

Q-POP, THE PRIDE OF KAZAKH YOUTH, AND ITS STIMULATION OF ETHNIC IDENTITY

by Kakim Danabayev, Jowon Park, and Piotr Bronislaw Konieczny



Photo credit: NINETY ONE on Instagram

Kakim Danabayev, PhD, Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, Hanyang University, Seoul, Republic of Korea •

Jowon Park, Associate Professor, Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, Hanyang University, Seoul, Republic of Korea •

Piotr Bronislaw Konieczny, Assistant Professor, College of Communication, Hanyang University, Seoul, Republic of Korea •

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Ethnic identity is a crucial topic in Kazakhstan, especially for ethnic Kazakh adolescents, who were born after the country gained independence. This part of the “Nazarbayev Generation” displays a complex combination of civic and ethnic identities.¹ Empirical studies about ethnic identity and popular culture reveal that previously marginalized ethnic groups often manage to “rediscover” their ethnic and cultural roots and transmit different identity statuses by applying pop cultural texts in adulthood.²



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In this study, we aim to explore whether the genre of Kazakhstani contemporary music known as Q-pop is related to national identity, ethnic identity, in-group interaction, and ethnic language proficiency and to study the factors that explain the popularity of Q-pop.

Our results show that while Q-pop is strongly related to national identity and ethnic identity, it has only a weak correlation with in-group interaction and ethnic language proficiency. Q-pop also explains a significant amount of variance in both national identity and ethnic identity. However, it did not predict a lot of variances in ethnic language proficiency and in-group interaction. The main factors that contributed to Q-pop's popularity were the usage of Kazakh language, songs' composition, and performance quality. Other factors included lyrics, idols' appearance, their singing ability, fashion style, and choreography. Notably, as with K-pop, the Internet was the main reason for the rapid growth of interest in Q-pop among study respondents. Most of the study participants were middle or high school students and learned about Q-pop from YouTube, social media, or their friends.

Ethnic Identity, National Identity, and the Role of Music

The idea that music can enhance a person's identity has been addressed by many scholars, most of whom have investigated how traditional music influences national identity.³ According to

1 Marlene Laruelle, "The Nazarbayev Generation: A Sociological Portrait," in *The Nazarbayev Generation: Youth in Kazakhstan*, ed. Marlene Laruelle (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019), 1-23; Aziz Burkhanov, "Youth and National Identity: Then and Now," in *The Nazarbayev Generation: Youth in Kazakhstan*, ed. Marlene Laruelle (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019), 49-69.

2 John Baily, "The Role of Music in the Creation of an Afghan National Identity, 1923–73," in *Music, Ethnicity and Identity: The Musical Construction of Place*, ed. Martin Stokes (Oxford: Berg, 1994), 45-60; Gerry Bloustien, "'Wigging People Out': Youth Music Practice and Mediated Communities," *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology* 17, no. 6 (2007): 446–462, doi:10.1002/casp.938; John Connell and Chris Gibson, *Sound Tracks: Popular Music, Identity, and Place* (London: Routledge, 2003); Simon Frith, "Towards an Aesthetic of Popular Music," in *Music and Society: The Politics of Composition, Performance and Reception*, ed. Richard Leppert and Susan McClary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 133–149; Simon Frith, ed., *Popular Music: Music and Identity, Vol. 4* (Hampshire: Psychology Press, 2004); Göran Folkestad, "National Identity and Music," in *Musical Identities*, ed. Raymond A.R. MacDonald (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 151–162; Vicki Mayer, *Producing Dreams, Consuming Youth: Mexican Americans and Mass Media* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003); David J. Hargreaves, Dorothy Miell, and Raymond A.R. MacDonald, "What Are Musical Identities and Why Are They Important," in *Musical Identities*, ed. Raymond A.R. MacDonald (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 1-20.

3 Bloustien, "'Wigging People Out'"; Connell and Gibson, *Sound Tracks*; Frith, "Towards an Aesthetic of Popular Music (2004)"; Folkestad, "National Identity and Music"; Mayer, *Producing Dreams, Consuming Youth*; Hargreaves, Miell, and MacDonald, "What Are Musical Identities and Why Are They Important"; Marie Gillespie, *Television, Ethnicity and Cultural Change* (London: Routledge, 1995); Rupa Huq, *Beyond Subculture: Pop, Youth and Identity in a Postcolonial World* (London: Routledge, 2007); Helen Kim, "A 'Desi' Diaspora? The Production of 'Desiness' and London's Asian Urban Music Scene," *Identities* 19, no. 5 (2012): 557–575; Bhavna Dave, "Minorities and Participation in Public Life: Kazakhstan," *UN Paper*, 2003, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/494603?ln=en>; Ken McLeod, *We Are the Champions: The Politics of Sports and Popular Music* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011); Irene Morra, *Britishness, Popular Music, and National Identity: The Making of Modern Britain* (London: Routledge, 2013); Adrian C. North and David J. Hargreaves, "Music and Adolescent Identity," *Music Education Research* 1, no. 1 (1999): 75-92,

Hargreaves and North, different cultures express their customs and ideology via music.⁴ Thus, music supports the construction of both individual and social identity. Larkey highlights that folk music with deep-rooted authentic, social, and linguistic sources is significant for national identity.⁵ Further studies have found that music can contribute to the process of building a national identity.⁶ A study of young people from six different countries—Brazil, Mexico, the Philippines, Hong Kong, New Zealand, and Germany—showed that traditional or folk music with deep historical, cultural, and linguistic roots is still an important marker of national identity.⁷ Scholars have also found that music contributes to the construction of social identity among youth.⁸

