



Қазақстан Республикасы
Ғылым және жоғары білім министрлігі

Ш.Ш. Уәлиханов атындағы
Тарих және этнология институты

ОТАН ТАРИХЫ

2026. Т. 29 (2)

ISSN 1814-6961
E-ISSN 2788-9718



- ТАРИХ
- ЭТНОЛОГИЯ
- АРХЕОЛОГИЯ

ОТАН ТАРИХЫ

2026. Т.29 (2)



ISSN: 1814-6961 (print)
ISSN: 2788-9718 (online)

Отан тарихы
Отечественная история
History of the Homeland

Үш айда бір рет шығатын ғылыми журнал
2026. Т. 29 (2)



Published in the Kazakhstan
Otan tarikhly
Has been issued as a journal since 1998
ISSN: 1814-6961 (Print)
ISSN: 2788-9718 (Online)
2026. Vol. 29. Is. 2. Pp. 488–501
Journal homepage:
<https://otan.history.iie.kz>



FTAXP / МРНТИ / IRSTI 03.20

https://doi.org/10.51943/2788-9718_2026_29_2_488-501

THE INSTITUTION OF «ZHETI ATA» IN KAZAKH SOCIETY AS A MECHANISM OF SOCIAL REGULATION AND KINSHIP ORGANIZATION

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Abstract. *Introduction.* The article is devoted to the analysis of the institution of “Zheti Ata” in Kazakh society as a mechanism of social regulation and kinship organization. In existing studies, this institution is predominantly considered as a genealogical system, while its normative and institutional functions remain insufficiently explored. *The aim of the study* is to identify the institutional role of “Zheti Ata” as a mechanism of social regulation and organization of kinship relations. Within this aim, the following objectives *are addressed*: defining the structure of the seven generation kinship model; analyzing the function of exogamous norms; identifying mechanisms of social regulation of behavior; and characterizing the role of the institution in maintaining social and kinship stability. *Materials and methods.* The study applies systemic and institutional approaches, as well as elements of kinship anthropology. Methods of theoretical analysis, structural generalization, and interpretation of ethnographic data are used, allowing “Zheti Ata” to be considered as a social institution with regulatory functions. An analysis of ethnographic and historical data shows that adherence to the principle of “Zheti Ata” contributed to the strengthening of social solidarity, maintaining the stability of the kinship organization and the formation of a collective identity. *Results.* It has been established that the institution of “Zheti Ata” performs both genealogical and normative regulatory functions. It ensures the organization of kinship relations through the seven generation system, regulates marital relations through exogamous rules, and forms stable norms of social behavior. The institution functions as a mechanism for maintaining social discipline, intergenerational continuity, and intracommunity stability. *Conclusion.* The institution of “Zheti Ata” represents not only a genealogical system but also a stable mechanism of social regulation and kinship organization in Kazakh society. Its

significance lies in maintaining the structural integrity of kinship relations and ensuring the normative regulation of social relations.

Keywords: Zheti Ata, kinship system, social regulation, exogamy, kinship institution, Kazakh society.

For citation: Yergali S., Kolukisa H., Shaldarbekova A. The Institution of «Zheti Ata» in Kazakh society as a mechanism of social regulation and kinship organization // Otan tarikhy. 2026. Vol. 29. No 2. Pp. 488–501. [in English]. DOI: 10.51943/2788-9718_2026_29_2_488-501

