

# Q-pop as a Phenomenon to Enhance New Nationalism in Post-Soviet Kazakhstan

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Q-pop refers to popular music that was developed by applying or combining western music composition techniques on the basis of the musical elements in Kazakhstan. Even though Western and South Korean pop music played an important role in the creation and development of Q-pop, reviews or research about the topic itself as well as how Q-pop changes Kazakh society have not been conducted comprehensively. This study aims to compensate the research gap by investigating the new popular culture phenomenon that is termed as Q-Pop with 'Q' standing for Kazakhstan, and 'Pop' meaning popular music. The issue of the new ideology of 'Q', the prefix of Q-pop, will be critically examined by the recognition of new nationalism in Kazakhstan. This study also discusses how the way of listening has changed in relation to the form and content of popular music in Kazakhstan. Based on this analysis, the study intends to examine Q-pop's challenges in the present and its potential in the future.

**주제어** Q-pop, Kazakhstan Nationalism, Kazakh Popular Culture

## I. Introduction

Since Kazakhstan had the tragic legacy of the Soviet Union were local population were considered a minority in their own country (Smagulova, 2008), it was crucial after gaining independence in 1991 to find a new nation's path that included clarifying their national identity and giving rise to a new multi-ethnic society. In Kazakhstan, there are more than 120 different ethnic groups. According to the statistical agency of the Republic of Kazakhstan the diverse ethnic groups living in Kazakhstan

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include 63.1%—ethnic Kazakh population, 23.7%—Russian population, 13.2%—other ethnic groups (Ministry of the National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan Committee on Statistics [MONERKCS], 2009). Therefore, issues of clarifying their national identity in a new multiethnic society are fundamental. There is a large minority group of ethnic Russians and other Slavs, which complicates the efforts to create a cohesive national group represented by the state (Spehr and Kassenova, 2012). Since its independence in 1991, the Kazakhstan government has tried various strategies to form a new national identity among the Kazakhstan population. There were attempts to promote the idea of tolerance and ethnic diversity of post-independent Kazakhstan rather than create a pure ‘Kazakh’ national identity.

However, today Kazakhstan is moving away from the multicultural agenda and towards embracing its ethnic Kazakh identity on a national level. One example of this is a proclamation that the Kazakh alphabet will change from Cyrillic to having a Latin base. The new alphabet has already been introduced in October, 2017 (BBC, 2017; *The Guardian*, 2017). According to government officials, the main purpose of this reform is to strengthen the economy and be assist the process of globalization. Yergaliyeva argues that the real motivation lies in developing a stronger Kazakh national identity by De-russifying the Kazakh language (Yergaliyeva, 2018). The proposed Latinization of the Kazakh alphabet is a political message that shows Kazakhstan is embracing its ethnic pride and divorcing its national identity building from Russia’s paternalistic influence. However, Kazakhstan has remained closely tied to Russia: economically, since Russia is one of Kazakhstan’s most important trading partners; and linguistically, with most of the population speaking Russian, the ‘language of interethnic communication.’ Therefore, for a long time, a dominant public ideology in Kazakhstan was multilingualism when there is the necessity to have proficiency in Kazakh, Russian and English (Smagulova, 2008). However, today

Kazakhstan is in the midst of a language ideology transformation process by strengthening Kazakh language position. Here, from the cultural point of view, popular culture can ride a new independent country on its attempt to find the right path toward raising a national identity. Only a limited number of studies have provided empirical data on and insights into how popular culture is articulated with diasporic youth identities. These studies have examined diasporic youth groups, such as South Asian and East Asian youth in the U.S. (Ju and Lee, 2015; Maira, 2002; Oh, 2015; Park, 2013), Latino youth in the U.S. (Mayer, 2003), and East Asian and South Asian youth in the U.K. (Gillespie, 1995; Huq, 2006; Kim, 2012). Overall, these empirical studies of diasporic youth and popular culture suggest that at a particular period of their transition to adulthood, diasporic youth tend to rediscover their ethnic and cultural roots and negotiate different identity positions through consuming pop cultural texts. However, those researches were mostly related to immigrants' families and how they adapt their identities in a new environment in a period of adolescence. Traditionally it claims that national identity drives the preference for national music styles. Tekman and Hortaçsu provided the first evidence for this association. They found that Turkish folk music handles with the behavior to express national identity (Hortaçsu, 2002).

Larkey emphasized that folk music with deep historical, cultural, and linguistic roots are important markers for national identity (Larkey, 2002). Further studies found that music relates to the contribution to the process of building national identity (Bloustien, 2007; Snell and Hodgetts, 2007; Boer et al., 2013). It was found that among young people “using modern music adapted to the national context by infusing local meaning is an excellent vehicle for transmitting these national identities and aspirations” (Boer et al., 2013: 12). Through a socio-historical scene, the literature says that certain music genres are associated with different social groups (Shepherd, 2003). Some

researchers found in countries like Afghanistan, music creates a strong sense of national identity (Baily, 1994) or tested how the British National Anthem relates with the national identity among children (Winstone and Witherspoon, 2016). Therefore, in this work, we will expand previous research related with modern music and analyze how it can contribute to the process of forming national identity among land inhabitants (specifically, young people) in case of Kazakhstan. This study aims to fill this research gap by investigating the ‘Q-pop’ phenomenon. From a theoretical background, we support the argument that ethnomusicology is the central element linking the preference for culture-specific music and national identity. Rather it is a more universal concept where culture-specific music preferences refer to music styles that are specific to one nation without exact equivalents in other nations. Research in ethnomusicology assigns value to the role of music in construction and strengthening a sense of national identity (Chopyak, 1987; Frith, 1987). In this thought, the main point is that people tend to seek to belong to a particular social group that shares their own musical preferences and thus, are able to determine their own identity (North and Hargreaves, 1999).

## II. Kazakhstan Pop Music in Post – Soviet Period

Kazakhstan Pop music at the beginning of the 90s was predominantly presented by musical groups and singers that were popular from the Soviet Union times. Nevertheless, some new artists of that period turned to perform folk music by mixing it with Western lyrics and singing songs in the Kazakh language. One of the representatives of this music direction was a ‘URKER’ group that appeared on the music scene in 1994. They tried to raise the theme of patriotism and the revival of cultural values in their

songs. At the same time, other bands were performed pop music with only Western lyrics and in the Russian language. For example, 'A-Studio' was popular in the early 90s. On all TV channels and radio stations, clubs and houses, hits 'Julia', 'Soldier of Love' and 'Unloved' bumped sudden success. The theme of the songs was mainly about love and romantic feelings. Same as with duet of Karina Abdullina and Bulat Syzdykov with their song 'Girl in a White Dress'. At that time, Kazakhstani pop music had a great influence from Russian pop music and Russian pop bands like 'laskovyi May' ('Ласковый Май'), 'Na-Na' ('На-На'), 'Ruki verkh' ('Руки вверх') were extremely popular. They turned to become idols for thousands of Kazakhstan people. As a result, in the late 90s, the topic of self-awareness, nationalism, national identity in Kazakhstani music began to fade into the background, giving way to new Western trends: hip-hop, rap music, boy bands, and pop-jazz. Following Western trends, the Kazakhstani music industry of the late 90s is also marked by the appearance of the first boy bands. It was then that the legendary trio "ABK" was born, as well as such groups as 'Bubliki' ('Бублики'), 'Alan' and 'Dervishes'. Most of them disappeared by the beginning of 2000 and only 'Dervishes' were able to maintain their popularity and share their music in the Central Asian region. Media also did not stand aside from the music industry. New independent TV channels actively supported young performers, twisting their clips in music programs, thereby helping still unknown musicians find their listeners.