Specific genres of music are also associated with different social groups.⁹ Tarrant, North, and Hargreaves asked youth in the United Kingdom to what extent people from their school (in-group) or another school (out-group) liked certain music.¹⁰ They found that participants associated musical genres that they evaluated positively with the in-group and those that they evaluated negatively with the out-group. Tekman and Hortaçsu have found that those who listened to Arabesque (traditional Turkish music) were considered “losers” by study participants.¹¹ In studying the lyrics of popular Kurdish music, scholars analyzed how it depicts Kurdish nationalism using performance, sounds, and rhythms. Popular Kurdish music has been perceived as a form of cultural resistance against Turkish state policies.¹² Another study found that Asian local music (in this case, in

doi:10.1080/1461380990010107; Adrian C. North, David J. Hargreaves, and Susan A. O’Neill, “The Importance of Music to Adolescents,” *British Journal of Educational Psychology* 70, no. 2 (2000): 255–272, doi:10.1348/000709900158083; John O’Flynn, “National Identity and Music in Transition: Issues of Authenticity in a Global Setting,” in *Music, National Identity and the Politics of Location: Between the Global and the Local*, ed. Ian Biddle and Vanessa Knights (London: Routledge, 2016), 19–38; David C. Oh, *Second-Generation Korean Americans and Transnational Media: Diasporic Identifications* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015); Jung-Sun Park, “Negotiating Identity and Power in Transnational Cultural Consumption,” in *The Korean Wave: Korean Media Go Global*, ed. Youna Kim (London: Routledge, 2013), 120–134; John Shepherd, “Music and Social Categories,” in *The Cultural Study of Music: A Critical Introduction*, ed. Martin Clayton, Trevor Herbert, and Richard Middleton (New York: Routledge, 2003), 69–79; Dave Snell and Darrin Hodgetts, “Heavy Metal, Identity and the Social Negotiation of a Community of Practice,” *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology* 17, no. 6 (2007): 430–445, doi: 10.1002/casp.943; Larry Starr, Christopher Alan Waterman, George Clack, and Mildred Solá Neely, *American Popular Music* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of State, Bureau of International Information Programs, 2008); Mark Tarrant, Adrian C. North, and David J. Hargreaves, “Social Categorization, Self-Esteem, and the Estimated Musical Preferences of Male Adolescents,” *The Journal of Social Psychology* 141 (2001): 565–581; Hasan Gürkan Tekman and Nuran Hortacsu, “Aspects of Stylistic Knowledge: What Are Different Styles Like and Why Do We Listen to Them?” *Psychology of Music* 30, no. 1 (2002): 28–47, doi:10.1177/0305735602301005.

4 David J. Hargreaves and Adrian C. North, *The Social Psychology of Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

5 Edward Larkey, “Postwar German Popular Music: Americanization, the Cold War, and the Post-Nazi Heimat,” in *Music and German National Identity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 234–250.

6 Bloustien, “‘Wigging People Out’”; Boer, Fischer, Atilano, Hernández, García & Mendoza, 2013; Snell and Hodgetts, “Heavy Metal.”

7 Larkey, “Postwar German Popular Music.”

8 Hargreaves, Miell, and MacDonald, “What Are Musical Identities and Why Are They Important”; Tarrant, North, and Hargreaves, “Social Categorization.”

9 Shepherd, “Music and Social Categories.”

10 Tarrant, North, and Hargreaves, “Social Categorization.”

11 Tekman and Hortaçsu, “Aspects of Stylistic Knowledge.”

12 R. Dönmez, “Constructing Kurdish Nationalist Identity Through Lyrical Narratives in Popular Music,” *Alternative Politics* 4, no.3 (2012): 318.

Bangladesh) can fuse with Western lyrics; this new direction of music formulates and represents a new identity.¹³

Scholars agree that music can contribute to national identity.¹⁴ More specifically, some lyrics may influence national values¹⁵ and even inculcate certain social and political values among youth.¹⁶ Weisethaunet describes pop music as recording national histories, narratives, and experiences.¹⁷ Piroth concurs that music formulates and expresses the audience's identity.¹⁸ From a theoretical standpoint, there is a general sense that music serves to construct and strengthen a sense of national identity.¹⁹ The main point is that people tend to seek to belong to a particular social group that shares their musical preferences, making them able to determine their own identity.²⁰

Comparing Q-Pop with K-Pop

Over the past 30 years, Kazakhstan has experienced an influx of foreign cultural products and their gradual localization. The local musical industry boomed late in the first decade of the 2000s, as hip-hop and R&B rapidly achieved popularity among Kazakhstani youth. The boy bands All-Davai, 101, Metis, and Ghetto Dogs and the girl groups Rakhat-Lukum, Dauys International, Serdtseyedki, and FM became very famous in Kazakhstan. A number of artists who sang exclusively in Kazakh also gained prominence during this time, among them Kairat Nurtas, Muz-Art, Zhigitter, and Orda.²¹ This trend only grew in the 2010s, with the result that songs increasingly raised issues of ethnic history and homeland, while music videos showed more Kazakh cultural symbols. In many ways, these artists' songs reflected a popular search for ethnic roots and identity.²²

In 2014 producer Yerbolat Bedelkhan started a new TV show, "K-Top Idols," on which he and his team selected and trained future music artists, similarly to the approach taken by South Korean

13 Anis Pervez, "Music and Identity: A Frame Analysis of Contemporary Popular Bangladeshi Music," *Journal of Bangladesh Studies* 137 (2012): 1-14.