ҚАЗАҚ ҚОҒАМЫНДАҒЫ «ЖЕТИ АТА» ИНСТИТУТЫ ӘЛЕУМЕТТІК РЕТТЕУ ЖӘНЕ ТУЫСТЫҚ ҚАТЫНАСТАРДЫ ҰЙЫМДАСТЫРУ ТЕТІГІ РЕТІНДЕ

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Аңдатпа. *Kırişne.* Мақала қазақ қоғамындағы «Жеті Ата» институтын әлеуметтік реттеу және туыстық қатынастарды ұйымдастыру тетігі ретінде талдауға арналған. Қолданыстағы зерттеулерде бұл институт негізінен генеалогиялық жүйе ретінде қарастырылады, ал оның нормативтік және институционалдық функциялары жеткілікті деңгейде зерделенбеген. *Зерттеудің мақсаты* «Жеті Ата» институтының әлеуметтік реттеу және туыстық қатынастарды ұйымдастыру тетігі ретіндегі институционалдық рөлін айқындау болып табылады. Қойылған мақсат аясында келесі *міндеттер* жүзеге асырылады: жеті ұрпақтық туыстық моделінің құрылымын анықтау; экзогамиялық нормалардың қызметін талдау; әлеуметтік мінез құлықты реттеу механизмдерін айқындау; және институттың әлеуметтік әрі туыстық тұрақтылықты сақтаудағы рөлін сипаттау. *Материалдар мен әдістер.* Зерттеуде жүйелік және институционалдық тәсілдер, сондай ақ туыстық антропологиясының элементтері қолданылады. Теориялық талдау, құрылымдық жалпылау және этнографиялық деректерді интерпретациялау әдістері пайдаланылады, бұл «Жеті Ата» институтын реттеуші функциялары бар әлеуметтік институт ретінде қарастыруға мүмкіндік береді. Этнографиялық және тарихи деректерді талдау «Жеті Ата» қағидатын ұстану әлеуметтік ынтымақтастықты нығайтуға, туыстық ұйымның тұрақтылығын сақтауға және ұжымдық бірегейліктің қалыптасуына ықпал еткенін көрсетеді. *Нәтижелер.* «Жеті Ата» институтының генеалогиялық және нормативтік реттеуші функция атқаратыны анықталды. Ол жеті ұрпақ жүйесі арқылы туыстық қатынастарды ұйысуды қамтамасыз етеді, экзогамиялық ережелер арқылы некелік қатынастарды реттейді және әлеуметтік мінез құлықтың тұрақты нормаларын қалыптастырады. Институт әлеуметтік тәртіпті, ұрпақаралық сабақтастықты және ішкі әлеуметтік тұрақтылықты қамтамасыз ететін тетік ретінде қызмет етеді. *Қорытынды.* «Жеті Ата» институты генеалогиялық жүйе болып табылады және қазақ қоғамындағы әлеуметтік реттеу мен туыстық қатынастарды ұйымдастырудың тұрақты механизмі ретінде қалыптасқан. Оның маңызы туыстық байланыстардың құрылымдық тұтастығын сақтауда және әлеуметтік қатынастарды нормативтік реттеуді қамтамасыз етуде көрінеді.

Түйін сөздер: жеті ата, туыстық жүйе, әлеуметтік реттеу, экзогамия, туыстық институт, қазақ қоғамы.

Дәйексөз үшін: Ергали С.Ә., Колукыса Х., Шалдарбекова А.Б. Қазақ қоғамындағы «Жеті Ата» институты әлеуметтік реттеу және туыстық қатынастарды ұйымдастыру тетігі ретінде // Отан тарихы. 2026. Т. 29. № 2. 488–501-бб. [ағылшын тілінде]. DOI: 10.51943/2788-9718_2026_29_2_488-501

ИНСТИТУТ «ЖЕТИ АТА» В КАЗАХСКОМ ОБЩЕСТВЕ КАК МЕХАНИЗМ СОЦИАЛЬНОЙ РЕГУЛЯЦИИ И РОДСТВЕННОЙ ОРГАНИЗАЦИИ

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Аннотация. *Введение.* Статья посвящена анализу института «жеті ата» в казахском обществе как механизма социальной регуляции и родственной организации. В существующих исследованиях данный институт преимущественно рассматривается как генеалогическая система, тогда как его нормативные и институциональные функции остаются недостаточно раскрытыми. *Цель исследования* заключается в выявлении институциональной роли «жеті ата» как механизма социальной регуляции и организации родственных связей. В рамках поставленной цели решаются следующие задачи: определение структуры семипокленной модели родства; анализ функции экзогамных норм; выявление механизмов социального регулирования поведения; и характеристика роли института в поддержании социальной и родственной устойчивости. *Материалы и методы.* В исследовании применяются системный и институциональный подходы, а также элементы антропологии родства. Используются методы теоретического анализа, структурного обобщения и интерпретации этнографических данных, позволяющие рассматривать «жеті ата» как социальный институт с регулятивными функциями. Анализ этнографических и исторических данных показывает, что соблюдение принципа «Жеті Ата» способствовало укреплению социальной солидарности, поддержанию устойчивости родственной организации и формированию коллективной идентичности. *Результаты.* Установлено, что институт «жеті ата» выполняет генеалогическую и нормативно-регулятивную функцию. Он обеспечивает организацию родственных связей через систему семи поколений, регулирует брачные отношения посредством экзогамных правил и формирует устойчивые нормы социального поведения. Институт выступает как механизм поддержания социальной дисциплины, межпоколенческой преемственности и внутрисоциальной стабильности. *Заключение.* Институт «жеті ата» представляет собой родословную систему, а также устойчивый механизм социальной регуляции и родственной организации в казахском обществе. Его значение заключается в поддержании структурной целостности родственных связей и обеспечении нормативного регулирования социальных отношений.

Ключевые слова: жеті ата, система родства, социальная регуляция, экзогамия, институт родства, казахское общество.