After 2000 new pop music directions like hip-hop and R'n'B were rapidly developing in Kazakhstan. Groups like 'All-Davai', 'Ghetto Dogs', 'Metis's', 'Not Everything Is Told' and the group '101' led by Ivan Breusov. Mixing genres and styles, each of these groups at that time were on the top lines of Kazakhstan charts. At the same time, alternative music groups occurred that were trying to mix Rock and Ethno music. Group 'Ulytau' was performing in the style of instrumental Kazakh Ethno-rock and also managed to visit

some international stages by this was able to share the heritage of Kazakh musical culture with a foreign listener. The second generation of boy's bands came to the stage after 2000. They were predominantly performing in Kazakh language 'Zhigitter' (Жігіттер), 'Orda' (Орда), 'Ringo' (Ринго). In a case with 'Orda' (Орда), 'Ringo' (Ринго) conquered Kazakhstani listeners not only with singing but with dance performances unusual at that time. However, the main feature of the music industry in the early 2000s was the appearance of the first girls' bands: 'Rakhat-Lukum' (Рахат Лукум), 'Dauys International' (Дауыс International), 'Serdseyedki' (Сердсееджи), 'FM' and many others. In those groups, singers often changed and their popularity faded as quickly as they appeared. The beginning of 2000 is also associated with the appearance of the first music producers of Kazakhstan - Eric Tastembekov, Alua Konarova, and Bayan Esentaeva. The music industry in Kazakhstan in the mid-2000s began to slow down due to the lack of new singers and bands, and those that occurred were looked like as the same artists. Therefore, some singers moved from show business to 'toy business' (singing on weddings, small events, shows, and corporate parties). Thus, in Kazakhstan, a huge number of cover bands began to appear—bands performing popular songs by domestic artists. Such groups, most often, did not write their music, relying on the commercial success of the one that they cover. The proliferation of Russian social networks V Kontakte (similar to Facebook with the option to listen to music) in Kazakhstan resulted that many Kazakhstan people began to listen free pirated music downloaded from this network rather than to buy licensed discs from music stores—which entailed big losses for music companies and labels.

A new round in the development of the music industry came in the 2010s when promising young musicians appeared on the scene, who changed the usual format of Kazakhstani music. Pop singer Kairat Nurtas, who gave his first concert in 2008, won great popularity among

Kazakhstani listeners. Performing songs of the great Kazakh composers from the past he remains one of the biggest stars of Kazakhstan's show business. In 2009, unknown Scryptonite appeared in the industry, which brought Kazakhstan hip-hop to a new level, adding to it a great musical style and the complexity of constructing music. A year later, Scryptonite founded the rap group JILLZAY and began to release many singles that became hits among Kazakhstani youth—not a single party could do without honest, rude and sometimes heavy songs of young Scryptonite. Soon, the musician joined the production center of Gazgolder, developing his work on the Russian stage and gaining popularity in the CIS countries. Music in the Kazakh language acquired a new sound with the advent of Galymzhan Moldanazar in the early 2010s. Neglecting the understandable and already boring pop format, Galymzhan began to develop an atypical Kazakhstani genre of indie music in the national language. His music found a great response among young listeners, and Galymzhan's music videos set the bar for many Kazakhstan performers.

With the development of the Internet, musical boundaries have erased: if previously music remained only within the country, now it can find its listener far beyond the borders of Kazakhstan. Thanks to social networks, one Kazakhstan performer Jah Khalib gained wide popularity. The development of a new musical wave was also facilitated by the emergence of television projects aimed at finding talented singers and singers from all over Kazakhstan and Central Asia. One of the brightest music television shows was the domestic 'X Factor', which launched in 2011. The show is held annually for several years, as a launching pad for many young artists. Before 'X Factor' the first audition program was 'SuperStar KZ' that gave great opportunities for such artists like Kairat Tuntekov, Alisher Karimov, Almas Kishkenbaev and Nurzhan Kermenbaev, who later became successful singers. The stunning success was gained by the international

musical show ‘I am a singer’—a joint project of local TV broadcaster and the South Korean company ‘MVS’. The first season of the project, which began in 2017, was watched by over 200 million people from China, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tatarstan (a federal district in the Russian Federation), and Bashkortostan (a federal district in the Russian Federation). The transformation of the music industry continued in the last four years when modern young bands with a different style, mindset, and vision of music began to appear in Kazakhstan. The modern music industry can be described as the music of protest. It created by a new generation who does not want to put up with the outdated, boring and conservative foundations of both society and industry as a whole. In recent years, the most favorable conditions have been created for the development of alternative Kazakhstani music. In Almaty, for example, the Qazaq Indie community has appeared, which gathers young musicians on its site, allowing each of them to share their creativity. An obvious trend in the industry was the performance of songs in the Kazakh language, which many artists successfully practice especially Q-pop idols. Adopting the eastern musical trend that came from South Korea, Kazakhstani boy band such as ‘Ninety-One’ (first representative of Q-pop) have changed the usual understanding of the local music industry.

### III. The Rise of New Pop Music in Kazakhstan: Q-pop

In Post-Soviet Union period most of the singers used to sing songs in Russian language and few in the Kazakh language. There were 2 types of music one for Russian speaking part of the population and another for Kazakh speaking population. After 2010 we can witness the rise of Kazakh singers as it was mentioned above. Since Kazakhstan independence, there was a trend to use traditional Kazakh cultural symbols in the artists’

videos. Images of traditional Kazakh nomadism and the objects commonly associated with this lifestyle (e.g. horses, yurts, clothing, traditional foods, and ornamental patterns) play a prominent role in these videos, even though the music—often oriented toward a pop style or ‘ethno-rock’. The videos and songs associated with them convey strong messages about ethnic history, homeland, identity, and the unity of Kazakhs. These singers were searching for their historical roots and national identity. As Rancier noted in her work analyzed three music videos by the Kazakh artist Batyrkhan Shukenov ‘Otan Ana’, the ethno-pop band Urker ‘Qonyr’ (Urker official, 2015), and the young dombra (two-string lute) virtuoso Asylbek Ensepov ‘Adai’ (Ensepov, 2002). These videos reflect varying degrees of historical nostalgia and nationalism through music and images of Kazakh traditional culture, creating powerful messages of Kazakh national identity for contemporary audiences in Kazakhstan (Rancier, 2009).

However, none of those videos received high hits on YouTube and were not popular among young Kazakhstan citizens. In her research, none of her respondents revealed any particularly emotional reactions to the videos. She suggested that it was due to their relatively young age. Meanwhile, even though artists used their mother tongue in their performances, the quality of video clips was very poor and the music itself was more of a traditional and classic style. It became clear that in order to attract the young generation of Kazakh citizens to their own language, culture and identity other actions need to be taken. At the same time, the Kazakhstan government actively started to move away from the ideology of multicultural and multiethnic society toward strengthening Kazakh national identity. For example, Russian and Soviet street names have been replaced by Kazakh ones, Kazakh-language education and publications have increased dramatically, and official calls went out to all Kazakhs living outside Kazakhstan to return to the homeland. Moreover, the Kazakhstan

government accepted the new alphabet and moved away from using Russian Cyrillic base to Latin. In the past, the Kazakh language was written in an Arabic script until the 1920s when the Soviet Union briefly introduced a Latin alphabet. This was later replaced by a Cyrillic one in 1940, based on the Russian alphabet, which has been in use until now. These days, the Kazakhstan government aims to transition fully to use the of a Latin-based script by 2025. Yergaliyeva (2018) highlights that the timing of this language reform is directly influenced by the changing demographics in Kazakhstan, with ethnic Russians steadily becoming a minority in Kazakhstan. In a new transcript, Kazakhstan was written as Qazaqstan. Latin 'Q' replaced Cirrilic 'K'. On June 12, 2013, a well-known bank rebranded its name from 'Senym bank' to 'Qazaq bank'. On April 4th, 2015 'Qazaq air' was established. The prefix 'Q' has a particular ideological connotation. Putting 'Q' as the prefix is a trendy way of representing new Kazakhstan. The new idea of 'Q' for resembling Kazakhstan was generally accepted by masses. In 2014, Yerbolat Bedelkhan (formerly a member of the popular 'Orda' band) created his record company and talent search agency JUZ Entertainment. He decided to create a new group that will consist of Western and Asian music cultures with a Korean entertainment system to rise new Kazakhstan idols. In the same year, Yerbolat Bedelkhan released the television project 'K-top idols'. It was the first academy in Kazakhstan to create idols and groups by the Korean system of training and educating singers. There was an audition program on TV channel 'MuzZone' and it showed how 24 participants of the academy are going through the selection process for the future group. Finalists of the contest then became interns at JUZ Entertainment. During the internship, the concept and name of the new group were developed.