14 Connell and Gibson, *Sound Tracks*; Folkestad, "National Identity and Music"; Frith, "Towards an Aesthetic of Popular Music (2004)"; O'Flynn, "National Identity and Music in Transition"; Martin Stokes, "Introduction: Ethnicity, Identity and Music: The Musical Construction of Place," in *Ethnicity, Identity and Music*, ed. Martin Stokes (Oxford: Berg, 1994), 1-27.

15 Jon Stratton, "Nation Building and Australian Popular Music in the 1970s and 1980s," *Continuum* 20, no. 2 (2006): 243-252.

16 Scott Piroth, "Popular Music and Identity in Quebec," *American Review of Canadian Studies* 38, no. 2 (2008): 154-164.

17 Hans Weisethaunet, "Historiography and Complexities: Why Is Music National?" *Popular Music History* 2, no. 2 (2007): 169-199.

18 Piroth, "Popular Music and Identity in Quebec."

19 James D. Chopyak, "The Role of Music in Mass Media, Public Education and the Formation of a Malaysian National Culture," *Ethnomusicology* 31, no. 3 (1987): 431-454, doi:10.2307/851665; Frith, "Towards an Aesthetic of Popular Music (1987)."

20 North and Hargreaves, "Music and Adolescent Identity."

21 Kakim Danabayev and Jowon Park, "Q-Pop as a Phenomenon to Enhance New Nationalism in Post-Soviet Kazakhstan," *Asia Review* 9, no. 2 (2020): 85-129.

22 Megan Rancier, "Resurrecting the Nomads: Historical Nostalgia and Modern Nationalism in Contemporary Kazakh Popular Music Videos," *Popular Music and Society* 32 no. 3 (2009): 387-405. doi:10.1080/03007760902985833.

entertainment companies. On September 1, 2015, Ninety One debuted with the song “Ayiptama.” These young artists, born after 1990, surprised Kazakhstani show business. Their dyed hair, bright clothes, makeup, and skinny pants—a novelty in the country—became an object of discussion in the Kazakhstani media. Many performers accused them of having non-traditional sexual orientation, while others claimed that they were imitating South Korean performers. Some nationalists staged protests calling for them to be forbidden from performing.

Kazakhstani youth, meanwhile, were far more receptive. The “Ayiptama” music video held first place on the Gakku Top 10 chart for 20 weeks straight. The group’s second video, “Kaitadan,” repeated the success of “Ayiptama,” likewise topping the chart for 20 weeks. On September 19, 2016, the single even reached first place on the music charts in Turkey. Soon, Ninety One’s fans coalesced into a fandom, the Eaglez, which became the first official fandom in Kazakhstan. It was the Eaglez who coined the term “Q-pop” to distinguish this musical genre from other styles (Bedelkhan subsequently began using it, too). Here, “Q” stands for Kazakhstan (romanized as “Qazaqstan”).²³ This reflects the country’s move toward the Latinization of its alphabet and is now a trendy way of representing the new Kazakhstan, with a particular ideological connotation that raises feelings of ethnic pride. The Latin “Q” has replaced the Cyrillic “K” in the names of some companies, including Qazaq Air, while a well-known bank rebranded itself from Senym Bank to Qazaq Bank and clothing companies sell T-shirts emblazoned with the word “Qazaqstan.”

Following Ninety One’s success, eight entertainment companies established and presented the new generation of Q-pop artists: Ziruza, Newton, Juzim, Moonlight, EQ, DNA, Malika Yes, Mad Men, Crystalz, etc. Danabayev and Park found that among Q-pop listeners, these who identify as Kazakh-speakers take pride in Q-pop artists’ use and popularization of the Kazakh language, while Russophones’ sense of pride is connected to the popularity of Ninety One and other Q-pop bands among foreign listeners.²⁴ As of 2021, Ninety One remains the most popular Q-pop group, with fans in Kazakhstan and abroad. However, it should be noted that most Q-pop brands are not stable: they often change group members and are not consistent in their performances. Yet as Q-pop exits the crystallization phase, the term refers not merely to concrete groups but to a certain style of music and performance.

Even though Q-pop has adopted its lyrical style from the West, several points confirm that Q-pop mostly developed from K-pop. Q-pop, like K-pop, involves the use of energetic music that combines different genres, a vivid clothing style, and defiant behavior. As in South Korea, local entertainment companies train future label artists, albeit that this period is much shorter in Kazakhstan than in South Korea, where artists may spend years training before the company decides to launch a new group or artist. Kazakh entertainment companies also make their artists look like South Korean stars, with bright images, costumes, and hairstyles.

In another similarity, both sets of artists have English nicknames, use English titles for their songs, and include some English words in their songs; Q-pop choreography may also resemble that of South Korean idols. Using Western lyrics and mixing in English words serves to lower cultural and linguistic barriers to transnational cultural flow; it allows the audience to actively decode and re-appropriate the text in polysemic ways. This cultural fusion connects to Pieterse’s claim about a

²³ Danabayev and Park, “Q-Pop as a Phenomenon.”