Для цитирования: Ергали С.А., Колукыса Х., Шалдарбекова А.Б. Институт «Жеті Ата» в казахском обществе как механизм социальной регуляции и родственной организации // Отан тарихы. 2026. Т. 29. № 2. С. 488–501. [на англ. яз.]. DOI: 10.51943/2788-9718_2026_29_2_488-501

Introduction. The institution of *Zheti Ata* occupies a special place in the system of traditional social organization of Kazakh society and represents one of the most stable mechanisms for regulating kinship relations, social integration, and the reproduction of national identity. In the historical development of the Kazakh people, kinship functioned not merely as a family category, but as one of the most important principles structuring public life. Through kinship ties were determined the norms of marriage, the order of mutual assistance, the responsibilities of community members, mechanisms of inheritance, forms of social solidarity, and models of interaction between different population groups [Levshin, 1832: 141]. In this study, the *Zheti Ata* system, which is a prohibition of marriage up to the seventh generation along the male line, performed a much wider function than a purely genealogically traced pedigree [Bronevskii, 1830: 11–14]. Historically, social structure of Kazakhs was formed as a peculiar "aggregate of socially functioning institutions". In nomadic and semi-nomadic life the stability of society was not achieved by the center and administrative structures but with help of social institutions "with inner mechanisms of regulation and self organization". Among them, system of kinship which distributed the share of obligations, limited responsibility between individuals, was the source of social discipline. Hence, the *Zheti Ata* institution should be treated as "one of the factors of traditional social order, uniting individual in collective identity and managing interests and continuation of a person through generation".

I have chosen the topic for the following reasons: Firstly, in the modern scholarship *Zheti Ata* is characterized by ethnographers and genealogists as tradition, concerning ancestor knowledge and the prohibition of marriage among consanguine relatives. But this approach is superficial and do not uncover the deep social function of this institution. For many scholars this subject means only the question of influence on people, stability of the social structure, status of the individual and cohesiveness of the community. Secondly, the traditional forms of social organizations is a current tendency for the Kazakh state, and that implies reconsideration of traditions as ancient vestiges of the past and as complicated, rather rational, adaptable system.

The relevance of the chosen research topic is growing with modern development such as Globalization, urbanization, migration processes, and changing social roles and institution of the family [Sadykova, 2015]. The study of the institution of *Zheti Ata* may present the opportunity to learn the way traditional society sustained a relatively stable social structure without extensive formal legal system and administrative apparatus. This research might be useful for re-establishing historical connections, and solving current problem on social coherence and cultural identity.

The relevance of the topic is not limited with the sociological aspects, but extends to the anthropological area as well. Kinship anthropology is greatly widening, now it includes the analysis of kin relations as a cultural symbol, as a structure that creates social bonds and sociality through different norms, beliefs and social practices. The institution of *Zheti Ata*, from this point of view, is a remarkable example of the localized model of kin organization.

For Kazakh people, the *Zheti Ata* system had a multiple function. Firstly, it regulated marriage relations, ensuring exogamy, that is, prohibition of marrying closer relatives from the same lineage, and created concepts on individual's place in social hierarchy as well as knowledge of who you are. Secondly, it helped to maintain a continuity between generations, reproduce collective values, and formed community feeling. On the basis of knowledge on genealogy were performed everyday activities, obligations and conflicts settlement, authority relations between older generation and younger. Thus, *Zheti Ata* may be interpreted both as cultural norm and as mechanism regulating social relationships [Gabitov, 2020: 57].

The purpose of this study is to analyse the institution of *Zheti Ata* of Kazakh society as mechanism of social regulation and kinship relations. In order to realize it I need to: reveal structure of the seven generation model of kinship; examine the function of exogamic norms on social relationships; demonstrate the significance of the institution for ensuring continuity of generation and identity; show how the norms within this institution function on controlling people and maintaining social discipline; demonstrate its value as an element of a self regulating social system.

The object of the research is the institution of traditional kinship system in Kazakh society. The subject of the research is the social, normative and institutional mechanisms of the institution of *Zheti Ata*

functioning. At the center of my attention is the seven generation genealogic scheme and the social functions it executes in the historically formed structure of the Kazakh society.

The scientific novelty of the presented research is that the institution of *Zheti Ata* will not be portrayed as ethnographic peculiarity but as an integrated social institution with its internal structures, norms, and stable functional mechanisms. Compared to a simple enumeration of tribes and marital prohibitions, my approach will focus on the systemic nature of the institution.

Based on the hypothesis, I believe that the institution of *Zheti Ata* was both a form of genealogical knowledge, and a real social mechanism which was effective due to combination of moral influence, collective memory, the obligatory nature of exogamy norms, and everyone's belonging to the system of mutual relations. In other words, the functionality of the *Zheti Ata* is explained not by biological reasons but by the culturally shaped logic of social organization.

The theoretical significance of the study consists of the expansion of understanding of institutions of nomadic societies, not as static and archaic ones, but as rational and dynamically organized systems with specific regulating mechanisms. Previously, the social systems of nomadic people have been generally depicted as anarchical or based on the tribal fragmentation. However, deeper analysis has proved that they were based on complicated and rigid system of norms, regulations and social responsibilities. Institution of *Zheti Ata* is a vivid example confirming this approach.

