

## A HERMENEUTICAL ANALYSIS OF ONTOLOGICAL SECURITY IN KAZAKH CULTURE

<sup>a</sup>Meruert SHUMATOVA , <sup>a</sup>Aigul BOKAEVA ✉ , <sup>b</sup>Eldar SHUMATOV

<sup>a</sup>*L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Astana, Kazakhstan*

<sup>b</sup>*M. Gabdullina Civil Defense Academy of the Ministry of Emergency Situations of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Kokshetau, Kazakhstan*

✉ [bokayevaigul@gmail.com](mailto:bokayevaigul@gmail.com)

**Abstract.** This article explores the mechanisms of maintaining ontological security in traditional and contemporary Kazakh culture. The novelty of the research lies in shifting the analytical focus from formal legal and state institutions to vernacular symbolic practices. Specifically, the author investigates the binary opposition of purity (tazalyq) and defilement (aram) alongside the dense network of verbal prohibitions (tyiym). By integrating philosophical hermeneutics, interpretivist sociology, and structuralism, the study redefines Kazakh taboos not as archaic superstitions but as a sophisticated, contemporary classificatory system for risk management. The author's primary contribution is the hermeneutic deconstruction of the warning formula "zhaman bolady" ("it will be bad"). A further contribution of this study lies in the explicit epistemological repositioning of key Kazakh categories — tazalyq, aram, zheti ata, and köz tiyu — not as local variants of universal Western concepts, but as autonomous philosophical-ethical constructs grounded in the classical tradition of Kazakh moral thought (Abai Kunanbaev, Shakarim Qudaiberdiuly). Empirical fieldwork, based on thirty in-depth interviews across urban and rural settlements, reveals that the semantic ambiguity of this phrase is precisely its main regulatory strength. It functions as a performative signal that mitigates uncertainty and enforces social conformity without requiring rationalized explanations. Furthermore, the findings demonstrate a striking resilience of these practices in modern megacities, where traditional norms act as therapeutic anchors against the anomie of liquid modernity. The study concludes that this escalating system of social control operates as a highly adaptable shadow infrastructure of security, offering vital practical implications for cultural policy, education, and social work.

**Keywords:** ontological security; taboo; tyiym; zhaman bolady; purity and defilement; risk management; hermeneutics; social philosophy; urbanization; liquid modernity; Kazakh epistemological traditions.

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## ҚАЗАҚ МӘДЕНИЕТІНДЕГІ ОНТОЛОГИЯЛЫҚ ҚАУІПСІЗДІКТІ ГЕРМЕНЕВТИКАЛЫҚ ТАЛДАУ

<sup>a</sup>Меруерт ШУМАТОВА, <sup>a</sup>Айгуль БОКАЕВА, <sup>b</sup>Эльдар ШУМАТОВ

<sup>a</sup>Л.Н. Гумилев атындағы Еуразия ұлттық университеті, Астана, Қазақстан

<sup>b</sup>ҚР ТЖМ М. Ғабдуллин атындағы азаматтық қорғау академиясы, Көкшетау, Қазақстан

## ГЕРМЕНЕВТИЧЕСКИЙ АНАЛИЗ ОНТОЛОГИЧЕСКОЙ БЕЗОПАСНОСТИ В КАЗАХСКОЙ КУЛЬТУРЕ

<sup>a</sup>Меруерт ШУМАТОВА, <sup>a</sup>Айгуль БОКАЕВА, <sup>b</sup>Эльдар Шуматов

<sup>a\*</sup>Евразийский национальный университет имени Л.Н. Гумилева, Астана, Казахстан