²⁴ Ibid.

hybrid culture that is more resistant, democratic, diverse, and heterogeneous.²⁵ “Hybridity” with Western culture is also the dominant explanation for the global success of K-pop,²⁶ but Q-pop is decidedly still more of a local phenomenon. Q-pop performers sing in Kazakh (not in Russian) and raise topics relevant to local youth and the region—such as cultural heritage²⁷ and inequality²⁸—as well as more universal themes like self-belief,²⁹ self-love,³⁰ love,³¹ and relationships.³²

If Q-pop was initially inspired by K-pop, it is undergoing an ongoing process of crystallization as artists and entertainment companies experiment with music and styles. It is also constantly growing, expanding into other Central Asian countries³³ as well as abroad: Ninety One, for instance, has international fan groups in Turkey, Russia, the US, Europe, and Mexico.³⁴

Research Questions and Methods

Based on the extant literature, which describes a relationship between music and ethnic/national identity, we aim to explore whether that pattern holds among Q-pop listeners in Kazakhstan. Given that Q-pop is performed in the Kazakh language, we aim to explore whether it also can contribute to ethnic language proficiency among Kazakh adolescents. Finally, based on earlier literature that found that youth construct their own ethnic identity, values, and views due to interaction with peers,³⁵ we analyze whether Q-pop predicts interaction among peers.

25 Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *Globalization and Culture: Global Mélange* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009).

26 Doobo Shim, “Hybridity and the Rise of Korean Popular Culture in Asia,” *Media, Culture & Society* 28, no. 1 (2006): 25-44.

27 “NINETY ONE - MEN EMES [Official M/V],” YouTube video, 4:19, posted by “JUZ ENTERTAINMENT,” August 2, 2019, accessed August 25, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L43JtW9OwRs>.

28 “NINETY ONE - Taboo (ft. Irina Kairatovna) [Audio Visual],” YouTube video, 4:08, posted by “JUZ ENTERTAINMENT,” December 26, 2020, accessed August 25, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h10HSJqz6xs>.

29 “Crystal—Sen sulu,” YouTube video, 3:25, posted by “GAKKU TV,” October 5, 2018, accessed August 25, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kWdAokqNVGI>; “MAD MEN—‘HIKAYA’ [OFFICIAL M/V],” YouTube video, 3:43, posted by “MM ENTERTAINMENT,” November 1, 2020, accessed August 25, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UqoRCMOAJCg>.

30 “MALIKA YES—Ait solai,” YouTube video, 2:58, posted by “Malika YES,” May 25, 2021, accessed August 25, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mPw1AhiWLXk>.

31 “Newton—Shimayla,” YouTube video, 4:32, posted by “GAKKU TV,” April 18, 2018, accessed August 25, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ALHIM51fi0Q>; “Ziruza & ALAR - Тағы да,” YouTube video, 4:54, posted by “GAKKU TV,” March 4, 2019, accessed August 25, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ftgjWVvSqnQ>.

32 “JUZIM - Bağynbaimyn,” YouTube video, 3:21, posted by “AUEN / ӘУЕН,” April 6, 2019, accessed August 25, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V5c2PnRKU6E>.

33 Arailym Aulbekova, “Q-prodiuser,” *Forbes.kz*, February 2020, <https://forbes.kz/process/q-prodyuser/>.

34 Based on the availability of translations of their songs into these languages via LyricsTranslate, accessed August 25, 2021, <https://lyricstranslate.com/en/ninety-one-lyrics.html>.

35 Jean S. Phinney, Irma Romero, Monica Nava, and Dan Huang, “The Role of Language, Parents, and Peers in Ethnic Identity among Adolescents in Immigrant Families,” *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 30, no. 2 (2001): 135–153; Adriana J. Umaña-Taylor and Mark A. Fine, “Examining Ethnic Identity among Mexican-Origin Adolescents Living in the United States,” *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences* 26, no. 1 (2004): 36-59; Tiffany Yip, Eleanor K. Seaton, and Robert M. Sellers, “Interracial and Intra-racial Contact, School-Level

We develop the following research questions and hypotheses:

RQ1: What factors contribute to the popularity of Q-pop among youth in Kazakhstan?

RQ2: What is the relationship between Q-pop, national identity, ethnic identity, in-group interaction, and ethnic language proficiency?

H1: Q-pop contributes to Kazakh ethnic identity.

H2: Q-pop predicts Kazakh language proficiency.

H3: Q-pop predicts in-group interaction.

The data were collected in January-February 2020. A total of 879 respondents participated in an online survey. The survey form was built in English and then translated into Russian. The online survey was created with Google Forms and was spread in different Q-pop fandom groups on Instagram and Vkontakte (a Russian analogue of Facebook). Participation was entirely voluntary, without any incentives. The vast majority of study participants were female (822, or 93.5%); only 56 (6.4%) were male. This is in line with earlier studies of K-pop that found that most K-pop artists and fans were female and likely marks another similarity between the two.³⁶ In terms of regional representation, survey respondents came from Almaty (27.1%), Nur-Sultan (16.2%), the southern region (Shymkent, 5.8%), the western region (Atyrau, 4.8%; Aktau, 3.2%), the center of the country (Karaganda, 5.6%), and other rural areas (37.4%). Demographic questions consisted of information about gender, age, residence, completed education, occupation, monthly income, marital status, and language fluency.

Variables

National Identity

Phinney and her colleagues have investigated the process of building national identity in multi-ethnic countries.³⁷ They found that in the US, some ethnic groups showed blended bicultural

Diversity, and Change in Racial Identity Status among African American Adolescents," *Child Development* 81, no. 5 (2010): 1431-1444.