Practical significance of the work lies in the possible usage of results in different branches of science: social history, culture studies, ethnology, anthropology, courses of study devoted to traditional culture of Kazakhstan. Institution of *Zheti Ata* as mechanism of social regulation might also suggest a new vision of traditional values in modern society and application of historical experience for strengthening of generational links and traditional family culture.

The anticipated results of the study are: firstly, institutional interpretation of *Zheti Ata* as informal governing institution; secondly, demonstration of seven generation model as a mechanism for marriage regulation and social discipline; thirdly, defining role of the institution for cultural memory and collective identity preservation; fourthly, affirmation that the system of kinship of traditional Kazakh society was highly systematized and functionally efficient.

Materials and Methods. Analysis of the institution of *Zheti Ata* in Kazakh society as an instrument of social regulation and organization of social connections requires an interdisciplinary approach to the research of the phenomenon, as it is a complex of historical, ethnological, social-anthropological, sociological, juridical, and cultural research subjects. It should be noted that *Zheti Ata* institution cannot be interpreted as mere genealogical traditions or narrow rules of marital and familial relations, since it is a complex system that incorporates a mechanism of social identification, social regulation of conduct, maintenance of interstate and intrastate relations, reproduction of collective memory, and stability of normative order. Thus, the source and methodological base of the research has been compiled so that an investigation into both historical and functional characteristics of *Zheti Ata* institution can be carried out systematically and consistently.

A wide range of written and academic sources is taken as the empirical and theoretical base for the study, and they can be conventionally subdivided into several major types: prerevolutionary descriptive data, works of Soviet and post Soviet epoch, materials written in Kazakh language and English-language works concerning kinship, institutions and systems. Such a subdivision of sources helped to trace the evolution of ideas and concepts related to kinship institution in a scientific discourse and how *Zheti Ata* was treated throughout this progression of knowledge:

First group of sources consists of prerevolutionary materials and works of Russian scientists of 18-19th centuries, that cover descriptive data about social structure of Kazakh nation, structure of zhuzes, classification of tribes and sub-tribes, marriage customs, traditions of mutual obligation and etc., and principles of steppe society organization. As far as kinship system is concerned the research relies on the works of Maevskii, Konshin, Kraft, Bukeikhanov, Haruzin, and expeditions into Steppe regions at the early 20 th century. These sources describe the list of clans, genealogy, tribal structure, land utilization system, and mechanisms of inner social control [Kraft, 1898]. More important parts were records of genealogical knowledge, system of clan identification, territorial system of nomadic tribes, customs and norms of interaction between separate groups [Bukeikhanov, 1905]. These works were written in the period when Kazakh society was studied under imperial paradigm, where kinship organization was viewed as a primitive form [Konshin, 1900]. However, these works are valuable for reconstructing basic principles of a social relation system, including social control exercised by means of the *Zheti Ata* institution [Maevskii, 1901].

Second group represents works of Soviet scientists dealing with ethnographical and historical data related to the economy of Kazakh tribes, family and kinship relations, ethnic history and culture of Kazakh nation. Among those scholars we should mention Alimbai, Mukanov and Argyubaev, that investigated connections between organization of social relations, family, economy and social life of Kazakh nomads [Alimbai, Mukanov, Argyubaev, 1998: 41-44]. Despite all ideological restrictions peculiar for Soviet scientific paradigm, these works offer valuable empirical data on actual practices, tradition of mutual assistance, customary law, social hierarchy based on age and position and mechanisms of group obligation. These data enable to trace and to analyze the functional significance of *Zheti Ata* institution within the social system.

Specific attention is paid to contemporary research published in Kazakh language. Such works as researches of Kenzheakhmetuly, Kopeev, Seidimbek, Karimuly, Abdreshuly examine concepts of shezhire, oral tradition, moral norms of conduct, cultural-symbolic representation of family, system of blood relation and social functions related to descent. This group of sources is very significant since it views *Zheti Ata* institution not only from descriptive aspect but as a cultural mechanism of order formation linked with traditions of honor, obligation, respect, unity. According to Kazakh authors the seven generation marriage system in *Zheti Ata* has to be viewed as part of a broader system of social relations and through genealogical knowledge boundaries of acceptable behaviour, expected behaviour as well as social control mechanisms are identified [Kenzheakhmetuly, 2010: 117]. Karimuly, Abdreshuly study how genealogical knowledge is involved into social relations of honor and dignity, respect of elders and mutual support and obligation within family structure [Karimuly, Abdreshuly, 2025]. This literature considers the *Zheti Ata* institution as a mechanism of keeping the ethnic identity and collective memory [Kopeev, 1993: 98–101].

The third group is related to research of Kazakh legal culture and normative system. Gabitov's works for instance show the importance of informal mechanisms of regulation (habit, fame, moral sanction, mutual responsibility) for the steppe society [Gabitov, 2020]. The *Zheti Ata* institution is not separated from normative system but it exists within the normative framework of steppe society including customary law, *adat*, reconciliation and rule of elders.