Finally, there was a team of five members. On September 1, 2015, Ninety one debuted (Akhmetova, 2015). Young guys in the literal sense of the word surprised Kazakhstan show business. Bright clothes, makeup, pierced ears

became an object of discussion in the Kazakh media. Many performers began to accuse them of non-traditional sexual orientation, some began to claim that they imitate Korean performers. Among the traditional singers, some completely forbade them to perform on a stage. The style of 'Ninety one's' performances was strikingly different from the typical Kazakhstan manner of acting on the stage. Dyed hair in bright colors, the use of cosmetics, including lipstick, catchy metal jewelry, skinny pants, short fur capes, which are characteristic features of K-pop idols, were unusual and new to Kazakhstan. Those features of the image of Ninety one outraged critics. The producer of the group, Yerbolat Bedelkhan, noted in one of his interviews that he wanted to domestic show business be brighter. That is why he creating this group. The main goal was to create a group that will sing songs for young people in a modern style in the Kazakh language which will be able to assemble stadiums at their concerts. Before the appearance of the band 'Ninety one', in Kazakhstan, most often this was done by foreign artists who came with their concert program or by a few solo singers.

Initially, the group wrote and released a video for their debut song 'Ayiptama' in 2015. The audience so positively took on a new song's music, lyrics, images that the producer of the team decided to release a mini-album of 'Ninety one'. After the release of 'Ayiptama' new group composed songs during the next week and recorded them in their studio a month later. Their first mini-album 'Ayiptama' appeared. It is worth noting that the 'Ayiptama' video clip took the first place on the 'Gakku TOP-10' chart for 20 weeks, and in honor of this, on March 31, the Gakku channel awarded a special prize to the Ninety one group. Their second video, 'Kaitadan', repeated the success of 'Ayiptama' and for 20 weeks led the music chart of the Gakku TV channel. On September 19, 2016 Ninety one with the video 'Kaitadan' took first place on the chart of the Turkish music

channel TMB. On September 22, the group performed at the EMA-2016 and won the Breakthrough of the Year nomination. In October-November 2016, Ninety one concerts were held in the cities of Ust-Kamenogorsk, Semey, Petropavlovsk, Pavlodar, Taraz, Shymkent, Karaganda, Kokshetau. In December 2016, the opening of the JUZ Entertainment center, which includes the JUZ Academy, 100 cafes, JUZ Shop, took place in Almaty. Fans of the Ninety one group gave the name to a new direction in music, which appeared along with the work of the group. The term 'Q-pop' was coined in 2015 by Ninety one fans to distinguish Kazakh pop music from the rest of the world pop scene. One characteristic feature of 'Q-pop' is very clear: it is 'Kazakhstan pop made in Kazakhstan by Kazakhstan musicians for a Kazakhstan audience and it dominates the Kazakhstan market. New popular culture phenomenon that is termed as a 'Q-pop' with 'Q' standing for Kazakhstan, and 'Pop' meaning popular music. In Wikipedia, there are already separate pages about 'Q-pop', and there is even a description in Korean. 'Q-pop', or 'Qazaq pop', like its origin, involves the use of energetic music, combining different genres, a vivid style in clothes and defiant behavior. Since the group is called Ninety one and this is the year of the declaration of independence of Kazakhstan, and the symbol of independence for Kazakhstan is an eagle (on a flag of Kazakhstan there is a soaring eagle) Ninety one fandom called themselves as 'EagleZ'. Where formal English word Eagles was changed with its last letter 'S' to 'Z', and where 'Z' stands for a new 'Z' generation (young people who were born after the Independence of Kazakhstan). If you flip this letter, you get the emblem of Ninety one. Therefore, the Ninety one fandom is 'EagleZ'. 'EagleZ' carries the meaning of free youth. The group began to quickly gain popularity in Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkey, South Korea, U.S.A., Latin America, and Europe. Foreign fandom of 'EagleZ' translate Ninety one songs into English, French, Greek, Turkish, Check, Korean, Russian, Tatar, German, Portuguese,

Finish, Indonesian, Polish, Kyrgyz, Chinese, and Uzbek (lyricstranslate, n.d.). JUZ Entertainment uploads videos with access in 3 languages (subtitles) in Kazakh, Russian, English. Thanks to this, the geography of fans of the group is expanding. Texts are also available on iTunes, and on YouTube, there is the ability to watch subtitled videos. Foreign 'EagleZ' film their covers, as well as reactions to the new Ninety one clips. Some of them have independently learned basic Kazakh language and can express their thoughts in this language. The Kazakhstani fandom is also actively developing. Kazakhstan 'EagleZ' fandom visits nursing homes, orphanages and dozens of other ways give good, helping those in need. They launched the endless 'baton of kindness.' Some have been in the fandom since the time of the 'K-TOP IDOLS' show, where our group was formed. 'EagleZ' is the first formed fandom that exists both in Kazakhstan and abroad. Interestingly that Yerbolat Bedelkhan decided also add the best practices from 'K-pop'. So, in a result, we can see that 'Q-pop' has mixed features with Western pop culture as well as Korean pop culture. For Kazakhstan, reality hybridization offers an opportunity for local culture to be continued, and that globalization is built on the base of local culture and local interpretation. This cultural fusion connects straight to the Pieterse (2009) claims to the hybrid culture that is more resistant, democratic, diverse, and heterogeneous than cultures of Western states. "Hybridity" with Western culture was also used by researchers as a dominant explanation of the global 'K-pop' success. (Iwabuchi, 2004; Shim, 2006).

On the other hand, according to Lie (Lie, 2012) 'K-pop' has nothing that can be considered as 'Korean' due to the global liberalization of the music market. Here 'K-pop' is too commercial and have nothing to do with traditional Confucian Korean culture. In this regard, 'K-pop' is more global and more Western. Only a few scholars explore 'authentic' (or traditional) cultural elements in K-pop (e.g. Hughes and Keith; Kim and Kim), most scholars

have defined ‘K-pop’ as a form of global hybrid culture (Fuhr, 2015; Jin, 2016; Jung, 2011; Jung, 2009). In recent literature, a few elements have been identified as evidence of increasing hybridity in ‘K-pop’—the frequent use of English and multicultural references in K-pop songs and music videos, ‘K-pop’ artists’ physical and musical presentation, multinational production teams, and an overseas fan base (Jin and Ryoo, 2014; Jung, 2015; Kim, 2011; Lie and Oh, 2014; Oh, 2014; Oh, 2013). Jin and Ryoo argue that ‘K-pop’s’ hybridity operates only at the level of form and style, “rather than establishing a new creative culture or a third space, one which is free from American influence.” (Jin and Ryoo, 2014: 127). Overall, with some variations, the empirical studies have tended to consider ‘K-pop’ as a recent breed of cultural commodity developed in relation to the influence of Western popular culture. Meanwhile, some researches focused that the core secret of ‘K-pop’ success relies on the Korean entertainment company’s organization where they have creativity management and export management (Oh, 2013). According to some researchers (lie, 2012; Oh, 2013), there are several key factors that helped ‘K-pop’ to gain its current success. First, evolution in the physique (simply through cosmetic surgery). Second, political democratization of Korea (no censorship on both Korean and Western type of popular music). Third, technological advancement (using digital technologies). Fourth, the advancement of the global capitalist economy (globalization).

In Kazakhstan reality, ‘Q-pop’ is on its very early stage of development. Similar to the Korean music entertainment system local entertainment companies are rising their own idols, training them to dance, sing and perform on the stage. Moreover, due to the technological advancement ‘Q-pop’ singers are becoming popular far away from its homeland. For example, Ninety one fandom ‘Eaglez’ has its own members in Turkey, Russia, France, Mexico, Italy, U.S.A., Canada and etc. Using English lyrics and mixing English words contribute to lowering cultural and linguistic

**Table 1** Similarities and differences between 'K-pop' and 'Q-pop'

Type	'K-pop'	'Q-pop'
Similarities	Idol group concept International fans Amazing visuals and catchy songs. Targeted at the international markets Bright fashion style and haircuts Entertainment system of companies Influenced by Western music 'K-pop' is famous for its 10 years long brutal training system. 'K-pop' sourcing is global; songs come from Europe and the US, and vocal trainers are African American trainers. Korean music videos generally have a good budget for music videos.	Idol group concept International fans Amazing visuals and catchy songs. Bright fashion style and haircuts Entertainment system of companies Influenced by Korean music 'Q-pop' idols are pushed out onto debut stage with as little as 3 months of training. 'Q-pop' team members only recently started to use English words in their songs 'Q-pop' sourcing is purely local, with local songwriters and local trainers.
Differences	Fashion: 'K-pop' clothing is generally casual but cool, sexy, and well designed with dyed hair Only use the Korean language with a mix of English words Songs titles all in English and Korean	'Q-pop' music videos budgets are not that expensive 'Q-pop' fashion is on its own way to develop Only use the Kazakh Language, Songs titles in Kazakh and sometimes in English

barriers in transnational cultural flows and allowing the audience to actively decode and re-appropriate the text in polysemic ways. Moreover, 'Q-pop' singers do not use their real names instead they replace them with English ones. Finally, when they release new songs they name them in English wording (name of the songs, group members' nicknames, fandom names, mixing English words and sounds with the Kazakh language). Here it seems important to identify what similarities and differences each of these cultures have.