36 Xi Lin and Robert Rudolf, "Does K-Pop Reinforce Gender Inequalities? Empirical Evidence from a New Data Set," *Asian Women* 33, no. 4 (2017): 27-54; Valentina Marinescu and Ecaterina Balica, "Korean Cultural Products in Eastern Europe: A Case Study of the K-Pop Impact in Romania," *Region: Regional Studies of Russia, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia* 2, no. 1 (2013): 113-135; Dani Madrid-Morales and Bruno Lovric, "'Transatlantic Connection': K-Pop and K-Drama Fandom in Spain and Latin America," *The Journal of Fandom Studies* 3, no. 1 (2015): 23-41; P.V. Langit, K.S. Astuti, A. Yuliyanti, and R.M. Nasution, "The Pervasiveness of K-Pop in 21st Century Indonesia," in *21st Century Innovation in Music Education: Proceedings of the 1st International Conference of the Music Education Community (INTERCOME 2018), October 25-26, 2018, Yogyakarta, Indonesia* (London: Routledge, 2019), 31; Andrew Eungi Kim, Fitriya Mayasari, and Ingyu Oh, "When Tourist Audiences Encounter Each Other: Diverging Learning Behaviors of K-Pop Fans from Japan and Indonesia," *Korea Journal* 53, no. 4 (2013): 59-82; Kyong Yoon, "Global Imagination of K-Pop: Pop Music Fans' Lived Experiences of Cultural Hybridity," *Popular Music and Society* 41, no. 4 (2018): 373-389; Kyong Yoon, "Transnational Fandom in the Making: K-Pop Fans in Vancouver," *International Communication Gazette* 81, no. 2: 176-192.

37 Jean S. Phinney, "Ethnic Identity in Adolescents and Adults: A Review of Research," *Psychological Bulletin* 108, no. 3 (1990): 499-514; Phinney et al., "The Role of Language, Parents, and Peers."

identities.³⁸ In some cases, there was even a negative correlation between ethnic identity and American identity.³⁹ American identity was measured with a one-item question: “How strongly do you think of yourself as American?” Two items for the Kazakhstan national identity scale were modified from Phinney and Devich-Navarro’s study,⁴⁰ while “I feel good about being Kazakhstani” was adapted from the MEIM (Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure)⁴¹ and “I feel close to Kazakhstan” was adapted from the International Social Survey Program.⁴²

Ethnic Identity

MEIM is one of the most popular measures of ethnic identity among different ethnic groups. Originally, this scale included an attitudinal component (“affirmation and belonging,” 5 items), a cognitive component (“ethnic identity achievement,” 7 items), and a behavioral component (“ethnic behaviors,” 2 items).⁴³ Later, the MEIM scale was revised to a 10-item scale.⁴⁴ In 2007, Phinney and Ong tested alternative theoretical models of the revised 10-item ethnic identity measure’s underlying factor structure, using exploratory and then confirmatory factor analysis.⁴⁵ Scholars have widely used this scale. For this study, we used the revised MEIM-R measure for ethnic identity, with 6 items looking at two factors: exploration and commitment.

Ethnic Language Proficiency

The language proficiency variable applies the research model about the role of language in formulating ethnic identity.⁴⁶ The ethnic language proficiency scale contained four items focusing on how well respondents understand, speak, read, and write in their ethnic language. Answer options ranged from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very well).

In-Group Interaction

We modified a scale developed by Iwasaki and Havitz to measure psychological commitment and behavioral commitment.⁴⁷ This included incorporating two items from the original Phinney MEIM

38 Jean S. Phinney and Mona Devich-Navarro, “Variations in Bicultural Identification among African American and Mexican American Adolescents,” *Journal of Research on Adolescence* 7, no. 1 (1997): 3–32.

39 Jean S. Phinney, Cindy Lou Cantu, and Dawn A. Kurtz, “Ethnic and American Identity as Predictors of Self-Esteem among African American, Latino, and White Adolescents,” *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 26, no. 2 (1997): 165-185.

40 Phinney and Devich-Navarro, “Variations in Bicultural Identification.”

41 Jean S. Phinney, “The Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure: A New Scale for Use with Diverse Groups,” *Journal of Adolescent Research* 7, no. 2 (1992): 156-176.

42 ISSP Research Group, “International Social Survey Programme: National Identity II - ISSP 2003. GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA3910 Data file Version 2.1.0,” 2012, <https://doi.org/10.4232/1.11449>.

43 Phinney, “Ethnic Identity in Adolescents and Adults.”

44 Phinney, “The Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure.”

45 Jean S. Phinney and Anthony D. Ong, “Conceptualization and Measurement of Ethnic Identity: Current Status and Future Directions,” *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 54, no. 3 (2007): 271-281.

46 Phinney et al., “The Role of Language, Parents, and Peers.”

47 Yoshi Iwasaki and Mark E. Havitz, “Examining Relationships between Leisure Involvement, Psychological Commitment, and Loyalty to a Recreation Agency,” *Journal of Leisure Research* 36, no. 1 (2004): 45-72.

scale.⁴⁸ The 5-point Likert scale was used to measure all items (1 = strongly agree, 5 = strongly disagree).

Q-Pop

Items for Q-pop were adapted from questionnaires used in earlier studies related to K-Pop.⁴⁹ The features of K-pop that were most often discussed in these studies were the quality of the content, professionalism, dance performance, singing ability, and the attractive appearance of K-pop artists. Some scholars also consider the easy-to-follow melodies and music videos to be key features of K-pop.⁵⁰ For this study, we organized these features into four factors: artist, songs, language, and dance/music video. The appearance, singing ability, and fashion style of Q-pop stars are considered “artist” factors. The “dance/music video” factors included choreography quality, uniqueness, video quality, and storytelling of the content features. The composition quality, arrangement and performance of the song, and content of the lyrics were grouped under “songs.” Since Q-pop artists perform exclusively in the Kazakh language, we added a fourth factor that we named “language.”