<sup>b</sup>Академия гражданской защиты имени М. Габдуллина МЧС РК

**Аңдатпа.** Бұл мақала дәстүрлі және қазіргі қазақ мәдениетіндегі онтологиялық қауіпсіздікті сақтау тетіктерін зерттейді. Зерттеудің жаңашылдығы аналитикалық назарды ресми құқықтық және мемлекеттік институттардан халықтық символдық тәжірибелерге аударуында жатыр. Атап айтқанда, автор тазалық (tazalyq) пен арамның (aram) бинарлық оппозициясын, сондай-ақ ауызша тыйымдардың (tyiym) тығыз желісін зерттейді. Философиялық герменевтика, түсіндірмелі социология және құрылымдық тәсілдерді біріктіре отырып, зерттеу қазақ тыйымдарын архаикалық ырымдар ретінде емес, тәуекелді басқарудың заманауи әрі күрделі жіктеу жүйесі ретінде қайта қарайды. Автордың негізгі үлесі – «жаман болады» ескерту формуласын герменевтикалық деконструкциялау. Бұл зерттеудің тағы бір үлесі – қазақтың негізгі категорияларын – «тазалық», «арам», «жеті ата» және «көз тию» – әмбебап батыстық концепциялардың жергілікті нұсқалары ретінде емес, қазақтың моральдық ойының классикалық дәстүріне негізделген автономды философиялық-этикалық құрылымдар ретінде айқын гносеологиялық репозициясында (Абай Құнанбаев, Шәкәрім Құдайбердіұлы) қарастыру. Қалалық және ауылдық елді мекендерде жүргізілген отыз тереңдетілген сұхбатқа негізделген эмпирикалық дала жұмыстары бұл тіркестің семантикалық бұлыңғырлығы оның негізгі реттеуші күші екенін көрсетеді. Ол белгісіздікті азайтатын және рационалды түсініктемелерді қажет етпей-ақ әлеуметтік біркелікті қамтамасыз ететін перформативті сигнал ретінде жұмыс істейді. Сонымен қатар, нәтижелер бұл тәжірибелердің қазіргі мегаполистерде айтарлықтай өміршеңдігін дәлелдейді, мұнда дәстүрлі нормалар аномияға қарсы терапиялық зәкір қызметін атқарады. Зерттеу әлеуметтік бақылаудың бұл эскалациялық жүйесі қауіпсіздіктің жоғары бейімделгіш көлеңкелі инфрақұрылымы ретінде жұмыс істейді және мәдени

**Аннотация.** Данная статья исследует механизмы поддержания онтологической безопасности в традиционной и современной казахской культуре. Новизна исследования заключается в смещении аналитического фокуса с формальных правовых и государственных институтов на народные символические практики. В частности, автор исследует бинарную оппозицию чистоты (tazalyq) и скверны (aram) наряду с плотной сетью вербальных запретов (tyiym). Интегрируя философскую герменевтику, понимающую социологию и структурализм, исследование переосмысливает казахские табу не как архаичные суеверия, а как сложную современную классификационную систему управления рисками. Главным вкладом автора является герменевтическая деконструкция формулы-предостережения «zhaman bolady» («будет плохо»). Еще один вклад этого исследования заключается в явном эпистемологическом переосмыслении ключевых казахских категорий — «тазалық», «арам», «жеті ата» и «коз тию» — не как локальных вариантов универсальных западных концепций, а как автономных философско-этических конструкций, основанных на классической традиции казахской моральной мысли (Абай Кунанбаев, Шакарим Кудайбердиұлы). Эмпирическая полевая работа, основанная на тридцати глубинных интервью в городских и сельских поселениях, показывает, что семантическая неопределенность фразы «zhaman bolady» как раз и является ее главной регулятивной силой. Она функционирует как перформативный сигнал, который снижает неопределенность и обеспечивает социальную конформность, не требуя рациональных объяснений. Кроме того, результаты демонстрируют поразительную устойчивость этих практик в современных мегаполисах, где традиционные нормы действуют как терапевтические якоря против аномии текущей современности. Исследование

саясат, білім беру мен әлеуметтік жұмыс үшін маңызды қолданбалы мәнге ие деген қорытындыға келеді.

**Түйін сөздер:** онтологиялық қауіпсіздік; табу; тыйым; жаман болады; тазалық пен арам; тәуекелді басқару; герменевтика; әлеуметтік философия; урбанизация; сұйық заманауилық, қазақ эпистемологиялық дәстүрлері.

делает вывод, что эта эскалационная система социального контроля работает как высокоадаптивная теневая инфраструктура безопасности, предлагая важные практические выводы для культурной политики, образования и социальной работы.

**Ключевые слова:** онтологическая безопасность; табу; тыйым; жаман болады; чистота и скверна; управление рисками; герменевтика; социальная философия; урбанизация; текучая современность, казахские эпистемологические традиции.

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## Introduction

The need for security is a basic human constant. Today, however, we are not just talking about physical survival or border protection. It is much harder to maintain what contemporary social theory calls ontological security (Laing, 1990; Giddens, 1991). That quiet, often unarticulated conviction that the world is stable. That daily routines are reliable.

In recent decades, this concept has evolved significantly. Western scholars have convincingly argued that actors might even risk physical danger in order to preserve a predictable sense of Self (Mitzen, 2006; Steele, 2008). In the conditions of late modernity, threats become diffuse — scattered across globalization, technological disruption, and information overload; this condition is often described through the concept of liquid modernity (Bauman, 2000).