Thanks to developments in music skills and knowledge of digital recording technology, Kazakhstan musicians and engineers started producing their music with almost the same quality as in the U.S. or the U.K. The constant economy rises since the mid of 2000 made Kazakhstan

a culturally developed country where any kind of music from anywhere in the world was available in record shops, clubs, live venues and concert halls. Applying all western and non-western music elements into the Kazakhstan context, 'Q-pop' became sophisticated enough to satisfy even those who used to love western music. Here 'Q-pop' has the hybrid quality of western music, and response to, globalization and its consequent anxiety since the late 1990s. Its rising popularity in Kazakhstan market is derived from the globalization effect of 'Q-pop', thanks to the development of new technology within computers, internet and transportation, the expansion of tourism, and, most importantly, the consequent trans-nationalization of cultural tastes in the Central Asian region. During the next 4 years, around 16 'Q-pop' groups came to the stage (Mikkonen, 2017). Most of these groups work in a Korean entertainment format. 'Q-pop' singers are young, with most of them being born after 1990 or even 2000, with bright fashion styles and colored hair with trendy haircuts. They can dance modern dances while singing and can put on great performances that attract thousands of young people. And this attracts attention among young people encouraging them to study their own language and culture as well.

If in 2015-2016 there were not much English in 'Q-pop' songs starting from 2016 there were some changes. We found that some titles of the songs written in English actually have two meanings (in English and Kazakh). For example, the title of the song 'Ah! Yah! Mah!' presented by Ninety one can be understood in two ways. First, just like Ah! Yah! Mah! (Ninety one, 2017) Secondly, if you remove 'H' letter, it begins to sound like 'Ayama', which means 'do not feel sorry' in Kazakh language. Another song by 'Ninety-one', 'Boyman' can be understood as 'Boy and Man', however in Kazakh Language 'Boyman' means 'Growing'. Since Kazakhstan is now gradually moving away from using the Cyrillic alphabet to a Latin alphabet, this interpretation of the Kazakh language in the English transcription is very

interesting. Finally, members of the Ninety one band use in their Instagram accounts not with a Cyrillic alphabet (like most Kazakh Instagram bloggers, artists, ordinary people do), but using the Latin alphabet. Although the group quickly gained popularity among young people, the adult part of the Kazakhstan population was skeptical about the new group. Ninety one members felt it when they went on their first tour around the country. In several cities, boy band concerts provoked an angry reaction. The band's first tour was disrupted—in 9 of 16 regions of Kazakhstan, the group's concerts were canceled at the last moment without warning. The perpetrators were reproached for non-traditional sexual orientation due to the stage image. At first, Ninety one was not allowed into Aktobe city (West Kazakhstan). Local singers protested their concert. Having not found understanding in Aktobe city, the group went to the Karaganda city, but they were not accepted there either. Activists wrote letters to the local mayor office where they accused Ninety one in violating religious principles and non-traditional sexual orientation. Nevertheless, Ninety one still managed to hold concerts in several cities of Kazakhstan, including northeastern Semey city (formerly Semipalatinsk) and Ust-Kamenogorsk. All this was later reflected in their documentary, where Ninety one talks about difficulties that they had to go through in their work. The plot of the movie tells about the formation of the boy band, the emergence of a large-scale fan movement 'EagleZ', the opposition from the public.

The growth of the Q-pop movement is also evidenced by the fact that after the appearance of Ninety one, over the next couple of years other Entertainment companies, as well as singers, came to the stage. They are also proclaimed that their main areas of work are 'Q-pop'. The formation of new Entertainment companies was quick, and the producers began to search and gain new talent. By the way, on October 27, 2018, in Almaty city, the first 'Q-pop' festival was held. Yerbolat Bedelkhan, a producer of

Ninety one, has teamed up with all the other producers of ‘Q-pop’ idols to create one big community. Erbolat Bedelkhan initiated the creation of an association to support ‘Q-pop’ music, which includes 6 other producers. So far there are eight top ‘Q-pop’ Entertainment companies in Kazakhstan: JUZ Entertainment, YB Entertainment, Eighty Eight Entertainment, MM Entertainment, GM Entertainment, Yerlan Alimov, A + Media Entertainment. There are current bands such as Black Dial, Newton, Crystalz, Mad Men, EQ, Red Blaid, Moonlight, Juzim, Ayumi, Renzo, 10iz, Blast Boy’, and solo performers like Ziruza, Ayree, Malika Yes, Riza, CCTAY, Kyle Ruh, DiUooU (Muzzone, nd). TV channels like NTK, Gakku TV have even dedicated special web-pages to ‘Q-pop’ (NTK, n.d.). Finally, to raise more ‘Q-pop’ talents on KazakhstanTV Channel, a new audition program called ‘Q-pop idols’ was held (Q-pop Idols, n.d.). Unprecedented growth in the popularity of ‘Q-pop’ music suggests that the generation of listeners has been changed.

#### IV. Research Method and Research Design

In this research, the qualitative inquiry was chosen to explore the new popular culture phenomenon that is termed as a ‘Q-pop’. The participants in this study were 18 individuals: 10 of them were from Kazakh ethnicity, 4 of them from Russian ethnicity, 1 from Uzbek ethnicity, other 3 were from mixed ethnicity (Kazakh and Karakalpak, Russian and Poland, Korean and Italian). 17 of them were female and 1 of them was male. 12 of them were students, 5 of them have graduated and working now, 1 of them was a high-school student. 14 of them were from Kazakhstan 3 of the respondents were from Russia, 1 from Italy, 1 from Uzbekistan. The average age of all respondents was 21.6 years old (8 of them were under their 20<sup>th</sup>, 10 of them were under 30 years old). Most of the respondents were in a part of ‘EagleZ’ fandom

**Table 2** Interview respondents list

Respondent	Age	Gender	Ethnic group	Occupation	Country of residence	Fandom	
1	O.Z.	25	FEMALE	KAZAKH	WORKER	KAZAKHSTAN	Q-pop
2	D.S.	22	FEMALE	KAZAKH	INTERN	KAZAKHSTAN	Q-pop
3	B.A.	20	FEMALE	KAZAKH	STUDENT	KAZAKHSTAN	Q-pop
4	N.S.	18	FEMALE	UZBEK	STUDENT	RUSSIA	Q-pop
5	B.E.	17	FEMALE	RUSSIAN	HIGH SCHOOL	RUSSIA	Q-pop
6	B.K.	18	FEMALE	RUSSIAN	STUDENT	RUSSIA	Q-pop
7	M.A.	22	MALE	KAZAKH	STUDENT	KAZAKHSTAN	Q-pop
8	K.D.	17	FEMALE	RUSSIAN	STUDENT	KAZAKHSTAN	Q-pop
9	V.S.	20	FEMALE	RUSSIAN+POLAND	STUDENT	KAZAKHSTAN	Q-pop
10	V.K.	17	FEMALE	KOREAN+ITALIAN	STUDENT	KAZAKHSTAN	Q-pop
11	H.G.	29	FEMALE	KAZAKH	WORKER	KAZAKHSTAN	Q-pop
12	K.T.	30	FEMALE	KAZAKH	STUDENT	KAZAKHSTAN	K-pop
13	A.Z.	24	FEMALE	KAZAKH	WORKER	KAZAKHSTAN	K-pop
14	A.S.	22	FEMALE	KAZAKH	STUDENT	KAZAKHSTAN	K-pop
15	U.A.	19	FEMALE	KAZAKH	STUDENT	KAZAKHSTAN	Q-pop
16	S.M.	19	FEMALE	KAZAKH	STUDENT	KAZAKHSTAN	Q-pop
17	K.P.	25	FEMALE	KAZAKH+KARAKALPAK	STUDENT	UZBEKISTAN	Q-pop
18	A.K.	25	FEMALE	RUSSIAN	WORKER	KAZAKHSTAN	K-pop

(13 and other 5 were not). The first round of the interviews was conducted with 4 interviewers through the in-depth interview on March—April 2018. Based on the information and knowledge gained from the first round of interviews and constant observation of ‘Q-pop’ development in Kazakhstan, we reviewed our research focus from exploring the new phenomenon and developed its influences to the nationalism and national identity. The second round of the interviews was made with other 14 interviewers on the period from February 2019 to August 2019. The snowballing methods were used. Questions emerged in both languages: Kazakh and Russian

from the immediate context and were asked in the natural course of the conversation. It was conducted informally with the goal of keeping informants comfortable and relax in answering all the questions asked.