Table 1. Popular Features of Q-Pop

Artists	Appearance
	Singing ability
	Fashion style
Dance/music video	Storytelling
	Uniqueness
	Choreography quality
	Composition quality

48 Phinney, “The Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure.”

49 Ju-Yeon Kim and Kyung-Mo Ahn, “Impact of K-Pop on Positive Feeling towards Korea, Consumption Behavior and Intention to Visit from Other Asian Countries,” *The Journal of the Korea Contents Association* 12, no. 1 (2012): 516-524; Hyo Jun Moon and Sung Hyun Park, “An Exploratory Study: The Popular Factors and Likability of Korean Wave,” *Journal of International Area Studies* 17, no. 3 (2013): 19-47; S.W. Park, “The Korea Wave in East Asia: A Study on Audience Analysis in Korea, China and Japan,” *Korean Journal of Communication Studies* 23, no. 1 (2015): 41-77.

50 Hyo-Jin Moon and Sung-Hyun Park, “A Study the Relation between Popular Factors and Likability of Hallyu and the National Image,” *Journal of Public Relations* 16, no. 4 (2012): 247-279, <https://www.earticle.net/Article/A231650> (in Korean).

Songs	Arrangement/performance
	Content of lyrics
Language	Preference for Kazakh use
	Usage of Kazakh language
	Interest about Kazakh language
	Wish to learn Kazakh language
	Learning new words

Demographic Variables

Demographic information included: gender, age, residence, education level, occupation, average income level, marital status, ethnicity, language used by parents in daily life, participants' mother tongue, the language(s) in which they are fluent, and the language they use most in daily life.

Results

The vast majority of survey participants were members of the titular ethnicity, Kazakhs (794 participants, 90.3%), while those of mixed ethnic origins comprised just 4.4% of the total (39 participants) and 5.3% were from other ethnic backgrounds. This clearly shows that Q-pop is more popular among ethnic Kazakhs. Respondents tended to be in their teens (729 participants, 82.9%) or twenties (125 participants, 14.2%); less than 3% (24) reported being older than 30. These young people were predominantly women (females comprised 93.5% of the sample, or 822 participants) and students (73%, 642). The vast majority of respondents (809, or 92%) were single; only 2.7% (24) were married. Most Q-pop fans have a low income of less than \$100 per month (583 participants, 71.5%); only 27.5% of respondents enjoyed greater income.

Research Question 1

Factor analysis and reliability analysis were performed to reveal the popular features of Q-pop and study the reliability of other variables' constructs. To check the results of prevalent factors that attract Q-pop fans, 14 items—grouped into four main factors—were analyzed. The results show that these 14 variables can be reduced to a single factor, "Songs," that explains 77.141% of the variance (eigenvalue = 10.800; explained variance = 77.141%). This factor covers songs' composition quality, arrangement performance, and content of lyrics.

To clarify the structure of the factors, the VARIMAX rotation method was performed. The KMO value was .970, which was higher than the reference value of .50. This appropriateness was further supported by Bartlett's test of sphericity (Chi-square=15220.076, $p < .001$). The Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranged from 0.902 to 0.963, indicating high reliability of each dimension's items. The findings supported earlier qualitative research that identified three main factors driving Q-pop's popularity: usage of the Kazakh language, the content of songs, and the quality of performances. In quantitative analysis, "Songs' composition quality" (.925), "Arrangements/performance" (.924), and "Preference for Kazakh use" (.921) were the three top features that accounted for the popularity of Q-pop. These were followed by "Content of lyrics," "Appearance," "Singing ability," "Fashion style," "Storytelling," "Usage of the Kazakh language," "Interest in the Kazakh language," "Uniqueness," "Wish to learn the Kazakh language," "Learning new words," and "Choreography quality."

Based on these results, the factor that most explains the popularity of Q-pop is the Song factor. After the Song factor, the Language factor showed the highest factor loading. In this regard, Kazakh language usage is welcomed and Q-pop has stimulated interest in the language. The Artists factor—which consisted of idols' appearances, fashion, and singing ability—also showed a high level of loading. Within this category, artists' appearance was particularly significant. Finally, the storytelling, dance style, and quality of the choreography revealed a high load level. Like their South Korean counterparts, Q-pop artists perform an extreme level of dancing and choreography that was previously uncommon.

Research Question 2

A Pearson product-moment correlation was performed to examine the relationship between ethnic identity and Q-pop and check relations between other variables from the study model. It was found that Q-pop was strongly positively and statistically significantly related to national identity ($r = .54^{**}$, $n = 811$, $p < .001$). A Pearson correlation examined the relationship between Q-pop and ethnic identity. The relationship was moderately positive and statistically significant ($r = .37^{**}$, $n = 843$, $p < .001$). There was a weak positive correlation between Q-pop in-group interaction and ethnic language proficiency, which was statistically significant ($r = .21^{**}$, $n = 852$, $p < .001$), ($r = .12^{**}$, $n = 868$, $p < .001$).

