from 2018 to 2023, with an overall increase evident in recent years. The most prevalent types of accidents—falls from height, falls to the same level, and incidents involving workers caught in or between objects—are particularly relevant to the mining and industrial sectors. Falls from height consistently ranged between 20,620 and 21,346 incidents per year, while incidents involving falls to the same level escalated over the years, culminating in 36,058 incidents in 2023 (see fig.5), thereby reflecting a steady upward trajectory. Similarly, accidents involving workers caught in or between objects consistently demonstrated an annual average exceeding 14,000 cases, underscoring the persistent risks associated with industrial machinery (JISHA, 2024: 7). The increase in total incidents, specifically during 2020 and 2021, can be attributed to factors related to the pandemic. However, upon excluding COVID-19 cases from 2022 onwards, the data illustrates Japan’s industrial emphasis on mitigating prevalent types of occupational hazards, particularly within sectors such as mining. The necessity for continuous enhancement of safety measures, especially with regard to falls and machinery-related accidents, is underscored by the stability of these figures despite increased regulatory efforts.

The dataset (see figure 6) concerning occupational accidents within Japan’s mining sector from 2018 to 2023 indicates a relatively stable trend in reported incidents, with an annual average of approximately 206 cases. Occupational incidents were predominantly concentrated in quarrying, which accounted for 92% of total accidents. In contrast, coal mining recorded minimal accidents, reflecting the industry’s decline in Japan, while the «other mining» category maintained low but fluctuating rates over the years. A detailed yearly breakdown reveals that in 2018, coal mining experienced its highest number of incidents (6); however, from 2019 to 2020, no accidents were reported in this sector. Minor incidents reemerged between 2021 and 2023, suggesting either reduced activity or the implementation of effective safety protocols. The quarrying sector remained the most consistent contributor to mining-related accidents, peaking at 201 incidents in 2021 before subsequently declining to 182 in both 2022 and 2023, likely attributable to improved safety practices. Other mining activities exhibited minor fluctuations, with incidents varying from 10 to 17 per year.

Figure 6. Total Mining Incidents in Japan from 2018 to 2023



Source: JISHA statistical data (2023)

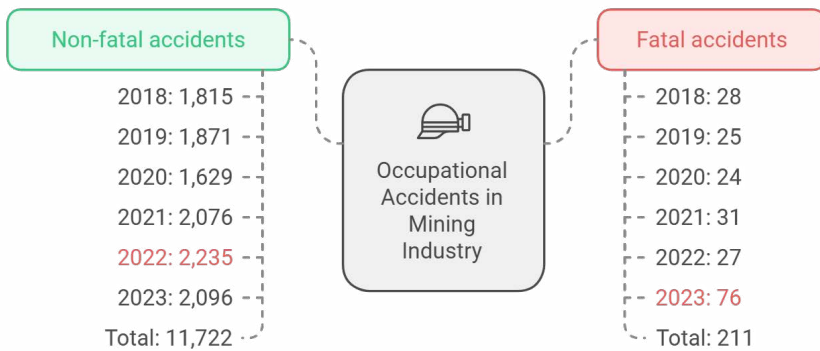
The predominant causes of these accidents include falls and collapse due to unstable geological conditions, machinery-related injuries involving heavy equipment, explosions and fires resulting from gas leaks or improper handling of explosives, and exposure to hazardous substances, which can lead to occupational diseases. Compared to all other industries, the mining sector accounted for only 0.16% of occupational incidents across Japan, a relatively low figure in contrast to high-risk industries such as manufacturing and construction, which exhibited significantly higher incident rates. This disparity underscores the comparatively reduced risk associated with the mining sector; however, the persistent occurrence of accidents in quarrying highlights the necessity for more focused safety measures.

Statistical data regarding occupational injuries within the mining sector in Kazakhstan.

Over the six-year period, a total of 11,722 non-fatal accidents and 211 fatal accidents were reported. This substantial disparity between non-fatal and fatal incidents underscores the generally hazardous conditions prevalent in the mining sector in Kazakhstan; however, the year 2023 stands out as an anomaly in terms of fatal incidents (see figure 7).

Over the six-year period from 2018 to 2023, a total of 9,948 workplace injuries were reported in Kazakhstan, classified as light, moderate, or severe injuries, each of which qualifies for compensation under Kazakhstan’s compulsory accident insurance legislation (see figure 8).

Figure 7. Analysis of Occupational Accident Data for Kazakhstan (2018–2023)



Source: Committee on Statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan (2024)

In accordance with Kazakhstan’s compulsory accident insurance legislation, eligibility for compensation is predicated upon the severity of injuries sustained by workers in work-related incidents. Compensation is disbursed as a percentage of the worker’s pre-injury wage, with variations depending on the classification of the injury as light, moderate, or severe (see figure 9).