All written transcripts were read several times to obtain an overall feeling for them. From each transcript, significant phrases or sentences were identified. Meanings are then formulated from significant statements and phrases. The results are then integrated into an in-depth, exhaustive description of the phenomenon. Once descriptions were obtained, new relevant data emerge, they are included in the final description. Background information was obtained through an Internet search and additional contact with participants. Finally, logical gaps in the research were identified and translated into English.

There were two main research questions. Those two questions led to research textual and structural description of the experiences and ultimately provided an understanding of the common experiences of participants. Other open-ended questions were included to investigate the phenomenon. Since the founder of Q-pop is Ninety one group and only this group is actively expanding to the global stage in this study we will focus on their performance: how they influence to the development of a 'Q-pop' and how it changes modern Kazakh society.

- RQ1: What is 'Q-pop'?
- RQ2: Does 'Q-pop' formulate Kazakh national identity?

## V. Results

### RQ1.

The thing that ‘Q-pop’ is similar to ‘K-pop’ was mentioned by a producer of Ninety one Yerbolat Bedelkhan. He did not disagree that while he was creating Ninety one group took the idea of how to rise idols from South Korean Entertainment system and applied it in a local market. As a member of the ‘Ninety-one’ group ZAQ noted in one of his interviews that they create a new trend in Kazakhstan’s modern music, which, taking ‘K-pop’ as a basis but transforming it and adapting to the local reality. “We are not Koreans at all and are not trying to be” (Caravan, 2016). Respondents also were agreed with the statement that ‘Q-pop’ and ‘K-pop’ have more external similarities with each other that mostly relates with their fashion and images, but there are significant internal differences—these are music, language, and cultural values that ‘Q-pop’ singers put on their songs. At the same time, some of ‘Q-pop’ groups stressed that they had their own unique style. The group Moonlight that debuted on September 16, 2016, under the label of GM Entertainment, had already claimed that “In ‘Q-pop’ there are no specific criteria that musical groups must match or follow” (NTK, n.d. para.2). They do not find ‘Q-pop’ music to be similar to modern Korean pop music. They consider that ‘Q-pop’ to be the modern music of Kazakhstan, which will continue to grow in the future into larger mass culture. Nevertheless, AZ from Ninety one in one of his interviews concludes that there ‘K-pop’ can be a model for ‘Q-pop’ and its future crystallization.

As a scholar who studies on Korea, I can say that ‘K-pop’ is like a role model for a ‘Q-pop’. Moreover, Kazakhstan entertainment labels are trying to copy ‘K-pop’ format and we can see it clearly. However, it’s good that finally, our

modern music is becoming popular among Kazakhstan youth. – AZ.

The fact that in the direction of ‘Q-pop’, the singers are precisely the supporters of the idol system, says the fact that the members of the group should not be touched, there are certain rules for their behavior. Their personal life is open and fans are aware of everything that happens in the life of their favorites. If ordinary singers, talking about their private lives, do not want to let fans into it, then idols, on the contrary, reveal all their secrets. They shoot videos, share them on ‘YouTube’, and also do fan-service (the Korean trait of K-pop culture). It is often said that they love their fans. As noted by M.A. the male respondent, who more refers to the Kazakh-speaking part of the Kazakh ethnic group, ‘Q-pop’ is characterized by dynamism and Kazakh flavor, and ‘K-pop’ is too open. He emphasized that each new genre in music has its roots originating from other musical directions and ‘Q-pop’, also originates from ‘K-pop’. This opinion was shared by all other survey participants. Some respondents said that these are two different countries, with a different mentality, the music is also different (K.D., personal communication, August 21, 2019). At the same time, respondents spoke positively on the fact that Kazakhstan singers start to see global trends and try to implement them in their own work.

Make the group similar to the ‘K-pop’, but at the same time adding something of its own. Many blame that we just copied ‘K-pop’ without thinking that Kazakhstan is not the only one who did this. Even in China, there are some groups that are similar to ‘K-pop’. Not only in China but also in other Asian-Pacific countries we can see the same trend. This is normal until a certain period of time, and then you need to move in your direction, find something unique to your culture, come up with your own. Everyone does this at the beginning of their journey – AS.

Popularity in Kazakhstan can be attributed to the fact that ‘Q-pop’ is appeared in Kazakhstan. It did not come from outside, but was born within the country and created for young people, a new generation of Kazakhstan. Previously, Kazakhstani youth used to listen to more Western music, since the majority of the music was created for ‘toy business’ and was not intended for them. However, with the advent of Ninety one and other ‘Q-pop’ groups, music appeared for them. Respondents noted that they learned about the existence of ‘Q-pop’ mainly through the Internet (‘YouTube’), when their friends send them links to videos on social networks. A small part replied that they had learned about ‘Q-pop’ after watching entertainment programs in which ‘Q-pop’ singers participated. Since most of the respondents were members of ‘EagleZ’ fandom, their answers mainly related to the Ninety one group. Among top clips most often mentioned ‘Ayiptama’, ‘Kaytadan’, ‘Ah! Yah! Mah!’ And ‘Mooz’. Among reasons of ‘Q-pop’ attraction respondents noted the following: performing songs in Kazakh language (using complex words and expressions from the Kazakh language), text-content, vibrant and high-quality video clips, music and lyrics (the appearance of the Kazakh rap as such and unusual singing style), images of singers (style, hairstyles, roles of members), vocal, dance parties. The principles promoted by Ninety one are freedom, love, and self-belief. Respondents noted that Ninety one songs have changed their lives, and gives strength to find their place in this life.

...Ninety one has changed my life. Thanks to them, I’m still here. From a song, they make you want to move forward, try again and again, believe in yourself, in your abilities, love and give positive to this world. Do not look at others, go to your goal, whoever says anything just become better one who you want to be. – B.E.

I want to say, I’m glad that ‘Q-pop’ appeared in my life. It helps me escape

from problems, studies (in a good way, of course). It helped me find very good, loyal friends. I met very different people, and every day there are more and more of them that makes me happier. – B.A.

Working on the Korean system of education idols, local entertainment companies first are trying to make them visually look like Korean stars with the help of bright images, costumes, and hairstyles. If we take into account the case of the song ‘Suimemin men’ (‘I don’t like’) made by solo singer Zeinesh (Zeinesh, 2015), it is an absolute copy of the music from the South Korean singer Taeyang ‘눈, 코, 입’ (‘EYES, NOSE, LIPS’). Same lyrics, music, and performing style. The only difference with ‘Taeyang’ is that Korean idol in his song still has feelings toward his love, but Zeinesh, on the other hand, claims that it is enough to him. Keywords: eyes, lips were also copied. In the ‘Ninety-one’ debut music clip ‘Ayyptama’ (Gakku TV, 2015) A.Z. (one of the leaders of the band) copied his rap portion from G-dragon’s ‘하깨 (Crooked)’. A.Z has a pretty similar manner of behavior and performance of the words in a song. Another way he is similar to G-dragon is his bad-boy image. A.Z.’s hair is also styled similarly to ‘G-dragon’s’ is for that song, and the video is arranged in a similar manner, with filming even taking place in dark tunnel much like ‘G-dragon’s’ video. Another representative of ‘Q-pop’ is Ziruzha, and her song ‘S.O.S’ (Gakku TV, 2018) is a close match with ‘K-pop’ star CL’s song ‘Hello bitches’. In that clip, Ziruzha has the image of a bad girl dancing with sexually explicit outfits and female backup dancers, much like CL’s video for ‘Hello bitches’. The use of black color is also heavily used. We also discovered that some titles of the songs written in English actually have two meanings (in English and Kazakh). For example, the title of the song ‘Ah! Yah! Mah!’ presented by Ninety one can be understood in two ways. First, just like Ah! Yah! Mah! (Ninety one, 2017) Secondly, if you remove ‘H’ letter, it begins to sound like ‘Ayama’, which means ‘do not feel