To understand how this global anxiety manifests locally, we must look at the specific macro-sociological context of Kazakhstan. It is a transit society. Over the last three decades, it experienced the sudden collapse of Soviet ideological macro-narratives, creating a state of anomie in the Durkheimian sense, followed by a rapid plunge into global capitalism (Durkheim, 1995). Accelerated urbanization has dramatically changed the demographic landscape. Millions of people moved from rural аулы to rapidly expanding megacities. In this condensed, urbanized space, deep nomadic memory clashes directly with postmodern realities. The modern citizen is surrounded by high-tech infrastructure, yet often experiences a profound deficit of existential predictability.

In practice – for instance, during seminars on social philosophy and sociology at our domestic universities – we constantly see how the younger generation attempts to conceptualize these new, invisible risks. When formal state institutions or expert systems fail to provide a sense of stability, people rarely invent new coping mechanisms from scratch. They turn to the familiar.

Traditional societies, to which the Kazakh society historically belongs, manage uncertainty differently. Their primary resource is not legal institutions, but a shared symbolic order. As Mary Douglas demonstrated, what we call «dirt» or defilement is rarely about hygiene. It is primarily «matter out of place» (Douglas, 2002: 44). A signal that classificatory boundaries have been breached.

In Kazakh culture, this moral and spatial order is built around the rigid opposition of purity (tazalyq) and defilement (aram). The main tool for maintaining this balance is a dense network of verbal prohibitions known as tiyim. Admittedly, the ethnographic side of these taboos has been studied quite thoroughly: classic works describe the everyday details in depth, while more recent studies examine tiyim and yrym as elements of the Kazakh cultural code and contemporary ritual-symbolic practice (Shakhanova, 1998; Alimbaeva, 2015a; Alimbaeva, 2015b; Капаева, 2020; Yerzhanov, Temur, 2022). However, these ethnographic accounts mostly treat taboos as artifacts of the past. A sociological and philosophical analysis of the tiyim system, specifically as a contemporary, adaptive mechanism of ontological security, is almost entirely absent.

These taboos function not as archaic relics, but as a vernacular technology for managing risk. They operate as a micro-sociological defense system. When the macro-world is unpredictable, the micro-world – the threshold of

the house, the dinner table, the body – must be kept strictly ordered. This research gap is exactly what the present article aims to fill.

The central focus of our work is the hermeneutic deconstruction of the warning formula *zhaman bolady* («it will be bad»).

Building on this, we propose the following hypothesis: the semantic ambiguity of the formula *zhaman bolady* functions as a powerful performative act of preventive normativity; it ensures ontological security not through specific legal sanctions, but by managing uncertainty, compelling the subject to avoid liminal zones and thereby reproducing social solidarity.

To test this hypothesis, we selected four specific clusters of *tyym*:

Spatial (prohibitions around the threshold and the hearth);

Social (the etiquette of hospitality);

Genealogical (the *zheti ata* imperative);

Reproductive (restrictions for pregnant women).

The selection of these exact cases is not random. They rely on robust ethnographic data and emerge most frequently in contemporary fieldwork. Most importantly, they mark the most vulnerable points of both the traditional and the rapidly urbanizing post-nomadic world – the borders of the home, the purity of lineage, and the protection of new life.

### Theoretical Framework

The problem of ontological security is usually discussed through the vocabulary of late modernity: uncertainty, institutional fragility, the erosion of stable biographies, and the individualization of risk. Bauman's metaphor of liquid modernity is useful here because it shows a historical condition in which social forms lose their solidity and individuals are expected to manage insecurity with fewer stable collective supports (Bauman, 2000). Beck's theory of risk society adds another important dimension: many modern threats are diffuse, indirect, and difficult to locate within a single visible source (Beck, 1992). The broader theoretical vocabulary of security as a field of social regulation is also relevant here (Foucault, 2007).

Yet these concepts cannot simply be transferred to the Kazakh context without adjustment. Kazakhstan's modernization has followed a compressed and uneven trajectory: nomadic memory, Soviet institutional experience, post-Soviet transition, urbanization, and global capitalism coexist within the same social space. In such a context, ontological security is not produced only through formal institutions or expert systems. It is also maintained through inherited symbolic practices that continue to organize everyday life and stabilize socially constructed meanings (Berger, Luckmann, 1966).

For this reason, the article uses the concept of Kazakh epistemological traditions. The purpose is not to assign a contested legal or political status, but to describe a local moral and symbolic vocabulary through which risk, order, cleanliness, lineage, and social responsibility are interpreted. One of the key elements of this vocabulary is *saqtyq*, understood here as vigilance, precautionary awareness, and sensitivity to possible disorder.