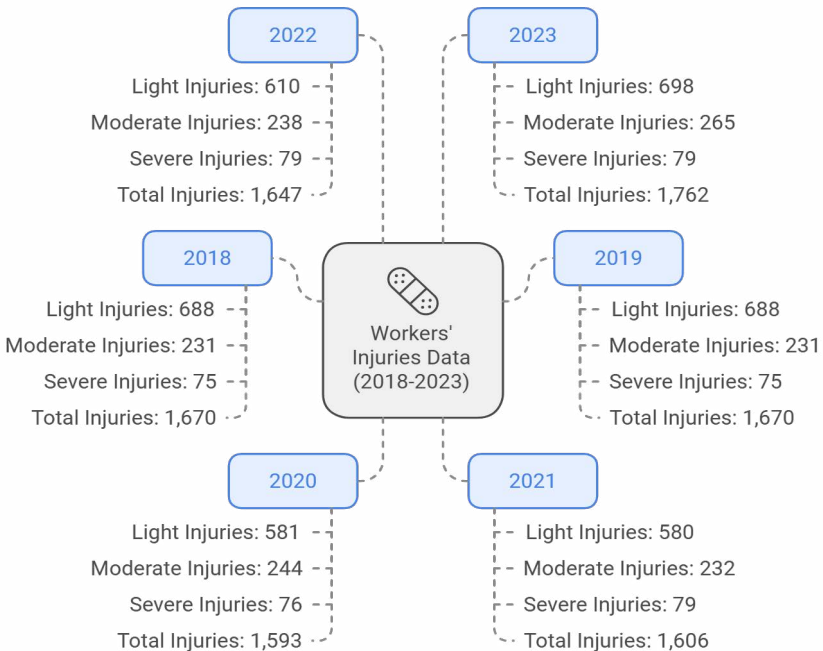
Data standardization and harmonization

Under Article 97 of the Ordinance on Industrial Safety and Health, Japanese employers are legally obligated to report workplace accidents to the Labour Stand-

ards Inspection Office. This report must encompass accidents that occur during work hours and within the workplace, even when a worker is off-duty; however, incidents occurring outside the workplace, such as commuting accidents, are excluded. Compliance with this regulation is enforced through penalties for non-reporting, and a subset of accident data (approximately 25%) is made available as open data, thereby promoting transparency. In certain instances, Labour Standards Inspectors, who possess powers akin to those of police officers, may carry out inspections, impose penalties, or suspend operations to ensure adherence to safety regulations. The harmonized matrix of occupational accidents, depicted in figure 10, presents a five-year comparative analysis of Japan and Kazakhstan, with particular emphasis on incidents within the mining sector.

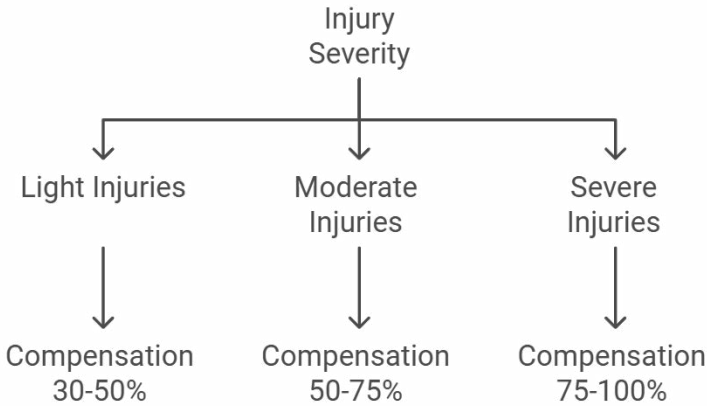
The data is categorized by affected body parts and classified into fatal and non-fatal cases, thereby providing insights into the accident profiles of both countries. The matrix categorizes injuries across six body parts: (1) head, mouth, and neck, (2) hands, shoulders, arms, and fingers, (3) lumbar and thoracic regions, back, and trunk, (4) toe, ankle, foot, knee, and leg, (5) eyes, and (6) multiple parts. This structured classification facilitates a more precise comparison of accident severity and injury types, highlighting significant trends. In Japan, non-fatal incidents are most frequently associated with injuries to the lumbar and thoracic regions (50 cases) and the hands and arms (36 cases), indicating that activities involving heavy machinery handling and manual labour pose considerable risks. Fatalities are rare, with the highest number recorded in the lumbar and thoracic regions (2 cases). Collisions, contacts, and crashes (CCC) emerge as the predominant type of accidents, particularly affecting hands and limbs, which reflects areas where safety interventions could be most impactful.

Figure 8. *Data on Workers' Injuries in Kazakhstan from 2018 to 2023*



Source: Committee on Statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan (2024)

Figure 9. *Severity of the Injuries in Kazakhstan*



Source: The author's elaboration

The data from Japan underscores the importance of implementing enhanced protective measures and ergonomic interventions to mitigate injuries that adversely affect workers' productivity and mobility. Conversely, Kazakhstan demonstrates a markedly higher rate of fatal incidents across various body categories. Fatal injuries are particularly prevalent in the lumbar and thoracic regions, as well as in the lower limbs (toe, ankle, knee, and leg), each with 74 cases. Non-fatal injuries are also widespread, especially in the hands, shoulders, arms, and fingers (612 cases) and the lumbar and thoracic areas (835 cases). Similar to Japan, CCC accidents account for a significant number of both fatal and non-fatal cases, underscoring the high-risk nature associated with the operation of heavy machinery and material handling.