**Table 3** Q-pop representative bands and their fandoms

Kazakhstan Q-pop	Entertainment company	Year of establishment, Fandom	Features	Group members
Ninety one	JUZ Entertainment	2015 Fandom ("EagleZ")	Western pop music & K-pop. The debut was on September 2015	5 members: A.Z. (Azamat Zenkayev), ALEM (Batyrrkhan Malikov), ACE (Azamat Ashmakyn), ZaQ (Dulat Mukhametkaliev), BALA (Daniyar Kulumshin).
Black Dial	YB Entertainment	2016 Fandom ("Ravens")	In April 2017, a debut single "Soile" got a million views on YouTube during the first month.	5 members: Vocals KenG, Ray, Tachi Rep L, Teddy
Newton	Eighty Eight Entertainment	2017 Fandom ("Power")	Debuted on August 24, 2017, with a song "Zhalyutym" In early 2018, it was announced that the group would continue to perform under the label Eighty Eight Entertainment.	4 members: Vocals Akim, Otty, Shyn Rep Smit
Mad Men	MM Entertainment	2017 Fandom ("Mad Wave")	July 8, 2017, debuted with a song "Bir Qadam". The group members represent different nationalities. On October 20, 2017, the band released their debut music video clip for the song "Beri Jahinda".	5 members: Vocals Ting Hai-Lun, Timur Kurmangaliev, Masakbai Rahat, Ibraimov Alimurad Rep Roman Kim
Moonlight	GM Entertainment	2016 Fandom ("Lunatiki")	The first single of the group called "Tokyo" was released on September 12, 2016,	5 members: Azamat Kabylov, Yerik Tolenov, Yerkehan Abdoldaev, Rufat Usenov, Ansat Dildaby
Ziruza	Yerlan Alimov	2017 Fandom ("Loyals")	Her debut was on May 2017. Ziruza was born on January 10, 1997.	Solo: Ziruza

sorry' in Kazakh language. Another song by 'Ninety-one', 'Boyman' can be understood as 'Boy and Man', however in Kazakh Language 'Boyman' means 'Growing'. Since Kazakhstan is now gradually moving away from using the Cyrillic alphabet to a Latin alphabet, this interpretation of the Kazakh language in the English transcription is very interesting. Finally, members of the 'Ninety-one' band use in their Instagram accounts not with a Cyrillic alphabet (like most Kazakh Instagram bloggers, artists, ordinary people do), but using the Latin alphabet.

Each of the survey participants learned about 'Q-pop' and the Ninety one group through the Internet. AZ said that she heard about them on the social network Vkontakte.ru, where there was a discussion that a new group appeared in Kazakhstan that copies Big Bang and G-dragon styles. UA also notes that she heard about the ensuing discussion around Ninety one and out of curiosity decided to listen to their debut album 'Aiptama'. She didn't like their first video, but she liked some songs from that album ('Umytpa', 'Kayrlythun'). We found that 'Q-pop' fans categorize themselves by membership in certain fandoms.

Biggest fandom in a 'Q-pop' presented by 'EagleZ', fans of Ninety one group. It has its own groups on social networks such as 'Facebook', 'Instagram', 'Telegram', 'Vkontakte', 'WhatsApp'. 'Twitter' has a separate page for the global 'EagleZ' fandom, which is run by foreign fans. At 'Telegram', the group consists of about 900 active members of 'EagleZ'. This is a Russian messenger where participants can join in groups and conduct discussions on certain topics. It is kind of online chatting. More than 100 different messages related to the work of your favorite group appear on the day. Besides, thanks to this group, participants get to know each other and meet offline. For Kazakhstan 'EagleZ' is very common to communicate with each other and meet in coffee shops, where they discuss the latest news, songs, or the work of the group, play games, and also talk about

other topics. By this, they become more united and bound to each other and could meet new friends.

Even though people do not know each other we become really close. We can discuss different topics and meet from time to time. 'Q-pop' helped us to meet new friends. – K.D.

In an American messenger 'WhatsApp', there are various closed groups of 'EagleZ' fans. There is also a separate group of 15 members who are administrating Ninety one fan pages on social networks. Through the 'WhatsApp', they manage the purchase of concert tickets to organize seats for 'EagleZ' fans or share the latest news related to their tours, people attendance of concert. Also, through this messenger 'EagleZ' local fan managers communicates with managers from JUZ Entertainment.

We have our own chatrooms. There are 'EagleZ' fandom managers who have on their pages more than 10 thousand subscribers. They have been in the fandom for a long time. We communicate with them, ask how the concert went, how many tickets were sold, they answer questions from people, whether it is possible to take water to the concert, children, what is the difference between concert tickets and even whether it is possible to laminate tickets. I used to think that JUZ entertainment should be responsible for these requests from their fans, but we are doing this. They do not help with the purchase itself rather than 'EagleZ' fandom managers do it. – O.Zh.

The most numerous groups with 'EagleZ' fans from Central Asia and Russian can be found in 'Vkontakte' (Russian version of Facebook, social network) where there are groups dedicated not only one Ninety one group, but also to its members A.Z, Alem, Zaq, Bala and Ace. There are some large groups with several hundred thousand members and smaller ones with

up to 200 participants. The language of communication is mainly Kazakh. The groups' post content related to the work of the Ninety one, concerts, fan-fights, music, and others. There is also a separate group that belongs to JUZ Entertainment label. They are also selling through 'Vkontakte' its merchandise—Ninety one clothing line. Also, other 'Q-pop' bands' fandom groups are presented in this social network but their size is not that big comparing with Ninety one. On Instagram, fans also actively engage in discussions and post their user-generated content related to 'Q-pop'. There is a separate hashtag by which fan can search for publications, posts related to 'Q-pop'—#qpop. The smallest number of fan groups is represented on the social network Facebook. This is because the Facebook audience is older and there are more adults. Interestingly, 'EagleZ' fan pages moderators approve some certain content with JUZ Entertainment because there are some 'EagleZ' members who can get too close information related to their idols. Mostly it relates to the relationship between idols and their lovers. However, even though Ninety one has been performing during for 4 years JUZ Entertainment has only recently begun to actively contact with its fandom.

... 'Ninty-one' has been performing for over 4 years. During this time, they had no contact with fan groups. JUZ (JUZ Entertainment) contacted with us only recently. And only after when fan pages began to come out with complaints about their work. When we want to get some kind of information, we knock on JUZ for a long time. – O.Zh.

I don't like the fact that Ninety one had so little contact with us on social networks and very rarely upload new pictures. However, they could fix it during the tour by uploading a lot of content for which we are 'EagleZ' are happy. I hope only that this work will not finish after the tour. And you are probably aware that we have been waiting for their comeback for 8 months (means re-

lease new songs). Next time we hope that new clips and songs will come out faster. As I said, they have little contact with fans when there are no tours or concerts. – N.S.

I just want to get quick answers from JUZ (JUZ entertainment company) for my requests. I would like operational headquarters to be quicker in their work. Once I wrote to them about problems with ticketing, but they answered me in a day after» – B.E.

Among foreign fans of ‘EagleZ’, we can note a positive trend in the emergence of interest to learn Kazakh language. Through songs, they learn a new language and begin to perceive it. Further, one can observe that fans begin to memorize some words and have a small knowledge base about the language. To follow the news of the group, they subscribe to the Ninety one pages on social networks and enter to Kazakhstan ‘EagleZ’ fandom through social networks. Since their communication is mostly performed in the Kazakh language, they still have to study the language further. All this leads to the fact that foreign ‘EagleZ’ begin to search for language courses where they continue to study the Kazakh language on their own or through online platforms such as ‘soyle.kz’, ‘sozdik.kz’. However, the available material is not enough. Respondents noted that there is a need to create language online course for a foreign audience.

At first, it was difficult for everyone to sort this. At some point, I was even envious that I do not understand the language that these wonderful people speak, I do not understand the pure meaning of texts. I like to learn languages and new cultures, and I know that translation does not convey all of the power and all of the meaning from original words. I began to think about studying Kazakh. I start to use some online platforms. I wish I could master this language» – B.E.