In everyday routines, *saqtyq* is expressed through verbal and behavioral prohibitions known as *tyym*. These prohibitions are analyzed not as irrational remnants of the past, but as practical cultural forms through which people classify risk, mark vulnerable boundaries, and maintain a sense of order in situations where institutional explanations may feel insufficient. The internal structure of this system is shaped by the opposition between *tazalyq* (purity/order) and *aram* (defilement/chaos). Following Mary Douglas, defilement may be understood not simply as dirt, but as "matter out of place": a sign that a classificatory boundary has been crossed (Douglas, 2002: 44). In the Kazakh context, this opposition is not limited to physical cleanliness. It concerns the moral condition of the household, the order of the *dastarkhan*, the safety of the pregnant body, the integrity of lineage, and the emotional atmosphere of social relations.

Kazakh moral philosophy provides an additional internal vocabulary for this analysis. Abai's idea of *Tolyq adam* and Shakarim's reflections on conscience (*uzhdan*) make it possible to read *tyym* not only as external prohibitions, but also as practices through which moral self-restraint, responsibility, and social order are cultivated (Kunanbaev, 2020; Qudaiberdiuly, 2008). Recent research on the relationship between nomadic moral philosophy and contemporary ethics in Kazakhstan supports the relevance of this internal ethical vocabulary (Zhakupova et al., 2022). In

this sense, everyday prohibitions form a practical layer of Kazakh moral thought: they translate abstract ethical categories into repeated gestures, avoidances, and forms of care.

The theoretical task of the article is therefore not to oppose Western social theory and Kazakh moral thought, but to put them into a controlled dialogue. Bauman and Beck help describe the late-modern background of uncertainty; Douglas helps explain the classificatory logic of purity and defilement; Abai and Shakarim allow us to understand why self-restraint, conscience, and social responsibility remain central to local interpretations of security. This dialogue frames *tyym* and the warning formula *zhaman bolady* as living mechanisms of ontological security within a specific Kazakh trajectory of late modernity.

## Methodology

This study uses a qualitative research design combining philosophical hermeneutics, interpretive sociology, and structural-functional analysis (Gadamer, 1988; Weber, 1978; Schütz, 1967). Its goal is not to measure the statistical prevalence of customary prohibitions across the whole population, but to understand how these prohibitions are interpreted, justified, reproduced, and sometimes questioned in everyday life.

The empirical core of the project consists of thirty in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted between September 2023 and April 2024 across urban centers (Astana, Karaganda) and rural settlements. Purposive sampling was used to include respondents of different age groups, gender, settlement type, and degree of attachment to customary norms. This strategy was chosen because the study is concerned with variation in meaning rather than representativeness in the statistical sense.

The primary analytical codes were defined through hermeneutic engagement with the material and then refined during coding. Ontological security was operationalized as a subjective sense of continuity and predictability; *tyym* and *zhaman bolady* were coded as units of preventive normativity; liminality designated vulnerable spatial and temporal borders; and *tazalyq/aram* mapped the structural taxonomy of order and defilement. The concept of a “shadow infrastructure” is used in a limited sense: it refers to informal, decentralized forms of social regulation that operate alongside formal institutions and may compensate for deficits in institutional trust.

The interview situation itself required reflexive control. In a culture where age and status strongly shape communication, conversations with older respondents, especially *aqsaqals*, were framed as respectful requests for life experience. With younger urban respondents, the interview format allowed more room for irony, hesitation, and cognitive distance from customary norms. This difference was treated not as noise, but as part of the data: it showed how the same taboo may be reproduced through belief, respect, habit, or family obligation. Reflexive control of the researcher’s position was maintained in line with qualitative methodological recommendations on participant objectivation (Bourdieu, 2003).

### Participants and Sampling

**Table 1**

Summarizes the main sociodemographic characteristics of the interview sample

Characteristic	Category	N (%)
Gender	Female	18 (60%)
	Male	12 (40%)
Age	19–35 years	10 (33%)
	36–55 years	12 (40%)
	56+ years	8 (27%)
Settlement Type	Urban (City)	16 (53%)
	Rural (Auyl)	14 (47%)
Education	Higher Education	19 (63%)

	Secondary / Vocational	11 (37%)
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Note. Sociodemographic characteristics of the sample (N = 30)

Algorithm of hermeneutic analysis and coding reliability

The interviews were transcribed and subjected to manual thematic coding. The unit of analysis was the situational utterance: the formula or prohibition together with its immediate behavioral and emotional context. The analysis followed three steps. First, fragments containing zhaman bolady or a related taboo were isolated and linked to the action being prohibited. Second, the respondent’s emotional modality was identified: fear, respect, irony, filial compliance, or rationalized distancing. Third, the open codes were mapped onto broader theoretical categories, such as spatial liminality, temporal vulnerability, commensal order, genealogical discipline, or ritual remediation.