A Pearson correlation analysis revealed a strong positive and statistically significant correlation between ethnic identity and national identity ($r = .58^{**}$, $n = 829$, $p < .001$). At the same time, ethnic identity showed a strong positive and statistically significant correlation with in-group interaction ($r = .60^{**}$, $n = 829$, $p < .001$). In-group interaction showed a moderate positive correlation with national identity ($r = .43^{**}$, $n = 829$, $p < .001$). Finally, Pearson correlation analysis showed a weak correlation between ethnic language proficiency and both ethnic identity ($r = .28^{**}$, $n = 836$, $p < .001$) and in-group interaction ($r = .28^{**}$, $n = 836$, $p < .001$). Table 2 summarizes the results of the Pearson correlations analysis.

Table 2. Summary of Pearson Correlations Analysis

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
1. Q-pop					
2. National identity			.54**		
3. Ethnic identity			.37**	.58**	
4. In-group interaction	.21**		.43**	.60**	
5. Ethnic language proficiency	.12**	.30*		.28**	.28**

Note. ** Correlation is statistically significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Factor analysis was performed to reduce the overall number of items for other variables. These included national identity, self-esteem, ethnic identity, identification with the majority group, acculturation orientation, and in-group interaction. Four questions related to the national identity factor analysis yielded one factor explaining a total of 79.745% of the variance for the entire set of variables. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin value was .839, exceeding 0.80 and indicating the appropriateness of using the factor analysis technique. This appropriateness was further supported by the significant result from Bartlett’s test of sphericity ($\chi^2 = 2542.076$, $p < .001$). Cronbach’s alpha coefficients ranged from .817 to .924, indicating sufficient reliability of the measures. Seven questions related to “Ethnic identity” referred to a person belonging to a participant’s own ethnic group. This analysis yielded one factor explaining a total of 66.091% of the variance for the entire set of variables. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin value was .876, exceeding 0.80 and indicating the appropriateness of using this factor analysis technique. The appropriateness was further supported by the significant result from Bartlett’s sphericity test ($\chi^2 = 3963.678$, $p < .001$). Cronbach’s alpha coefficients ranged from .701 to .863, indicating sufficient reliability of the measures.

Four questions related to “ethnic language proficiency” described how well youth understood, spoke, read, and wrote their ethnic language. This analysis yielded one factor explaining 86.816% of the variance for the entire set of variables. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin value was .852, exceeding 0.80 and indicating the appropriateness of using this factor analysis technique. The appropriateness was further supported by the significant result from Bartlett’s test of sphericity ($\chi^2 = 3520.807$, $p < .001$). Cronbach’s alpha coefficients ranged from .922 to .945, indicating sufficient reliability of the measures.

Four questions related to “in-group interaction” described social interaction between peers in one group. This analysis yielded one factor explaining a total of 75.750% of the variance for the entire set of variables. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin value was .773, exceeding 0.80 and indicating the appropriateness of using this factor analysis technique. The appropriateness was further supported by the significant result from Bartlett’s test of sphericity ($\chi^2 = 2205.958$, $p < .001$). Cronbach’s alpha coefficients ranged from .826 to .904, indicating sufficient reliability of the measures.

Study Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3

Based on the results of factor analysis, a multiple regression was carried out to investigate whether Q-pop predicts national identity, ethnic identity, in-group interaction, and ethnic language proficiency. The results of the regression suggested that Q-pop explained 29.3% of the variance of national identity ($R^2 = .293$, $F(1,791) = 329.112$, $p = .000$). Q-pop significantly predicted national identity ($B = .490$, $t = 18.141$, $p = .000$).

Another set of multiple regression analysis was used to develop a model for predicting ethnic identity. R2 for the overall model was 13.6%, with a small size effect. As a whole, the model was significant to predict ethnic identity ($R^2 = .136$, $F(1,791) = 125.713$, $p = .000$). Q-pop significantly predicted ethnic identity ($B = .340$, $t = 11.212$, $p = .000$).

Table 3. Summary of Linear Regression Analysis for Predicting Q-Pop's Influence on Dependent Variables from the Research Model

Variables	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Collinearity		R2
						Tolerance	VIF	
National Identity	.490	.027	.542	18.141	.000	1.000	1.000	.293
Ethnic identity	.340	.030	.370	11.212	.000	1.000	1.000	.136
In-group interaction	.195	.033	.206	5.920	.000	1.000	1.000	.041
Ethnic language proficiency	.088	.025	.124	3.528	.000	1.000	1.000	.015

Another set of multiple regression analysis was performed to investigate whether Q-pop significantly predicts in-group interaction and ethnic language proficiency. Though the model significantly predicted in-group interaction ($R^2 = .041$, $F(1,792) = 35.041$, $p = .000$, $B = .195$, $t = 5.920$, $p = .000$) and ethnic language proficiency ($R^2 = .015$, $F(1,802) = 12.448$, $p = .000$, $B = .088$, $t = 3.528$, $p = .001$), it had a small size effect that explained 4.1% and 1.5% of investigated variances, respectively.

Discussion

Folk music, with its deep historical, cultural, and linguistic roots, has traditionally been an important marker for national identity.⁵¹ In this study, we aimed to explore whether the Kazakhstani contemporary music genre known as Q-pop relates to national identity, ethnic identity, in-group interaction, and ethnic language proficiency and can contribute to national identity and ethnic identity. We also aimed to study the factors that might explain the rapid growth of Q-pop's popularity in Kazakhstan.

We found that one reason for the rapid growth of Q-pop was the Internet. Previous studies found that technological advances, specifically the growth of the Internet, and globalization were behind

⁵¹ Larkey, "Postwar German Popular Music."

the global success of similar music phenomenon K-pop.⁵² In this study, we found that the Internet was likewise one of the main factors driving the growth of Q-pop. Respondents shared that they had learned about Q-pop mainly from YouTube, social media or their friends.