If the active part of ‘EagleZ’ participates in discussions, translates songs, meets with each other, go to concerts and ready to spend money to purchase products: clothes, tickets, music (not more than \$ 50, according to the interview), then the passive part of the fandom only watches videos and listens to music. Despite this, even among the passive part of the fandom, there was an interest to learn the Kazakh language.

It would be great to learn the Kazakh language, but it is too difficult for me. I learned a few random Kazakh words, but I do not use them in everyday life. – B.K.

Among the respondents, there were also participants who were born in Kazakhstan but currently, reside abroad. For example, V.K. was born in Kazakhstan but lives in Italy. She has an international family (Korean-Italian). Since she moved to live in Italy for a long time ago she speaks Russian poorly and does not speak the Kazakh language at all. After she became seriously interested in Ninety-one group, she developed her interest in the Kazakh language that resulted in a certain sense of pride for her ethnic homeland. Also, V.K. noted that ‘Q-pop’ encourages international fans to learn and to speak in Kazakh language.

I don’t know Kazakh well enough to speak it, but thanks to ‘Q-pop’ I remembered a few words like ‘Salem’ (Hello), ‘Sau bol’ (Goodbye), ‘Alem’ (World), ‘Bala’ (Boy), ‘Kalyn Kalai’ (How are you doing), ‘Kaitadan’ (Again) ... I would like to learn Kazakh, but there are very few online courses. Of course, although I don’t live in Kazakhstan, I was born here and I consider Kazakhstan as my home country. I am proud that many foreigners finally noticed this huge country. Additionally, I became interested to study Kazakh culture after I saw cultural things in their video (video clip Sen men emes). – V.K.

## RQ2.

The founders of 'Q-pop', the Ninety one group, with their performance and songs, not only laid the foundation for a new pop music direction in Kazakhstan but also caused an increase in interest in the Kazakh language among the local population who do not speak Kazakh. Especially, it is interesting to note that, if earlier the titular ethnic group of Kazakhs divided themselves into those who do speak and do not speak Kazakh 'Q-pop' start to unite them. Kazakh speaking part of Kazakh ethnicity (younger generation) positively views how 'Q-pop' encourages other parts of ethnicity to learn their own mother tongue. Here 'Q-pop' can unite Kazakh ethnicity and rise interest to the culture and language. It should be noted that in Kazakhstan division between Kazakh speaking part of the population (here we mean in general all ethnicities) and Russian speaking part was huge. For example, there are schools (elementary, secondary, senior) where education is built only in either using Kazakh or in Russian languages. At universities, the same picture can be observed when, in one faculty, there are two streams of students studying in either Russian or Kazakh languages. Moreover, a lot of representatives of the titular nation study in Russian-language schools and graduate from universities where the main language of study in Russian. In music field this distinction also happened when the Russian-speaking part of different ethnic groups used to listen to music in Russian (Russian pop), or foreign music including 'K-pop', and Kazakh-speaking part listen to songs predominantly in the Kazakh language. Now, due to 'Q-pop', the Russian-speaking part of the Kazakhstan population start to actively show interest to learn the Kazakh language. Moreover, the Kazakh ethnic group begin to speak in their native language trying to use it more often in everyday life. Kazakh ethnicity that was divided by the language principle because of aggressive Soviet Union language policy now is on a process to unite.

Young people enter the ‘Q-pop’ fandoms and practice speaking, reading, writing and listening in the Kazakh language. Moreover, ‘Q-pop’ has led to an increase of nationalism, patriotism, and pride among ethnic Kazakhs. In particular, the Kazakh-speaking part of the respondents noted that they like the fact that ‘Q-pop’ increase popularity of Kazakh language. Additionally, respondents noted that they feel patriotism and honor when ‘Q-pop’ artists become popular in foreign markets.

I get a feeling of patriotism when people start to ask about Ninety one abroad. Here Ninety one motivates others to learn the Kazakh language through their music. Those people who have never heard about Kazakhstan want to learn the Kazakh language. – O.Zh.

I have graduated from a Kazakh school, so for me, there were not any problems with Kazakh, but I know many people who were motivated to speak more often in their native language after getting knowing ‘Ninty one’ group. I even know one fan of ‘EagleZ’, she is from Russia and now studying Kazakh language. Our youth always used to listen to either West or ‘K-pop’ music, with the ‘Q-pop’, many began to pay attention to the Kazakh language. – M.A.

In order to understand the language, you need to communicate on it. I try to talk with my Kazakh friend, she likes to help me and corrects me when I make mistakes. She is a native speaker and she is happy to help me. Yes, it is connected with ‘Q-pop’, and I want to add that she also tries to speak Kazakh more, her level of Kazakh is just a household level, but after Ninety one group, she decided to learn more about her native language. – K.D.

In the fandom of the Ninety one group ‘EagleZ’, we can observe a trend when Russian-speaking fans began to try to speak the Kazakh language, use the Kazakh language in their daily lives and this is observed not

only in Kazakhstan but also in Russia. Three respondents from Russia (representatives of the Russian 'EagleZ' fandom) also noted that they began to independently study the Kazakh language and separately use some of the words they heard in the Ninety one songs. Even representatives of the Kazakh-speaking 'EagleZ' fandom note that they are discovering new words that they did not know or did not use before the village. This is because the Ninety-one group uses in their songs words that they take from literature and which are not often found in everyday life. As ZAQ said in his interview, one of the goals of their work is not only to motivate young people to believe themselves, never give up, achieve their dreams but also to popularize the Kazakh language.

I have now started to use Kazakh more. Also, I demand from my younger brother 16 years to speak Kazakh with me. At work, colleagues also noticed that I started to use more Kazakh language in my everyday life. At the meeting with my school classmates, everyone was shocked when I spoke in Kazakh without an accent. – O.Zh.

I am fluent in the Kazakh language, but still learn some words from Ninety one songs. The last one was 'Taptauryñ' (stereotype). – M.A.

I want to speak more in the Kazakh language. This came because I listen to Ninety one songs every day, I also watch video blogs and see posts in Kazakh that inspires me to use more Kazakh in colloquial speech. There are many new words that I found. 'Taptauryñ'—stereotypes, 'Boseu'- coolness, 'Tymsha' -smog, 'Berish'-sediment from resentment, etc. – B.A.

Today, 'Q-pop' groups actively cultivate interest to the Kazakh language through their music—this is especially important for that part of the Kazakh ethnic group that does not or weakly speak in their mother tongue. Ninety one as the founder of 'Q-pop' went even further in the issue of awakening

the national identity of the Kazakh ethnic group and already uses cultural references in its videos to the traditions of the Kazakhs, in particular to the spirit of nomadism. For example, in the video clip ‘Men emes’ there are many references to the history of Kazakh ethnicity. This is due to the runic past. In the video, there are signs of ‘tamga’ (nomads traditional signs), similar in writings to the famous epic about ‘Kultegin’. Also, Bala (one of the group member) appears in the video with a dog that traditionally was breed in Kazakhstan. Its name is ‘tazi’. Eagle is a traditional symbol of Kazakhstan independence and A.Z. stands with it in his hand as well as ZAQ also occurs with it on his rap part. In the clip, we can see the frame of the traditional nomad’s dwelling together with the “shanyrak”, a symbol for nomads that means house, homeland, and family. In the text of the song, the word cradle is mentioned several times, which they are rocking, in this sense, it refers to the revival of the Kazakh culture and the Ninety one group do it precisely. In this sentence Ninety one directly says that they will wake up people and will not allow disappearing Kazakh national culture. In the rep part of ZAQ, he says that culture should not disappear, as an example, he says that he is a warrior, like Cthulhu and Sith. Of course, all these references to history, nomadism and the spirit of freedom were noticed by the fans. Local and foreign ‘EagleZ’ immediately began to search for information about symbols meanings and get to know about them.

...On Twitter, there is one page of foreign ‘EagleZ’. There they post the latest news and updates about the group. Naturally, it was difficult for them to translate original texts from the Kazakh language. So, they asked me to join them as a translator. Whenever n clip comes out, I have to explain to them many things that they are cannot understand not only in language but also in signs. Like in their clip for the song ‘Men emes’, there are many references for traditional Kazakh culture, history, and tradition. I am interested to explain to

them their meaning and they always admire and wonder it. It is very pleasant when foreigners are interested in our history and traditions. – B.A.