For example, the statement “I do not take the trash out at night; I do it just so my mother does not get upset” was first coded as filial compliance within a nighttime restriction and then mapped to the meta-category of temporal vulnerability and boundary maintenance. This shows how social order may be reproduced even when the respondent does not fully share the older explanation of the taboo.

To strengthen the consistency of interpretation, an audit trail was maintained during coding. A subset of transcripts was independently reviewed by a second qualitative researcher through peer debriefing. Disagreements were discussed until a negotiated interpretation was reached.

Table 2

Excerpt of the thematic codebook (coding matrix)

Axial Category / Code	Operational Definition	Example Anchor Quote (from transcripts)
<b>Spatial Liminality</b>	Anxiety or avoidance behaviors associated with architectural boundaries (e.g., thresholds) where the ordered «inside» meets the unpredictable «outside.»	«Even in a modern apartment... I never shake hands across the threshold. I make the guest step inside first.»
<b>Temporal Vulnerability</b>	The perception of night or dusk as a phenomenological rupture, a time of suspended social order and heightened ontological risk.	«My mother was furious... She said: ‘You are throwing away the house’s baraka (blessing) into the dark.’»
<b>Diffuse Threat (Zhaman bolady)</b>	An unspecified, non-causal fear of misfortune triggered by breaking a rule, used to manage uncertainty without rationalization.	«I still don’t know exactly why... Why risk checking if it’s true? Better not.»
<b>Performative Compliance</b>	Physical adherence to an avoidance practice aimed at maintaining social harmony, often performed despite internal cognitive skepticism.	«I don’t take the trash out at night, I do it just so my mother doesn’t get upset.»
<b>Hidden Malice (Aram Pighyldy)</b>	The perceived threat of unseen negative intentions (e.g., envy, the evil eye) can disrupt the subject’s ontological security.	«Many people looked at [the new car], maybe with envy. We need to clean the energy.»
<b>Ritual Remediation (Alastau)</b>	The active use of traditional purification practices to restore a sense of predictability and safety, particularly in modern or urban spaces.	«The first thing my father did was bring some adyraspan and smoke the interior... I felt much safer afterward.»

Digital corpus and triangulation

To strengthen the credibility of the interpretation, interview materials were compared with a supplementary corpus of forty-five public digital texts from Kazakhstani social media and discussion forums. This procedure is understood as data-source triangulation rather than as a full mixed-methods design. The digital corpus was not used to verify the interviews statistically. Its function was more limited and more precise: to trace whether the same formulas and categories, such as zhaman bolady, tyiym, alastau, and koz tiyu, circulate beyond the interview situation and appear in public everyday discourse.

Only publicly accessible digital materials were used, and personal identifiers were removed. Texts focused exclusively on formal Islamic jurisprudence were excluded, since the study is concerned with vernacular security

practices rather than theological debate.

Regarding the descriptive figures presented below, the unit of accounting was the individual respondent. “Adherence” was defined functionally: respondents who physically performed the avoidance practice were coded as adherent even when they explained it through irony, habit, or respect for elders rather than genuine fear. This small-scale quantification is used only as a descriptive framing of functional alignment within the isolated sample. It is not treated as a measure of statistical variance or as evidence of national prevalence.

Analysis and Case Studies

The operationalization of saqtyq within contemporary Kazakh society appears not as a residual cluster of marginal superstitions, but as a structured grammar for policing risk and stabilizing the everyday lifeworld. Read through Mary Douglas’s structural lens, these vernacular practices show that dirt or defilement is not merely a hygienic problem. It is a sign that a boundary has been crossed and that the continuity of order has been placed at risk (Douglas, 2002).

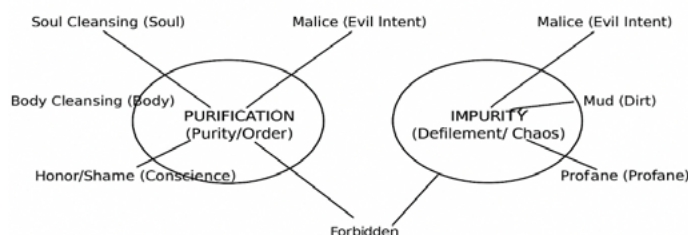
The empirical material shows that these classificatory boundaries remain resilient in both rural and urban settings. Modernization does not simply dissolve the symbolic order; it forces it to adapt. The codes of tazalyq and aram, therefore, provide the main vocabulary through which respondents describe vulnerability, danger, protection, and everyday order.