Additionally, Kazakhstan reports a considerable number of fatal falls and slips (17 cases), indicating that inadequate fall protection and unstable work surfaces are major safety concerns. This comparison reveals critical differences and shared challenges in the mining sectors of Japan and Kazakhstan. Japan's higher non-fatal injury rates, particularly those affecting hands and arms, emphasize the need for protective equipment and ergonomic adjustments. In contrast, Kazakhstan's elevated fatality rates highlight the urgent necessity for comprehensive safety enhancements, including stricter enforcement of safety protocols, modernized equipment, and robust worker training programs. By harmonizing occupational injury data, this matrix facilitates a more effective comparison of safety standards, aiding in the identification of shared risk factors and the formulation of targeted safety policies. Ultimately, this analysis supports international collaboration and data sharing as essential strategies to enhance worker safety in the mining industry, encouraging the adoption of best practices and the development of proactive safety measures across borders.

Figure 10. Matrix of Harmonization of Occupational Fatal and Non-fatal Injury Statistics data

Type of accident	Japan						Kazakhstan					
	Body category											
	Head mouth neck	Hands shoulder arms, fingers	Lumbar and thoracic region, back, trunk	Toe, ankle, foot, knee, leg	Eyes	Multiple parts	Head mouth neck	Hands shoulder arms, fingers	Lumbar and thoracic region, back, trunk	Toe, ankle, foot, knee, leg	Eyes	Multiple parts
FS	13	24	30	50	1	7	17	8	12	74	1	3
SMO	4	5	4	4	2	0	205	612	343	311	35	4
EHS&ET	1	0	4	0	1	0	56	173	80	48	29	23
CCC	0	0	2	4	11	0	12	83	15	103	3	8
R&CS	1	0	1	0	0	0	3	56	7	43	6	45
Unclassified	13						1396					
	3						367					

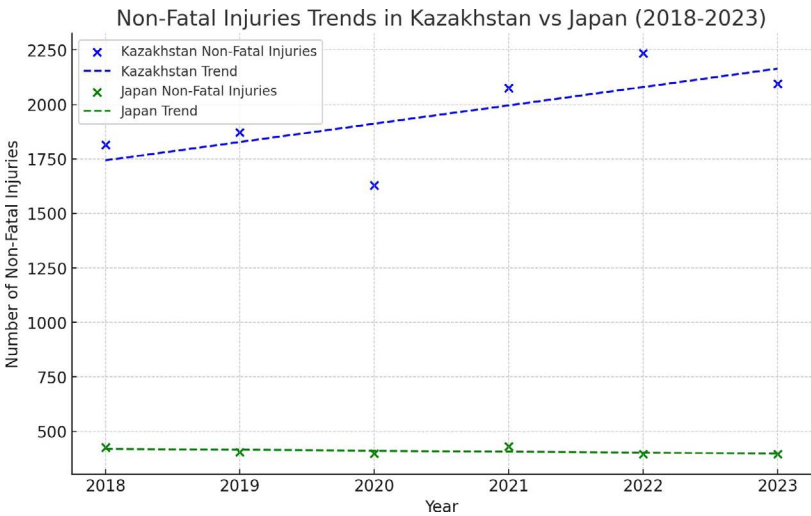
■ Fatal ◻ Non fatal

Source: The author’s elaboration

RESULTS

This study utilized a quantitative methodology to analyse occupational incidents in the mining sectors of Kazakhstan and Japan from 2018 to 2023, highlighting distinct trends in mining safety across the two nations. A comparative analysis reveals a notable increase in both fatal and non-fatal mining incidents in Kazakhstan, particularly within the coal and quarrying sectors, whereas Japan’s mining industry demonstrates a stable or slightly declining trend in incidents over the same period (see Figure 11). In Japan, non-fatal incidents remained consistently low, suggesting the effectiveness of regulatory and safety measures. Conversely, Kazakhstan experienced a marked upward trajectory in non-fatal injuries, indicating potential safety protocol and enforcement deficiencies.

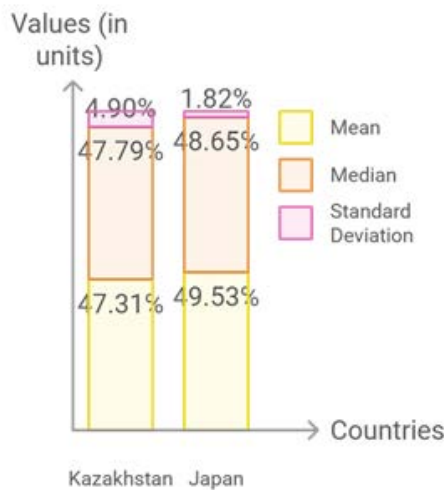
Figure 11. Comparison of Incident Trends



Source: The author’s elaboration

Statistical tests, including Chi-Square and ANOVA, confirm significant year-on-year changes in accident rates in Kazakhstan, with sharp increases observed in 2020 and 2023 ($p < 0.05$). Conversely, Japan's data display no significant fluctuations, underscoring the stability of its safety measures. Regression analysis further supports these observations, indicating that Kazakhstan's non-fatal injury rates increased by an average of 84 cases per year, while Japan exhibited a slight annual decrease of approximately 4.5 cases. The analysis also reveals that Kazakhstan's higher incident rates correlate strongly with workforce size, particularly in large-scale operations where non-fatal injuries are prevalent. Fatal incidents in Kazakhstan were more frequent in specific types of accidents, such as falls and machinery-related incidents, reflecting hazardous conditions that necessitate improved safety measures and equipment upgrades (see Figure 12).