After I first heard Kazakh songs, I began to think that the Kazakh language is very beautiful. I started to get involved in the culture not so much, but after the ‘Men Emes’ clip just for the Interest I went to the Internet and started to read about the great people who were pictured in the clip at the very beginning. It was quite informative, to be honest. – N.S.

So, the music video has become a kind of symbiosis of the ancient Kazakh culture and modern time. It is noted that over 4 years, the Ninety one group has matured greatly in their work. If at first, the songs were predominantly about love, the importance of not being afraid to go beyond ordinary thinking and be brave, then singers began to raise social topics related to environmental protection, social issues. For example, in the song ‘Bari Biled’ that translates as ‘Everybody Knows’ it talks about pollution, teenage suicides, wars, the use of nuclear weapons and other global issues. The group calls on people to change within themselves and to unite among themselves to solve global problems such as natural disasters or violence in society. In the song ‘Mooz’ singers wonder why everyone has become so selfish, thinking about only themselves and their benefit. “People are like ice floes.”

I will add that few singers raise social topics through their songs as Ninety one do. Because of that, I value them a lot. – H.G.

## VI. Summary and discussion

Even though ‘Q-pop’ has visual similarities with K-pop inside its different music style. ‘Q-pop’ is a result of hybridity with Western pop

music and 'K-pop' system of entertainment that includes not only the vertical management system but also visual attributes (fashion, hair-style, make-up, etc.). In the beginning, 'Q-pop' was more similar to 'K-pop'. We proved it through the content analyses by comparing some 'Q-pop' and 'K-pop' songs' text and video. On the visual side Ninety one and Ziruza were similar to G-dragon; and 'Cl' performances, on the text side Zeinesh copied Taeyang song '눈, 코, 입' ('Eyes, Nose, Lips'). Here, 'K-pop' was like the right model of performance for young 'Q-pop' artists. However, 'Q-pop' did not just stop on it and was growing and maturing year by year. After, 2016 when other entertainment companies occurred and presented their own idols competition helped to change the market and rise new power. 'Q-pop' turn to be a more local phenomenon rather than just a copy of Western and 'K-pop'. As it local, so first and foremost its goal is to raise interest among Kazakh people and then to influence the world with their language/culture. The most important thing are the lyrics, catchy melody, use of Kazakh language is very important, especially if the artists want the world to know about it. Talking about language, the rap flow in Kazakh is almost always amazing, not many people notice how beautiful Kazakh can be and the raps demonstrate its musicality and flow.

The singers' clothing style really adds to their popularity since it's the thing that attracts many people. The video quality is very important it tells the story through visual representation and 'Q-pop' singers performed high-quality videos. The result was obvious 'Q-pop' began to rise and one of those indicators is a 'Q-pop' fandom. Each of the groups has their own fandom with its own name. The biggest one has Ninety one. They call themselves as 'EagleZ'. It's not just a local fandom that exists only in Kazakhstan but a global. They translate Ninety one songs to different languages including English, French, Greek, Turkish, Czech, Korean, Russian, Tatar, German, Portuguese, Finnish, Indonesian, Polish, Kyrgyz,

Chinese, and Uzbek. 2 out of 3 Russian fans of 'EagleZ' in their interview said that visited Kazakhstan in order to attend Ninety one concert, another one is planning to visit Kazakhstan next year. On a 'YouTube' under Ninety one songs there are comments from international 'EagleZ', they show they love and passion to their idols. Some of them even try to make covers and sing in the Kazakh language. On the other hand, other 'Q-pop' singers are not that popular worldwide like Ninety one, instead of being famous in the local market. Nevertheless, we can witness through the 'YouTube' comments that 'Q-pop' bands like 'Mad Men' and Ziruzza are becoming to be popular among foreign listeners. However, since Kazakhstan popular music entertainment system is not fully focused to the international markets there are some troubles for international fans to find subtitles for idols interview in English or even other 'Q-pop' singers except Ninety one. At least, when they present new video clip JUZ entertainment provides translation and subtitles in 3 languages: Kazak, Russian and English. Respondents noted that they would like to see more bands that represented themselves in a new genre such as 'Q-pop'. According to them this will develop industry and increase competition among them. This will result in the quality of songs, production, and artists' performance. Respondents said that they would like to Ninety one be more productive in their work and activities in collaboration with fans. For example, between the last release of the song 'Men Yemes' and the previous one 'Why'm' has passed 8 months and it was too long for respondents. They would like to Ninety one to work systematically and do not disappear for a long time. All respondents indicated in their responses that they would like to see a more responsible attitude from other producers who are performing in 'Q-pop' format. First and foremost, it relates to group members.

Despite the fact that groups appear recently producers often change groups' members. Meanwhile, some bands release only one song and then

quickly disappear. However, the most important thing is related to the lyrics and the quality of the clips. Respondents agree that Ninety one and Mad Men songs and clips quality are high, but could not say that about other brands or solo singers. It's also noted is noted that participants are willing to spend up about \$ 50 to buy things related to 'Q-pop'. Also, fans said they were buying Ninety one music through google play music and in an Appstore. We found that 'Q-pop' and 'K-pop' help young people feel more open and tolerant of other cultures. Moreover, some respondents noted that they have increased self-esteem about themselves. During the study, we found that 'Q-pop' raises interest among foreigners to learn the Kazakh language even though they try to sing in Kazakh language (Angelita, 2018; Angelita, 2019; Zaraku, 2018; Rena, 2018; Jai, 2018; Nice music, 2019; OtOEL TV, 2016). This suggests that the Kazakh language is slowly beginning to be recognized abroad. Secondly, 'Ninety-one' uses sophisticated Kazakh words in their music, words that are not often used in everyday life. Because of that, young people can learn new words that they did not know before. We also found several reasons for adopting 'Q-pop'. First is that singers of this trend are distinguished by modern images similar to Korean ones (clothing, hairstyle), bright video clips, strong choreography, and dance parties. Second, the performance of the songs in the Kazakh language, as well as the use of rap in the Kazakh language, was noted as a very positive factor. The third reason is the meaning of songs. The lyrics are mostly about love, female singers sing generally about the topic of love, and male singers often sing about how they suffer from love (which are all actual topics teenagers can understand).

To sum up, 'Q-pop' is a phenomenon that began to stimulate the Russian-speaking part of the Kazakh ethnicity to speak and learn their native language. All the respondents agreed that they start to use more Kazakh language in their daily life. This is a popular and relevant music

direction that arose in 2015 in Kazakhstan. Due to the fact that 'Q-pop' singers use only Kazakh language in their songs and start to use traditional elements from that Kazakh culture in their video clips we observe the massive restoration of interest among Russian-speaking part of Kazakh ethnicity to their own culture and history. Meanwhile, it connects and bounds young Kazakh-speaking and Russian-speaking parts of the Kazakh ethnicity together. Also, we noted among all respondents that stimulated different feelings among them such as pride and this happened not only among ethnic Kazakhs but also among other ethnic groups. This led to a sense of nationalism and national identity awakens among the young part of Kazakhstan people that was destroyed during the Soviet period. 'Q-pop' has become just music for young people, her voice. In 'Q-pop', artists teach their audience to be purposeful, not to be afraid of anything, and always achieve their goals. They are raising a new generation of Kazakhstanis who are starting to believe in themselves and their abilities. 'Q-pop' idols and bands have their own fandom. The best example is Ninety one with its fandom 'EagleZ'. Being the first local 'Q-pop' group, it expanded its popularity through the Internet among foreign listeners.

Global fandom of 'EagleZ' is located in Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkey, South Korea, U.S.A., Latin America, and Europe. They translate Ninety one songs into English, French, Greek, Turkish, Check, Korean, Russian, Tatar, German, Portuguese, Finish, Indonesian, Polish, Kyrgyz, Chinese, and Uzbek (lyricstranslate, n.d.). Although this so far only concerns mainly only one Ninety one group, other representatives of 'Q-pop' are also starting to gain their part of the foreign audience by forming their fandoms abroad of Kazakhstan. As a result, we can conclude that the 'Q-pop' now is at the stage of 'Q-pop' 1.0 Wave. It is still a more local phenomenon that has a goal to expand to the global market. For this purpose, it requires government support for the popularization of modern

Kazakhstani music, as well as the development of Entertainment companies within the country and a better approach to the work of other producers of the ‘Q-pop’ industry. Finally, since ‘Q-pop’ is a result of hybridity it needs more elements that will attract a global audience as it happened with K-pop.

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