Fourth category of sources is formed by English-language academic works on kinship, social theory and institutional analysis. Initial concepts of kinship as social structure are developed by Morgan, Tylor, Malinowski, Radcliffe Brown, Lvi Strauss, Fox, Needham, Scheffler in works that analyze system of kinship relations: descent groups, exogamy, marriage exchange, segmented systems, functions of kinship groups etc. [Giddens, 1984]. The concepts from these studies were adapted for analysis of Kazakh system of *Zheti Ata* [Goody, 1990]. Modern researchers have deepened the understanding of kinship system by including concepts of social construction of reality [Berger, Luckmann, 1966] into study of kinship as an institutionally reproduced mechanism of order formation. Giddens discusses role of habitus and structuring practice that is reproduced through everyday life interactions. Sahlins and Carsten have made a critical redefinition of biological interpretation of kinship towards symbolic interpretation, defining it as cultural system based on sharing life, having mutual obligations etc. [Sahlins, 1976]. This definition appears to be quite important while dealing with *Zheti Ata*, since the seven generation relationship system could be defined as institutionalized kin relation not a biological system. In addition, work on social systems by Bertalanffy and Parsons and others provided an analytical framework in which the society is regarded as a system composed of components which maintain balance through adaptation and integration, and the institution of *Zheti Ata* is a subsystem that is aimed at the regulation of marriage relations, integration of kins and transfer of cultural traits. [Von Bertalanffy, 1968].

Methodology of research. Interdisciplinary approach. The research cannot limit itself only to historical study, or only to an ethnographical one; a systemic investigation approach can reveal all aspects of this institution. Thus, the methodology combines the methods of historical-comparative analysis, of social-cultural interpretation, of structural-functionalism and of system analysis. A historical-comparative analysis of different approaches to *Zheti Ata* study made it possible to define the characteristic evolution of study on this institution starting from archaic approaches used by Russian scientists in imperial times and to modern ideas viewing *Zheti Ata* as a logically designed system [Tylor, 1871]. Moreover, it allowed to separate the parts of the institution that are static and those that are dynamic, and trace the continuity in their manifestation over centuries.

The systems approach enabled the analysis of *Zheti Ata* as a holistic mechanism composed of interconnected elements: genealogical memory, exogamy norms, moral sanctions, social status systems, collective responsibility, and intergenerational continuity [Karataev, 2025]. The analysis focused not on

isolated customs but on the interaction between elements within a stable structural framework. The institutional approach was applied to interpret *Zheti Ata* as a system of rules regulating social behavior, including sanctions for violations of marriage restrictions, symbolic capital of descent, elder authority, and mechanisms of reproduction through education and collective memory.

General scientific methods of analysis, synthesis, classification, interpretation, and conceptual modeling were also employed. Analysis allowed for the decomposition of the institution into its components, synthesis enabled the reconstruction of an integrated model of social regulation, and conceptual modeling was used to construct a functional representation of *Zheti Ata* as a social mechanism [Zhugenbaeva, Konqabaeva, Burkhanov, Baizhumanova, 2025]. A key methodological principle of the study is a critical stance toward reductionist interpretations. The *Zheti Ata* institution is not reduced to biological protection against consanguineous marriage, nor to a simple genealogical record system. It is instead interpreted as a complex form of social organization in which biological, cultural, normative, and political dimensions are structurally interconnected.

Discussion. Based on the results of the conducted research, it can be concluded that the "*Zheti Ata*" institution in Kazakh society is neither local customs nor only a form of kinship relations, but a complicated socio-cultural form in which mechanisms of normative regulation, continuity of generations, marital strategy, group identity, and reproduction of cultural memory are interconnected [Sarkenova, Abenova, 2026: 219–234]. From time immemorial this social institution has been interpreted as part of the ancient genealogy, or in terms of interdiction, as the prohibition of marriage between close relatives, with a view to preventing blood relationship. Such understanding has explained only the "outer appearance" of this complex phenomenon. Further study shows that "*Zheti Ata*" existed as a stable social institution in structuring both the inner ties of Kazakh society and its coherence during the long course of history [Turgunbaev, 2020].

One of the most significant outcomes of the study is that the kinship system of seven generations played the role of structuring social proximity and distance. In the traditional world, knowledge of the origin of a person was necessary in order to know the degree of proximity of social distance, the nature of their mutual duties, their suitability for marriage, the scope of their moral responsibility, and the measure of their symbolic kin [Shakirbaeva, 2024]. Thus, knowledge of the "*Zheti Ata*" was a form of social navigation, enabling individuals to navigate in the multitude of kin ties, relying only on their own knowledge without external administrative help. Such a social structure has been functioning effectively in a society based on custom law, authority of the elders, and collective memory.