Figure 12. *Descriptive Statistics*



Source: The author's elaboration

These findings suggest that while Japan's regulatory frameworks and proactive safety culture contribute to its stable accident rates, Kazakhstan's mining industry faces significant challenges due to its rapid expansion, larger workforce, and regulatory gaps. Enhanced safety protocols, targeted worker training, and stricter enforcement are essential to address the rising incident rates in Kazakhstan.

DISCUSSION

The comparative analysis of occupational incidents in the mining sectors of Kazakhstan and Japan from 2018 to 2023 reveals significant disparities attributable to variations in technological adoption, regulatory frameworks, socioeconomic factors, and safety cultures. These disparities have profound implications for both countries' occupational safety and health (OSH) outcomes.

Similarities and differences in the underlying causes of injuries

Both Kazakhstan and Japan's mining industries face inherent risks linked to mining activities, such as hazardous working conditions, the operation of heavy

machinery, and environmental hazards. However, the root causes of incidents exhibit significant disparities between the two countries, attributable to variations in safety practices, regulatory enforcement, and workforce characteristics. In Kazakhstan, the elevated rates of occupational diseases and injuries can be traced to inadequate safety protocols, insufficient training, and weak regulatory enforcement (Bakischev, 2024: 109; Chebotarev and Sementsova, 2021: 114). The rapid expansion of the mining sector has outstripped the development of essential safety measures, resulting in increased exposure to dust, toxic substances, and noise (Yerdessov et al., 2022: *jphr.2021.2169*). Furthermore, the underreporting of incidents and a lack of transparency impede effective safety interventions (Bakischev, 2024: 109).

Conversely, Japan has achieved lower incident rates through the implementation of stringent safety regulations, advanced technologies, and a proactive safety culture (Hara et al., 2023: 243; Kadyrzhanova, 2024: 320). The primary causes of incidents in Japan are frequently associated with human factors, such as inattentiveness and challenges arising from an aging workforce, which can lead to non-fatal injuries (Wasaki and Takahashi, 2024: JOSH-2023-0016-GE). The emphasis on continuous improvement and worker involvement contributes to more favorable safety outcomes (Shimizu et al., 2022: 260).

Socioeconomic and demographic factors exert a significant influence on accident rates in both Japan and Kazakhstan. In Japan, the aging workforce contributes positively to safety vigilance, as older workers exhibit a heightened adherence to safety practices, which correlates with reduced accident rates (Isa et al., 2021: 18). Nonetheless, the age-related physical limitations experienced by older workers in Japan may heighten their susceptibility to specific categories of injuries, thereby necessitating the implementation of targeted safety measures (Hayashi et al., 2023: 196). Conversely, in Kazakhstan, the prevalence of a younger and less experienced workforce is correlated with increased accident rates (Isa et al., 2021: 18). The rapid pace of industrial growth, in conjunction with inadequate training, exacerbates the risks encountered by these workers, as many lack the essential skills and knowledge required to navigate hazardous environments safely (Liu et al., 2024: 107375).

Advancements in technology and automation possess the potential to significantly mitigate injuries, particularly in high-risk sectors such as mining. However, the successful integration of these innovations necessitates comprehensive worker training and proactive organizational support to ensure their effective utilization and sustainability. The adoption of technology and automation has significantly affected occupational safety within Japan's mining sector. Advanced safety technologies, including real-time monitoring systems, automated machinery, and hazard detection devices, have substantially improved risk management practices and diminished human exposure to hazardous environments (Kadyrzhanova, 2024: 320). These innovations enable the early identification of potential hazards and enhance emergency response capabilities (Hara et al., 2023: 243). Conversely, the mining industry in Kazakhstan has witnessed a slower pace of advanced technology adoption, primarily attributable to economic constraints and the prioritization of production over safety investments (R. Liu et al., 2021: 103672). The dependence on outdated equipment and insufficient technological infrastructure contributes to elevated accident rates and greater severity of incidents (Yerdessov et al., 2022: *jphr.2021.2169*). Moreover,

the absence of automation and contemporary safety systems hinders the capacity to monitor and mitigate risks effectively, thereby exacerbating occupational hazards (Taubayev et al., 2023: 4).