In the Kazakh case, tazalyq operates simultaneously across bodily, moral, domestic, and social dimensions. Aram includes physical dirt, the profane, and hidden malice or evil intent (aram pighyldy). The overlap between these spheres determines what is classified as forbidden. Several respondents described a house, food, or a person as clean without referring to physical dirt at all; they immediately connected cleanliness with blessing, protection, or moral safety.

The primary verbal mechanism that activates this preventive normativity is the formula zhaman bolady (‘it will be bad’). Twenty-four of the thirty respondents emphasized that the exact nature of the impending misfortune is never clearly named. Rather than indicating a cognitive limitation, this indefiniteness is precisely what gives the formula its social force: it absorbs different possible threats, from illness and quarrels to blocked luck (zholy bolmau), and turns diffuse anxiety into immediate avoidance.

This ambiguity does not invite rational debate about causes and evidence. It marks the situation as risky and calls for action. In this sense, zhaman bolady is not merely an explanatory phrase, but a performative warning that translates saqtyq into a practical rule of everyday conduct.

**Figure 1**  
**Conceptual map of the Tazalyq / Aram opposition**



Note: This diagram was inductively constructed from the axial coding of interview transcripts, mapping respondents’ vernacular vocabulary – such as ‘body’, ‘soul’, ‘mud’, ‘evil intent’ – onto Mary Douglas’s structuralist categories of Purity and Defilement

The following table gives a descriptive overview of practice-based adherence within this small sample. The figures are included to show the internal distribution of the interviewed group, not to claim statistical representativeness.

**Table 3****Self-reported practice-based adherence to key tyiym clusters by settlement type (N = 30)**

Tyiym Cluster (Thematic Focus)	Urban Respondents (N=16)	Rural Respondents (N=14)	Total Adherence (N=30)
Spatial (Threshold, Hearth)	12 of 16	14 of 14	26 of 30
Temporal (Nighttime taboos)	11 of 16	13 of 14	24 of 30
Commensality (Food, Bread)	15 of 16	14 of 14	29 of 30
Genealogical (Zheti ata)	14 of 16	14 of 14	28 of 30
Ritual Remediation (Alastau)	10 of 16	12 of 14	22 of 30

Note. Adherence is defined functionally. Respondents who perform the physical avoidance practice, even if motivated by filial piety, habit, or irony rather than fear, are counted as adherent because the social boundary is materially maintained. The figures describe this sample only and are not used as statistical generalizations

Table 3 should be read as a descriptive framing of functional alignment within this isolated qualitative sample, not as a claim about statistical variance in the wider population. Its value lies in showing where symbolic boundaries are most consistently maintained among the interviewed respondents.

The protective mechanics of saqtyq are most visible in spatial security, where the architectural layout of the home becomes the primary canvas for boundary maintenance. The prohibition against standing or sitting on the threshold (*bosagada turma*), reported by 26 of the 30 informants, illustrates the vulnerability attributed to liminal spaces. Within phenomenological sociology, the home is the ordered center of the lifeworld, while the threshold is the hinge where this predictable interior meets the volatile external world. Recent semiotic research on the yurt door and threshold confirms that this boundary is structurally connected with traditional taboos, rites, and symbolic codes (Shaigozova et al., 2022).

The tyiym restricting exposure on this boundary functions as a micro-security protocol. It guards the symbolic integrity of the household by requiring a clear transition between inside and outside. The practice remains active among urban high-rise residents: the material shift from a felt yurt or rural house to a concrete apartment block does not erase the underlying logic. Respondents still avoid shaking hands or conducting transactions across the threshold, thereby maintaining the domestic sphere against diffuse external risks.

The same regulatory logic governs time. Prohibitions surrounding the transition from day to night, such as cutting nails at night (*tünde tirnaq alma*) or taking out waste after sunset (*küldi түнде tökpe*), mark dusk as a vulnerable interval. Daylight is associated with visible social order, while night suspends this order and opens the household to unseen forces. To discard waste or bodily fragments into the dark is therefore interpreted as throwing away the household's blessing (*baraka*). The persistence of these restrictions among urban professionals, including 11 of 16 urban respondents in this sample, shows that rhythmic, diurnal boundaries still operate as anchors of predictability under late-modern conditions.