In this respect, pre-revolutionary sources are of great value, being direct evidence of the practice of kinship relations in a concrete social reality. Levshin already pointed out that origins, belonging to a certain clan, and an understanding of the divisions in the society was crucial for the social standing of individuals [Levshin, 1832: 55]. Hence, it can be argued that the social significance of "*Zheti Ata*" is by no means limited only to the realm of symbolic memory. It has always been practical. Materials published by A. Bukeikhanov are evidence of the significance of family relations in politics and power distribution [Bukeikhanov, 1905].

Contemporary Kazakhstani researches have further expanded the topic through analysis of "*Zheti Ata*". Today, researchers like Z. Artykbaev suggest viewing this as a great patronymic system that encompasses a number of clan lineages within a single social space [Ergali, Artykbaev, 2025: 225–230]. This kind of understanding is vital because it shifts the focus from descriptive ethnographic data to institutional sociology and from the naming of clans to a fundamental principle of social organization based on origin.

An important development has been the involvement of Kazakh scholarship into international scholarly publications, specifically into Turkish journals. The joint publication of A. Yegizbaeva, G. Kozgambayeva and A. Urazbayeva in *Milli Folklor* on "*Yedi Ata*" in the Kazakh culture, as a type of seven-generation interdiction, can be singled out [Kozgambayeva, Yegizbaeva, Urazbayeva, 2021: 45–57]. This is another example of a comparative approach and integration of a Kazakh case study into a broad Turkic research on kinship and rules of close relative marriages, the ultimate goal being to draw a greater number of Turkish readers into the research.

Significant has been the fact that researchers in Kazakhstan have taken initiative in the study of "*Zheti Ata*" in Turkey, instead of being merely objects of observation. Such tendency illustrates the elevation of the position of national academia from merely documenting ethnographic facts to developing intellectual concepts [Shadkam, 2021: 113–122]. It is important in contemporary identity studies, when social communities are able to create their own explanatory schemes of their institutions.

Yet, Turkish scholarship on this theme has been very late and, rather, limited. Hence, the research of Zeyne Smail on the family and marriage relations in Kazakh society dedicates much space to the description of marriage traditions but refers to "*Zheti Ata*" simply as to tradition, without deep analysis of the institution from a normative point of view [Zeyne, 2002]. A similar case can be noticed in the research on administrative structures of Kazakh Turk by A. Erdoan [Erdoan, 2019], where kinship relations form an accompanying factor to the main research subject.

Such development could be explained by the fact that Turkish scholarship for a long time focused mainly on Ottoman history and culture. Kazakh studies have been the subject of researches on a more systemic level only in recent decades due to closer collaboration in the framework of post-Soviet Turkic cooperation and inclusion of national research into international discourse. Before this the approach towards Kazakh materials was introductory and descriptive. The studies on institutional aspects are rather recent.

The analysis has also revealed that "*Zheti Ata*" is not simply a matter of biological imperatives; reduction of this institution to the necessity of preventing incest reflects only one aspect. In fact, "*Zheti Ata*" served to create an extended network of tribal marriage alliances [Alimbay, 2021: 8–11]. Being forced to marry outside the kin, people became closer in non-kin ties (of friends, neighbors and comrades), broadening the scope of interaction and mutual aid. Hence, a prohibitory norm plays an integrational role and exactly this fact is important for comparative studies in anthropology.

This is one of the significant features of the Kazakh system compared to other exogamic societies where the rule is a separate one of matrimonial exchange, since in the Kazakh system the prohibition of marriage with close relatives is inextricably linked with the norms of ancestor veneration, moral education, social positioning of the individual and collective identity. The knowledge of genealogies, one's status within them, expected behavior – all these are integrated aspects of the social system.

Moreover, "*Zheti Ata*" played a crucial role in vertically and horizontally integrating the society. The former aspect is vertical integration between the generations of the ancestors and descendants (continuity), the latter is horizontal integration through inter-clan marriage alliances, thus weaving a dense network of connections between the groups within a singular framework [Serubayeva, Kalenova, 2023].

The symbolic importance of the number seven is another major aspect of the "*Zheti Ata*". This number symbolizes fullness, entirety and sacred boundaries. Hence, "*Zheti Ata*" as a limit was perceived not as an arbitrary number but as socially meaningful, making the norm institutionally more stable [Khasenov, 2016].

Thus, the institution of "*Zheti Ata*" should be understood as one of the most developed historical mechanisms of social organization in nomadic society, combining legal, cultural, symbolic, and integrative functions. Its study is essential not only for reconstructing the historical past but also for understanding how traditional societies produced stable social order without complex bureaucratic systems. This is why the topic remains highly relevant both in Kazakhstan and in international Turkological scholarship.

Results. The conducted study demonstrates that the institution of "*Zheti Ata*" represents one of the most developed forms of traditional social organization in Kazakh society, combining a genealogical structure, a normative regulatory mechanism, a system of intergenerational continuity, and an instrument for maintaining ethno-social integrity. The obtained results indicate that this institution cannot be reduced to a simple genealogical counting system or interpreted solely as a marriage prohibition. Its historical function was considerably broader, encompassing the organization of social hierarchy, regulation of behavior, distribution of statuses, reproduction of cultural memory, and maintenance of internal community stability [Alimbay, 2021: 17–21].