Theoretical contribution of government policies and private sector initiatives

This comparative investigation significantly contributes to the sociological discourse on labour inequalities, state regulatory frameworks, and the intricate relationship between industrial safety measures and overarching social welfare policies. The mining industry serves as a crucial case study, illustrating the complex interplay between worker protection, economic pressures influencing labour conditions, and governance mechanisms in high-risk sectors. The findings resonate with established sociological theories regarding state responsibility and protection, emphasizing state intervention's vital role in safeguarding workers' well-being and safety in hazardous environments. Drawing upon institutional theory, which posits that organizations conform to the norms and rules established by institutions to achieve legitimacy (Meyer and Rowan, 1977: 341), the stark contrast between Japan and Kazakhstan's regulatory approaches underscores the significant impact of variations in regulatory frameworks on labour conditions and industrial safety standards. In Japan, the government enforces stringent occupational safety and health (OSH) regulations, supported by comprehensive oversight and mandatory compliance for mining operations (Hara et al., 2023: 243). The private sector actively invests in safety training, adopts international safety standards, and fosters a culture of safety consciousness (Okumura et al., 2018: 14). This alignment between government policies and private sector initiatives reflects a cohesive institutional environment that prioritizes worker safety.

Conversely, Kazakhstan's regulatory framework, while comprising legal requirements similar to those of developed nations, is undermined by weak enforcement mechanisms and the underreporting of incidents (Abikenova et al., 2023: 41; Bakishev, 2024: 109). From the perspective of conflict theory, which asserts that societal structures reflect the interests of powerful groups often, at the expense of others (Marx and Engels, 1848: 25), the prioritization of economic gains over worker safety becomes evident. The compulsory accident insurance system emphasizes compensation rather than prevention or rehabilitation, thereby diminishing incentives for proactive safety measures (Kazbekova, 2023: 87). Limited private sector initiatives and inadequate collaboration between government and industry in prioritizing worker safety further exacerbate these challenges (Smatlayev et al., 2023: 42). This situation highlights how disparities in regulatory enforcement and safety culture contribute to increased labour inequalities and occupational risks.

Furthermore, the incorporation of risk society theory by Ulrich Beck (1992: 19), which argues that modern societies are increasingly preoccupied with the future and safety through systematic management of hazards and insecurities, illustrates that Japan's approach demonstrates proactive risk management and preventive measures. Meanwhile, Kazakhstan's reactive stance underscores a lack of effective strategies to mitigate the industrial risks inherent in mining operations.

Sectoral priorities and reporting practices

Japan's sectoral priorities play a pivotal role in shaping the reporting and management of occupational accidents. Secondary industries, such as mining and manufacturing, exhibit higher levels of occupational safety and health (OSH) reporting compared to tertiary sectors, reflecting a stronger emphasis on safety measures (Shimizu et al., 2022: 260). This prioritization enhances data collection and analysis, enabling more precise and targeted interventions.

Meanwhile, the aging workforce in Japan introduces additional complexities, necessitating adjustments to safety protocols to meet the specific needs of older employees (Hayashi et al., 2023: 196). Workplace adaptations and revised practices are crucial for minimizing risks tied to demographic shifts. In contrast, Kazakhstan faces significant challenges with underreporting incidents, particularly in large-scale mining operations (Bakishev, 2024: 109). Sociocultural barriers, such as limited transparency and accountability, hinder accurate documentation of accidents, thereby complicating the development of effective safety strategies (Chebotarev and Sementsova, 2021: 114).

Impact of safety culture

Safety culture plays a pivotal role in both the causation and prevention of workplace accidents. In Japan, a well-established safety culture—characterized by continuous improvement, active employee participation, and strict adherence to established protocols—has significantly contributed to the reduction of incident rates (Tetzlaff et al., 2021: 412). The integration of educational initiatives, engineering controls, and enforcement mechanisms further enhances hazard management practices (Sherin et al., 2023: 85).

Conversely, Kazakhstan's mining industry exhibits an emergent safety culture. Insufficient emphasis on hazard recognition, inadequate risk assessment, and limited worker empowerment in safety-related matters contribute to elevated risk levels (Yerdessov et al., 2022: [jphr.2021.2169](#)). Furthermore, the absence of effective safety attitudes and practices exacerbates the consequences of existing hazards (Taubaev et al., 2023: 3).

Limitations and future research

Despite the valuable insights gained, this study has several limitations that must be considered when interpreting its findings. First, the harmonization of occupational injury data from two countries—each operating under distinct reporting and accounting systems—complicated the direct comparison of indicators. Underreporting or incomplete documentation of occupational injuries, particularly in the context of Kazakhstan, may have affected the statistical analysis. Constraints in accessing detailed information on the nature and circumstances of injuries also impede a more nuanced evaluation of trends.

Second, the qualitative data collected in this study did not include direct interviews with workers. As a result, the everyday safety practices and individual perceptions of risk—especially within high-hazard industries—remain less thoroughly explored. The absence of first-hand worker testimony limits the identification of sociopsychological factors that influence behaviour in high-risk environments.

Third, the theoretical framework, rooted in concepts of regulatory state capacity and comparative political economy, requires further elaboration. Expanding these conceptual boundaries and integrating theories of labour protection and corporate accountability would help link the study's findings to a broader array of institutional factors.