Commensality forms another protected field of social solidarity, where everyday food security is structurally sustained through dense symbolic taboos centered on bread (*nan*). The dining space (*dastarkhan*) is therefore not merely a place for eating; it is a symbolic nucleus where trust, respect, hierarchy, and mutual obligation are enacted (Meirmanova, 2007; Musagazhinova, Kabidenova, 2021). Bread must not be stepped on, discarded into profane spaces, or placed upside down; to disrespect it is to threaten the moral order of the household and to call forth images of famine, poverty, or the withdrawal of blessing. However, the taboos extend beyond the food itself to the instruments of commensality: an upturned or hollowly resonant cauldron (*kazan*) symbolically calls for poverty and the death of the household.

The micro-sociological organization of meat distribution (*sybaga*) carries similar weight. The person carving the meat is expected to leave a symbolic portion behind, thereby neutralizing the suspicion of selfish intent (*aram pighyldy*). By disciplining appetite through tyiym, the community protects the *dastarkhan* as a predictable space of mutual trust.

The same defensive grammar extends to genealogical and reproductive security, where biological and social lineage are heavily regulated. The marriage taboo within seven patrilineal generations (*zheti ata*) is often rationalized today through the language of genetics, but its punitive weight remains traditional: violation is associated with shame, curse (*qarghys*), and damage to the lineage (Ryskaliev, 2023; Temirgazina et al., 2023). Around pregnancy and newborns, prohibitions become especially dense. The ban on rocking an empty cradle (*bos besikti terbetpe*), for example, treats the empty cradle as a structural void that should not be animated, since an unoccupied space may invite chaotic forces to fill it.

Such reproductive prohibitions may appear restrictive, and this must not be ignored. Yet the interviews suggest that they also provide a predictable micro-environment for subjects undergoing heightened vulnerability. In this respect, *tyiym* function ambivalently: they discipline bodies and reproduce hierarchy, but they also offer forms of care, anxiety reduction, and practical orientation.

The contemporary vitality of these frameworks is most visible in their migration into urban and digital environments. The ritual of *alastau*, fumigation with *adyraspan* smoke, is no longer confined to rural houses or ritual settings; respondents described using it for newly purchased apartments, office spaces, and cars to neutralize envy or negative intention. Similarly, the idea of the evil eye (*koz tiyu*) has moved into social media practices. Urban parents may restrict the online visibility of newborns or personal success, translating an older taboo against exposing vulnerable persons to strangers into a modern privacy protocol (Yerzhanov, Temur, 2022; Kapaeva, 2020).

Taken together, these cases show that *tyiym* is not a museum remnant. It is a living repertoire of symbolic techniques that manages borders, time, food, lineage, vulnerable bodies, and digital exposure. Through these practices, *saqtiq* becomes embodied: the modern world may remain risky and unstable, but everyday conduct is organized in ways that make it feel ordered enough to inhabit.

## Discussion

The structural and hermeneutic analysis of *tyiym* returns us to the central question of the study: how is security imagined and maintained when formal institutions are not the only source of trust? The material supports the claim that *zhaman bolady* functions as a performative axis of preventive normativity. Its effectiveness lies in its resistance to full rationalization. Because the threat is left unnamed, the formula transforms diffuse anxiety into concrete avoidance practices.

This finding complicates the universalist assumptions of late-modern Western sociology. Giddens and Beck help us understand why modern subjects seek routines, predictability, and ways of managing invisible risks. Yet in the post-nomadic transit context of Kazakhstan, formal expert systems and state institutions do not exhaust the sources of ontological security. The rapid movement from nomadic lifeworlds through Soviet institutional experience to post-Soviet capitalism has produced a terrain in which older symbolic repertoires remain socially useful.

When macro-structural conditions feel unstable, the manageable environment of everyday life becomes the site of compensatory order: the threshold, the hearth, the dinner table, the pregnant body, the cradle, and now the digital profile. The continued observance of spatial and temporal taboos among urban apartment residents should not be dismissed as backwardness or the passive survival of folklore. It is better understood as a reflexive strategy for securing a predictable lifeworld when abstract mechanisms of trust feel distant or insufficient.

Read through Douglas's structural taxonomy, *tazalyq* and *aram* form a local grammar of risk governance. This grammar has adapted to globalization and digitalization rather than disappeared (Douglas, 2002). *Alastau* may now be used to purify mortgage apartments or imported vehicles; *koz tiyu* may be managed through restrictions on online exposure; and *halal* discourse may intersect with older customary prohibitions. In practice, respondents move between different languages of danger: medicine, religion, family authority, and the grandmother's *zhaman bolady* may all be invoked to justify the same precaution.