The analysis shows that the "*Zheti Ata*" system was based on a multi-level hierarchical model in which each structural level constituted a component of a larger social formation. In traditional Kazakh society, this model included sequential units: individual, family, kinship line, seven-generation union, clan, and tribe. Such an arrangement demonstrates a structural logic in which lower-level elements do not exist in isolation but are embedded within a broader system of collective belonging. This implies that an individual's position was defined not only by personal characteristics but also by their place within the kinship architecture of society. A particularly important finding is that the seven-generation structure functioned as an initial social platform for the formation of larger associations. Clan and tribal formations emerged not arbitrarily, but on the basis of pre-existing lineage lines preserved in collective memory and recognized by social consciousness. Consequently, the institution of "*Zheti Ata*" served as a primary framework of ethnic organization, ensuring the connection between local family environments and the broader space of ethnic identity [Sadvokassova, Tursynbay, 2024].

The study further demonstrates that genealogical consciousness within this system performed a memorial function. Knowledge of ancestors operated as a mechanism of social responsibility. Each member of the community perceived themselves as a continuation of a specific lineage, which generated an obligation to preserve family honor, adhere to behavioral norms, and maintain the reputation of the kin group. As a result, social control was exercised not only externally but also through internal moral self regulation. It was established that the number seven in the context of the “Zheti Ata” institution carried not only a quantitative but also a symbolic meaning. In Kazakh cultural tradition, it is associated with notions of completeness, wholeness, and integrity. Therefore, seven generations were perceived as a sufficient cycle of historical memory and genealogical distance. This endowed the institution with additional cultural legitimacy and transformed a numerical limitation into a socially recognized norm.

One of the most significant findings of the study is the identification of internal social differentiation within the seven generation community. This structure functioned as an organized space of roles and responsibilities. The central position was occupied by the group of elders, who possessed moral authority and the right to make decisions regarding marriage, conflict resolution, preservation of traditions, and maintenance of internal order. Their authority was not based on formal coercive structures but derived from age, experience, and social recognition. The middle generation of men performed practical functions related to the implementation of collective decisions, coordination of economic activities, and protection of group interests. Women ensured the everyday reproduction of kinship relations, maintenance of household order, moral and ethical atmosphere, and transmission of behavioral norms within the family. The youth represented both the object and subject of socialization, as they served as the medium through which ancestral memory, respect for elders, and acceptable behavioral patterns were transmitted [Imanqul, Smagambet, 2024].

A particularly important aspect of the results concerns the analysis of exogamy as a central regulatory mechanism. It was established that the prohibition of marriage within seven generations had a multifunctional character. It certainly restricted consanguineous unions, but its primary social significance lay in the formation of normative boundaries between categories of “insiders” and “outsiders.” Through this boundary, possibilities of marriage, scope of mutual obligations, and the nature of intergroup relations were defined. It was revealed that exogamy contributed to the expansion of social ties beyond one’s own kin group. The necessity of marrying outside the immediate lineage created stable channels of inter clan cooperation, exchange, and mutual support. As a result, what appears as a restrictive norm in fact performed an integrative function, strengthening unity within a broader ethno social space through marital alliances.

The functional analysis of the institution allowed for the identification of several key directions of its operation: the marital regulatory function ensured the structuring of permissible unions and the maintenance of internal order; the function of kinship consciousness facilitated the assimilation of social roles and behavioral norms; the function of collective memory preservation ensured cultural continuity; the economic cooperative function manifested in mutual assistance, joint labor, and intra kin support; the protective function was expressed in the care of vulnerable members of society, including orphans, widows, and economically disadvantaged families; the integrative function connected separate kin groups through a network of marital and symbolic relations; and the ethno structural function ensured the formation of larger associations up to tribal and supra ethnic levels.

To verify the systemic nature of the institution, a functional approach based on the AGIL model was applied. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Correspondence of AGIL model functions to the institutional structure of “Zheti Ata”

Component	Function content	Manifestation in the “Zheti Ata” system
A	Adaptation	Adaptation to the external environment
G	Goal attainment	Definition and realization of collective goals
I	Integration	Coordination of interaction among system members
L	Latency (pattern maintenance)	Transmission of values and behavioral models

The analysis demonstrates that the institution of “Zheti Ata” possessed the functional completeness of a social system. The adaptation function was expressed in the community’s capacity to adjust to the conditions of a nomadic environment. Through marital alliances, channels of cooperation, access to

resources, and zones of mutual support were expanded. This increased group resilience under conditions of ecological uncertainty.

The goal attainment function was reflected in orientation toward collective values. The preservation of clan honor, unity, and continuity became a shared objective of all community members. Individual actions were assessed in terms of their conformity with the interests of the kin group.