Based on these observed limitations, several avenues for future research emerge:

- further operationalization of such concepts as “regulatory state capacity” and “comparative political economy” is needed to illuminate the institutional underpinnings of occupational safety systems;
- future inquiries should prioritize uncovering the sources of underreporting and adopt robust verification measures. For instance, researchers might supplement official statistics with alternative data sources (worker surveys, labour union reports, etc.) to minimize the risk of systematic errors;
- follow-up studies should incorporate direct interviews with workers and examine documented case studies to offer deeper insights into “safety culture” at the operational level. Qualitative observations can enrich quantitative analyses by revealing underlying social and organizational factors;
- future publications would benefit from integrating descriptive and analytical findings into a coherent structure that more clearly connects statistical data to interpretive discussions, thus enhancing transparency and coherence;
- it is crucial to more explicitly address the role of international guidelines (e.g., ILO-OSH 2001) and national legislation in shaping corporate accountability practices, while aligning the findings with broader global debates on labour rights.

CONCLUSION

This comparative analysis elucidates the significant disparities in occupational safety trends between Kazakhstan and Japan. Kazakhstan is currently confronted with increasing challenges in managing workplace safety within its rapidly expanding mining sector. Elevated accident rates and under-reporting of incidents indicate deficiencies in safety management systems and highlight the urgent need for comprehensive reforms. In contrast, Japan's comparatively stable incident rates reflect the effectiveness of its advanced safety protocols and stringent regulatory oversight; however, the country must address issues associated with an aging work-force to ensure that safety measures evolve in accordance with changing demographics and industry requirements. The findings from this study underscore the pressing necessity for enhanced cross-country collaboration aimed at improving occupational health and safety standards, particularly within high-risk industries such as mining. Establishing more robust regulatory frameworks, enhancing worker training programs, and fostering a strong safety culture is imperative for minimizing risks and safeguarding workers in hazardous occupations. By adopting best practices from countries like Japan, Kazakhstan could achieve substantial reductions in workplace accidents, thereby aligning with international standards for occupational health and safety. Overall, this study emphasizes the critical importance of effective government policies and active private sector engagement in enhancing occupational safety.

Strong regulatory frameworks and a robust safety culture are essential in mitigating risks and protecting workers. The comparative analysis not only illuminates existing gaps but also contributes to a broader sociological understanding of how institutional practices and societal values influence labour conditions and worker safety.

In conclusion, while both Kazakhstan and Japan recognize the importance of worker safety in the mining industry, they face distinct challenges. Kazakhstan grapples with elevated accident rates and underreporting, which underscore deficiencies in safety management systems and the urgent need for reforms. Conversely, Japan, despite lower incident rates, must contend with issues related to an aging workforce and ensure that safety measures are adaptable to evolving industry requirements.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The research team extends its sincere gratitude to Head of statistics data department of Republican Research Institute for Occupational Safety and Health Ms. Shynar Aitimova for her valuable contributions by providing statistical data, as well as to the RRIOSH for their support throughout the study. Special appreciation is also extended to Dr. Ryutaro Matsugaki (MD, PhD) for his insightful and precise comments, which significantly enhanced this manuscript and contributed to the professional growth of the corresponding author as a researcher. This research was made possible through funding provided by the Ministry of Science for the project titled «Transformation of the State Mechanism of Social Guarantees for Persons Employed in Harmful Working Conditions in the Modern Context» (Grant No. BR22182673). Additionally, this article is a component of the PhD dissertation of Kazbekova D.B., titled «Challenges of the Institutional Infrastructure of Compulsory Insurance from Industrial Accidents in Kazakhstan», conducted under the auspices of the Department of Sociology at L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University.

Ethical Commission Approval

This study did not require approval from an ethics committee as it did not involve human participants, animals, or sensitive personal data. All data used in this research were obtained from publicly available sources.

Conflict of Interest Statement

There is no conflict of interest with any institution or person within the scope of this study.

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BOOK REVIEW

BOOK REVIEW
EURASIAN RESEARCH JOURNAL
ERJ, Vol. 7, No. 1, 101-103, Winter 2025

Eurasian
Research
Journal
Winter 2025
Vol. 7, No. 1

<https://doi.org/10.53277/2519-2442-2025.1-06>

IRSTI 11.25.25

ISSN 2519-2442, KAZAKHSTAN

Book Review

**THE EASTERN INTERNATIONAL: ARABS, CENTRAL ASIANS,
AND JEWS IN THE SOVIET UNION'S ANTICOLONIAL EMPIRE**

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Received: 16.12.2024

Accepted: 21.01.2025

Masha Kirasirova. *The Eastern International. Arabs, Central Asians, and Jews in the Soviet Union's Anticolonial Empire.* Oxford University Press, 2024, pp. 416.

The Soviet Union strategically exploited its 'own East' depending on the political and diplomatic needs of the country. As the first communist state, it mobilized to a varied extent Central Asians, Arabs, and Jews to mediate the state's ideological and geopolitical ambitions. The book, through the cases of these mediators, unpacks how the Soviet government employed the concept of 'Easternness' to propagate critiques of capitalism, fascism, and colonialism through propaganda, education, cultural relations, and, subsequently, political and economic assistance in the foreign East. It also illustrates how global geopolitics, intellectual history, and individual experiences shaped the concept of the East as a quasi-imperial creation in the Soviet Union.