Demographic analysis showed that most Q-pop fans were females (822, 93.5%). In the literature related to K-pop, a similar pattern has likewise been identified.⁵³ Hence, K-pop and Q-pop display similar patterns when it comes to audience gender.

Regarding the primary factors that contributed to Q-pop's popularity, we found that the main factor was "Songs," which was comprised of three features: "Composition quality," "Arrangements/performance," and "Preference for Kazakh use." The next most popular features were "Content of lyrics," "Appearance," "Singing ability," "Fashion style," "Storytelling," "Usage of Kazakh language," "Interest in the Kazakh language," "Uniqueness," "Wish to learn the Kazakh language," "Learning new words," and "Choreography quality."

In this study we aimed to explore the relationship between Q-pop, national identity, ethnic identity, in-group interaction, and ethnic language proficiency. A Pearson product-moment correlation revealed that Q-pop was strongly positively and statistically significantly related to national identity and had a moderately positive and statistically significant relationship with ethnic identity. There was a weak positive correlation between Q-pop, in-group interaction, and ethnic language proficiency. The weaker correlation between Q-Pop and ethnic language proficiency echoed the finding of Danabayev and Park's earlier study that Q-Pop encouraged respondents to use specific words in their daily life but was not truly correlated with language fluency.⁵⁴ Additionally, the study found a positive and statistically significant correlation between ethnic identity and national identity. Ethnic identity also showed a strong positive and statistically significant correlation with in-group interaction. Hence, the more Q-pop fans interact with each other, the higher level of ethnic identity they display.

We hypothesized that Q-pop might contribute to national and ethnic identity. The results showed that Q-pop can explain 29.3% of national identity variance and 13.6% of ethnic identity variance. These results supported this hypothesis and demonstrated that contemporary music can predict a person's national and ethnic identities.

Since Q-pop artists perform exclusively in Kazakh language, we hypothesized that Q-pop would predict ethnic language proficiency among Kazakhstani adolescents. This hypothesis was not confirmed: the results of the regression indicated that Q-pop had a small size effect that explained 1.5% of ethnic language proficiency. Consequently, there is a need to explore other factors that might influence ethnic language proficiency. Notably, study participants displayed different levels of Kazakh language fluency: while 65.1% of respondents confirmed their fluency in Kazakh, 21.5%

52 John Lie, "What Is the K in K-Pop? South Korean Popular Music, the Culture Industry, and National Identity," *Korea Observer* 43, no. 3 (2012): 339-363; Ingyu Oh, "The Globalization of K-Pop: Korea's Place in the Global Music Industry," *Korea Observer* 44, no. 3 (2013): 389-409.

53 Lin and Rudolf, "Does K-Pop Reinforce Gender Inequalities?"; Marinescu and Balica, "Korean Cultural Products in Eastern Europe"; Madrid-Morales and Lovric, "Transatlantic Connection"; Langit et al., "The Pervasiveness of K-Pop in 21st Century Indonesia"; Kim, Mayasari, and Oh, "When Tourist Audiences Encounter Each Other"; Yoon, "Global Imagination of K-Pop"; Yoon, "Transnational Fandom in the Making."

54 Danabayev and Park, "Q-Pop as a Phenomenon."

indicated that they were fluent in Russian only and 13.4% stated that they were fluent in both languages. At the same time, 61.4% of respondents indicated that they tend to use Kazakh in daily life, 32.2% said that they used Russian, and just 6.2% expressed that they used both. Usage of the Kazakh language among the older generation of respondents' families is even smaller: only 49.2% of participants' parents use the Kazakh language; 7.6% of them prefer to use Russian, while 43.2% use a mixture of Russian and Kazakh.

We identified that Q-pop had a small effect on in-group interaction. Therefore, Q-pop does not significantly predict in-group interaction. It should be noted that for the Kazakh ethnic group, the issue of in-group interaction is essential because ethnic Kazaks tend to be linguistically divided between those who are fluent in Kazakh and those who are not. Future research should engage in further study about in-group interaction and the factors that contribute to this interaction.

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ORCID

Kakim Danabayev: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0716-5225>

Appendix. Descriptive Statistics about Survey Participants

	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	56	6.4%
	Female	822	93.5%
	Missing value 0.1		
Age	Under 20	729	82.9%
	20~29	125	14.2%
	30~39	20	2.3%
	40 and over	4	0.5%
	Missing value 0.1		
Residence Location	Almaty	238	27.1%
	Nursultan	142	16.2%
	Shymkent	51	5.8%
	Karaganda	49	5.6%
	Atyrau	42	4.8%
	Aktau	28	3.2%
	Other	329	37.4%
Education	Elementary school	27	3.1%
	Middle school	359	40.8%
	High School	340	38.7%
	Graduate	128	14.6%
	Postgraduate	24	2.7%
	Missing value 0.1		
Occupation	Office worker	49	5.6%
	Self-employed	43	4.9%
	Government employee	14	1.6%
	Specialized professional	20	2.3%
	Student	642	73%
	Housewife	8	0.9%
	Unemployed	75	8.5%
	Missing value 3.2		
Income (monthly)	Less than \$100	583	66.3%
	\$101 – \$300	152	17.3%
	\$301 - \$600	46	5.2%
	\$601 - \$700	18	2%
	More than \$700	26	3%
	Missing value 6.1		
Marital status	Married	24	2.7%
	Single	809	92%
	Missing value 5.2		