The integration function was realized through behavioral norms, status roles, and the mediating role of elders. Due to a clearly defined distribution of responsibilities, the likelihood of conflict was reduced and internal cohesion was maintained.

The latency or pattern maintenance function ensured the transmission of norms across generations. Genealogical knowledge, etiquette, forms of respect, and moral representations were reproduced as obligatory components of culture.

An additional outcome of the study is the finding that the “Zheti Ata” institution combined vertical and horizontal forms of social integration. Vertical integration was ensured through intergenerational continuity and recognition of ancestral authority. Horizontal integration emerged through marital alliances between different groups. At the intersection of these two dimensions, a stable ethno social unity was formed. Notably, this system was capable of functioning without an extensive state apparatus. Many regulatory matters were resolved within the community itself through authority, custom, and collective memory. This confirms the high degree of self regulation in traditional Kazakh society.

The study also reveals that the institution of “Zheti Ata” retains relevance in the contemporary era. Although its practical forms have changed, it continues to perform a symbolic function in cultural identity. Knowledge of ancestry, respect for forebears, and the notion of kin responsibility remain significant elements of social consciousness.

The overall results of the research lead to the conclusion that the “Zheti Ata” system constituted a fundamental mechanism of social organization in Kazakh society. It ensured not only the recording of lineage, but also the regulation of marriage, distribution of social roles, preservation of collective memory, integration of diverse groups, and reproduction of cultural values. In this sense, the institution functioned as a comprehensive social system integrating structural, normative, cultural, and functional dimensions of social life.

Conclusion. The conducted study leads to the conclusion that the institution of “Zheti Ata” in Kazakh society represents a significantly more complex and substantive phenomenon than the traditionally understood system of genealogical counting. Its essence lies in the recording of a person’s paternal lineage up to the seventh generation and in the formation of a stable mechanism of social regulation through which order, normative discipline, marital restrictions, collective responsibility, and the reproduction of social relations were ensured. In traditional Kazakh society, this institution functioned as one of the foundational forms of social organization, linking the family level, kinship structure, and broader ethno social space. For this reason, “Zheti Ata” should be regarded as a historically formed social institution that performed a system forming role within the structure of public life.

The study demonstrates that the central content of the institution was the regulation of kinship and marital relations through the principle of seven generation exogamy. The prohibition of marriage within seven generations had not only a biological but primarily a social significance. It defined the boundaries of permissible kinship, prevented excessive closure of kin groups, expanded the network of inter clan alliances, and created stable channels of interaction between different segments of society. As a result, marital relations became an important instrument of social integration. At the same time, compliance with these norms was maintained not through formal legal mechanisms, but through the authority of elders, public opinion, and moral categories such as honor, shame, and responsibility toward ancestors. This reflects the high significance of internal normative culture in traditional Kazakh society.

Of particular importance is the connection identified in the study between the “Zheti Ata” institution and the preservation of collective memory and intergenerational continuity. The obligation to know one’s ancestors up to the seventh generation fostered a sense of belonging to a specific lineage, strengthened respect for kinship, reinforced historical consciousness, and cultivated responsibility toward future generations. Genealogical knowledge performed both an educational and worldview forming function, transmitted through oral tradition, family upbringing, and social practice. As a result, genealogical memory became not only a means of identification but also a cultural mechanism for the reproduction of values, behavioral norms, and perceptions of social hierarchy. Through the “Zheti Ata” institution, society maintained its historical continuity and cultural resilience.

The scientific analysis shows that the “Zheti Ata” system possessed the characteristics of an integrated social mechanism comprising structural, functional, and symbolic levels. At the structural level, it united the individual, family, kinship line, clan, and tribe into a single hierarchical model. At the functional level, it ensured the regulation of marriage, economic cooperation, protection of vulnerable members of society, mediation in conflicts, and internal coordination of social roles. At the symbolic level, the institution reinforced notions of kin honor, generational continuity, and the value of lineage. This allows us to conclude that “Zheti Ata” was not an archaic remnant of the past, but a rationally formed system of social self regulation, particularly effective in nomadic and semi nomadic environments where formal administrative structures were limited.

In contemporary conditions, the study of the “Zheti Ata” institution retains high academic and social relevance. Processes of globalization, urbanization, and transformation of family relations have intensified interest in traditional models of social stability, cultural identity, and intergenerational solidarity. Engagement with this topic allows for a deeper understanding of the internal logic of Kazakh social organization, the mechanisms of ethno cultural continuity, and the functioning of informal institutions. Therefore, the “Zheti Ata” institution should be regarded as one of the key historical and cultural foundations of Kazakh society, in which kinship organization, moral regulation, historical memory, and social integration are organically combined. Its further study opens broad perspectives for research in social anthropology, history, sociology of the family, ethnology, and comparative analysis of traditional institutions in Eurasia.

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