Dr. Kirasirova's central argument is that the Soviet Union's involvement with Easterners was not solely a geopolitical strategy but an endeavour to foster global anticolonial solidarity grounded in socialist ideals. It demonstrates how individuals and ideas traversed the socialist and decolonising realms, thereby enhancing our understanding of the USSR not only as an empire-builder but also as a multifaceted actor in the anticolonial movement. It also provides a context and understanding of the practice, manipulation, and performance of the "Eastern international" policy through the examples of the intermediaries involved.

The first chapter of the book commences with the early efforts of the Bolsheviks for a global revolution in the colonised East. It traces the formation of the "Eastern International" as a paradigm for anticolonial and anti-imperialist revolution in the East envisioned in 1918 by Konstantin Troianovskii, an assimilated Jewish Bolshevik and the first head of the Comintern's Near East Section. Similar to other early Cominternians, Troianovskii's career illustrates the life of the 'old Bolsheviks' who participated in the construction of the Soviet foreign propa-

ganda institutions, and their relationship with the ‘new’ Marxist orientalists. His career allows us to understand how the Comintern’s ties to the Arab regions of the Ottoman Empire along the northern Mediterranean coast and to Southeast and Southwest India through a European hub were expanded and the role of the centres of Tashkent, Bukhara, Odessa, and Batumi in these processes.

The second chapter delves into the decade of the 1920s when the efforts of Soviet and Comintern officials were institutionalised under the “laboratory” for training Eastern revolutionaries—the Communist University for the Toilers of the East (KUTV). It explores how Soviet officials established institutions to cultivate local and foreign cadres, fostering connections between the communist intelligentsia and revolutionary movements across the East. The author looks at the activities of KUTV students like Egyptian Hamdi Seliam and Palestinian Najati Sidqi to show how the Soviet Union shaped foreign students’ understanding, ultimately acting as intermediaries to the East.

The third chapter investigates the changing context of the 1930s. There, the author looks into how, by the 1930s, hardened boundaries and intensified securitisation transformed the USSR into a more insular and ethnonationalist state. As anticolonial nationalist movements intensified under British and French mandates, the rift between Jewish and Arab communities in Palestine widened following the violent confrontations of 1929. Notwithstanding these changes, the Communist University of the Toilers of the East (KUTV) persisted as a channel for both international and indigenous concepts of the East. At the same time, these dynamics resulted in the expulsion of numerous senior Jewish officials from both KUTV and the Comintern, especially those associated with Palestine, Egypt, or Syria-Lebanon. This, in turn, facilitated the emergence of new intermediaries to further party-state objectives in the region.

Further, the author examines how World War II shifted Stalin’s focus away from the Eastern Mediterranean, relegating the region to a peripheral theatre compared to Europe, America, and Asia. The chapter concentrates on the intellectuals from Syria and Lebanon who were invited by the All-Union Society for Cultural Ties Abroad, also known by its Russian acronym VOKS. These delegations, as the chapter unpacks, contributed to minimizing the repressive nature of Russocentric anticommopolitanism. The chapter also highlights how their Eurocentric perspective preserved the Soviet Union’s image as a model of alternative modernity despite its internal contradictions.

In chapter five, the author elaborates on Nikita Khrushchev’s reassessment of the Eastern Mediterranean, who maintained Stalin-era frameworks of connecting and distinguishing the domestic and foreign Easts. Khrushchev and the emerging political elite established the trajectory of Soviet internal and international cultural policy, initiating the most significant extension of the ‘Eastern International’, characterized by an increase in connections, linkages, and exchanges with the decolonizing Afro-Asian world. The career of Uzbek politician Nuriddin Mukhitdinov exemplifies how Soviet officials used Central Asians to promote Khrushchev’s “East politics” at home and abroad. It also illustrates how Soviet Central Asian officials attempted to leverage Moscow’s geopolitical priorities to promote their region as both a model and a bridge to the broader Eastern world.

In the 1960s, the Soviet Union's emphasis on presenting itself as an anticolonial entity enabled prominent Central Asian artists to redefine themselves as revolutionary anticolonial icons. Soviet cultural bureaucrats recognised that films could potentially reach a wider audience in the non-Western world than literature, which led to the investment and promotion of Central Asian artists within the Afro-Asian cinematic networks. The chapter on the career of Central Asian Tajik filmmaker Kamil Yarmatov, illustrates how policy on the representation of Soviet culture was reconsidered and how Yarmatov positioned the Soviet Union's anticolonial credentials catering to both internal and international audiences.

Chapter seven reveals the late Soviet period, marking a gradual shift in the narratives of "the Eastern International" that once linked the two Easts. The growth of global capitalism and scepticism towards the Soviet model of development, particularly in relation to the industrialisation of poorer republics and the provision of foreign aid, coincided with the 1970s and 1980s. Therefore, Soviet mediators persisted in bridging the two Easts, yet prioritising economic development and military aid with Middle Eastern states alongside cultural diplomacy. Soviet internationalism of that period was constructed upon Soviet resources, political authority, and intermediaries, significantly supplemented by the contributions of Arab thinkers and states. The 1973 oil revolution, along with the war in Afghanistan transformed the established connections between the domestic and foreign Easts. The chapter also discusses how late Soviet and post-Soviet developments encouraged Soviet Central Asian writers to openly challenge Soviet historical politics in both domestic and foreign Eastern contexts.