A critical reading must also acknowledge the disciplinary side of this system. Some prohibitions regulate female bodies, reinforce generational hierarchy, and restrict individual autonomy. A purely celebratory interpretation would therefore be misleading. At the same time, reducing *tyiym* only to patriarchal power would ignore the phenomenological experience of the actors themselves. For many informants, compliance with these rules reduces anxiety and

creates a structured environment during periods of vulnerability.

The applied significance of this interpretation lies in its capacity to reframe social tensions. In cultural policy, customary prohibitions should not be treated only as museum folklore; many still function as active social protocols. In education, their analysis allows students to approach local forms of security through their own cultural vocabulary rather than through imported categories alone. In social work and psychotherapy, attention to *tyim* can help mediate generational conflicts by showing that disputes over rituals often reflect two different systems of maintaining ontological security, not simply a clash between progress and regression.

## Conclusion

This study has examined Kazakh *tyim* not as a static remnant of traditional culture, but as a living set of symbolic practices through which people organize risk, disorder, and everyday vulnerability. The analysis of interviews and public digital texts shows that prohibitions connected with the threshold, nighttime routines, food, pregnancy, kinship, purification, and digital exposure continue to structure conduct in both rural and urban settings.

The warning formula *zhaman bolady* plays a central role in this system. Its force lies not in a clear causal explanation, but in its semantic open-endedness. The phrase does not name the exact danger; it marks a situation as risky and calls for avoidance. This ambiguity helps transform diffuse anxiety into concrete action: do not violate the threshold, do not discard household elements at night, do not disturb the order of the *dastarkhan*, do not expose the newborn too early.

The study also shows that modernization does not erase these practices. In urban contexts, *tyim* is reinterpreted and relocated. *Alastau* may be applied to apartments, cars, and offices; *koz tiyu* may be translated into practices of digital caution; and *zheti ata* may be explained through both customary morality and modern genetic reasoning. These shifts suggest that Kazakh epistemological traditions remain active, although their forms of expression continue to change.

The contribution of the article lies in linking the concepts of *saqtyq*, *tyim*, *zhaman bolady*, *tazalyq*, and *aram* to the broader problem of ontological security. Instead of treating these categories as local variants of Western theoretical terms, the article approaches them as a coherent Kazakh vocabulary for interpreting risk, maintaining order, and negotiating vulnerability under the conditions of late modernity.

The study has clear limitations. The sample is qualitative and does not allow statistical generalization to all regions or social groups of Kazakhstan. The small-scale descriptive figures are used only to characterize functional alignment within the interviewed group. The digital corpus served as a contextual comparison, not as quantitative verification. Further research may test these findings on a larger sample, compare age cohorts and regions, and examine how customary prohibitions circulate in social media, urban chat groups, and other digital communities.

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**Авторлар туралы мәлімет / Сведения об авторах / Information about authors:**

**Meruert Shumatova** - PhD student, L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Satpayev St., 2, 10000, Astana, Kazakhstan; <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7535-4482>

**Меруерт Шуматова** – докторант, Л.Н. Гумилев атындағы Еуразия ұлттық университеті, Сәтпаев көш., 10000, Астана, Қазақстан; <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7535-4482>

**Meruert Shumatova** – докторант, Евразийский национальный университет имени Л.Н. Гумилева, ул. Сатпаева, 2, 10000, Астана, Казахстан; <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7535-4482>

**Aigul Bokayeva** - Candidate of Philosophy, Associate Professor, Eurasian National University named after L.N. Gumilyov, Satpayev St., 2, 10000, Astana, Kazakhstan; <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-0765-0107>

**Айгуль Бокаева** – философия ғылымдарының кандидаты, қауымдастырылған профессор, Л.Н. Гумилев атындағы Еуразия ұлттық университеті, Сәтпаев көш., 10000, Астана, Қазақстан; <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-0765-0107>

**Айгуль Бокаева** – кандидат философских наук, ассоциированный профессор, Евразийский национальный университет имени Л.Н. Гумилева, ул. Сатпаева, 2, 10000, Астана, Казахстан; <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-0765-0107>

**Eldar Shumatov** - Candidate of Philosophy, Head of the Department of Social and Humanitarian Disciplines, Language and Psychological Training of the Academy of Civil Defense named after M. Gabdullin of the Ministry of Emergency Situations of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Kokhetau, Kazakhstan; <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1434-5400>

**Эльдар Шуматов** – философия ғылымдарының кандидаты, ҚР ТЖМ М. Ғабдуллин атындағы азаматтық қорғау академиясы, Көкшетау, Қазақстан; <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1434-5400>

**Эльдар Шуматов** – кандидат философских наук, Академия гражданской защиты имени М. Габдуллина МЧС РК, Кокшетау, Казахстан; <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1434-5400>

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