The author concludes with an emphasis on the limited attention paid to Soviet 'Eastern' politics and the role of Eastern intermediaries in Soviet diplomacy. The author advocates for reconsidering the Soviet setting to foster postcolonial studies of Soviet and post-Soviet entities. Dr. Kirasirova believes that a comprehensive examination of Soviet interactions with the East enhances the understanding of how circulations of people and ideas across the Soviet Union's various Easts influenced postcolonial studies. The historical narratives of Central Asia and the Arab Left within the Soviet framework, along with the personal and shared experiences of the key figures in the Eastern International, continue to be overlooked.

Dr. Kirasirova's research brings new perspectives on how the Soviet government employed its Muslim-majority Central Asian republics as intermediaries to the Arab world. It also highlights the significant involvement of Soviet Jews, particularly in cultural and educational initiatives. The book facilitates comprehension of how the Soviet government acted and positioned itself as a model for decolonisation and modernisation. It provides a significant contribution to the discourse on post-colonial studies by elucidating the origins of Soviet frameworks, thereby enhancing the comprehension of post-Soviet post-colonial studies.

EXAMINING THE ROLE OF SOFT POWER IN TÜRKİYE AND INDIA'S
RELATIONS WITH AFGHANISTAN

**Eurasian
Research
Journal**
Winter 2025
Vol. 7, No. 1

Eurasian Research Journal

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		N	X	SS	N	X	SS
Article	96	2,042	21.3	7.5	2,646	27.6	15.8
Book review	4	30	7.5	4.4	31	7.8	8.3
Total	100	2,072	20.7	7.9	2,677	26.8	16.1

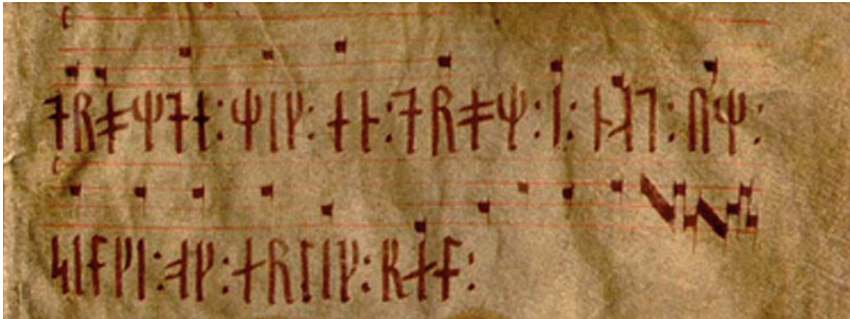
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Develi, Hayati (2002). *Evliya Celebi Seyahatnamesine Gore 17. Yuzyil Osmanli Turkcesinde Ses Benzesmesi ve Uyumlar*. Ankara: TDK Yay.

_____ (2003). *XVIII. Yuzyil Istanbul Hayatina Dair Risale-i Garibe*. İstanbul: Kitabevi.

If **more than one work by the same author of the same date** need to be cited, they should be indicated by (a, b).

Example:

Develi, Hayati (2002a). *Evliya Celebi Seyahatnamesine Gore 17. Yuzyil Osmanli Turkcesinde Ses Benzesmesi ve Uyumlar*. Ankara: TDK Yay.

Develi, Hayati (2002b). *XVIII. Yuzyil Istanbul Hayatina Dair Risale-i Garibe*. İstanbul: Kitabevi

For **encyclopedia entries**, if the author of the encyclopedia entry is known, the author’s surname and name are written first. These are followed by the date of the entry, the title of the entry in quotation marks, the full name of the encyclopedia, its volume number, place of publication, publisher and page numbers:

Example:

Ipekten, Haluk (1991). “Azmi-zâde Mustafa Haleti”. *İslam Ansiklopedisi*. C. 4. İstanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı Yay. 348-349.

For **theses and dissertations**, the following order should be followed: surname and name of the author, date, full title of thesis in italics, thesis type, city where the university is located, and the name of the university:

Example:

Karakaya, Burcu (2012). *Garibi'nin Yusuf u Zuleyha'si: Inceleme-Tenkitli Metin-Dizin*. Master’s Thesis. Kirsehir: Ahi Evran Üniversitesi.

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Example:

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To cite a **study found on the Internet**, the following order should be followed: Author surname, Author name. "Title of message". Internet address. (Date of Access)

Example:

Türkiye Cumhuriyet Merkez Bankası. "Gecinme Endeksi (Ucretliler)" Elektronik Veri Dagitim Sistemi. <http://evds.tcmb.gov.tr/> (Accessed: 04.02.2009).

An article accepted for publication but not yet published can be cited in the following way:

Example:

Atilim, Murat ve Ekin Tokat (2008). "Forecasting Oil Price Movements with Crack Spread Futures". *Energy Economics*. In print (doi:10.1016/j.eneco.2008.07.008).

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