Between Kazakh Batyrs and Feminization of

Masculinity: Korean Wave as Means of Transformation

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Submitted to the Department of Sociology,

Central European University, Budapest, in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master

of Arts degree in Sociology and Social Anthropology

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Abstract

Over the past four years, contemporary Kazakhstani popular culture scene has seen the emergence of alternative constructions of masculinity represented by the members of *Q-pop* boy groups and male fans of Korean popular culture. In this paper, I explore the importance of this emerging trend of feminization of masculinity, or embracing of the soft masculinity, by observing and analyzing audience reception and the appearances of those young men who have chosen to represent themselves in these unconventional ways. The research links significant concepts like masculinity, gendered representation of the self, and the cultural identity. Rather than discussing 'softening' as a sign of cultural identity loss and total rejection of hegemonic masculinity, I argue that these young male performers and fans distance themselves from culturally defined constructions of masculinity to explore alternative gender identities. The intention to explore alternative masculinity implies a fear on the part of conservative and traditionalist society over the gender boundary-crossing practice, which threatens the stability of culturally defined gender hegemony and has an influence on the sense of Kazakhness.

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1.   Introduction

Making a start in East Asian region in the 1990s, the Korean Wave or *Hallyu* has grown to be a global phenomenon in last years as confirmed by the exceptional success of PSY' hit song "Gangnam Style" in 2012 and BTS' Billboard charts topping album "Love Yourself: Tear" in 2018. Chinese journalists introduced this term (Korean Wave) back in the 1990s to describe a surprising wave of popularity experienced by Korean popular culture outside of South Korea. Even though it began as a "phenomenon" recognized in some parts of East Asia, lately, there was an influx of Korean popular culture products outside the region to more worldwide audiences like Southeast Asia, US, South and North America, Europe, Australia, the Middle East, Africa and Central Asia (KOCIS, 2011:11). Korean popular culture includes TV drama series, films, pop music, dancing, specific fandom and fan identity, and less frequently fashion, cuisine, video gaming, language, and international tourism. South Korea has become a producer of transnational popular culture, whose products are exported globally (Jang and Paik, 2012:196).

To an indifferent spectator, *Hallyu* may not seem so extraordinary, because he or she might find it reflecting the global popularity of Japanese popular culture (anime, sushi as well as video gaming) throughout the 2000s. However, it is necessary to understand that these two cultures have noteworthy distinctions between themselves. The first difference is that *Hallyu* has been developed and promoted as government's official strategy to resuscitate the national economy. In this regard, Korean Wave products are designed to attract a comprehensive audience surpassing regional as well as national borders. The second difference is that *Hallyu's* global success is mostly due to "the coming of the digital age in that, in addition to the established routes, products are presented, distributed, and consumed through the Internet and social media by both entertainment agencies and enthusiastic fans" (Kuwahara, 2014:1).

This introductory chapter consists of an overview of the research topic's general context as well as the main question addressed in this research. The chapter follows with the outline of the theoretical framework, methodology and case study.

1.1.   General context

There are a number of researches (see, Joo 2011; Lee 2009; Shim 2006; Jung 2011 and etc.) dedicated to analyze *Hallyu* with an eye to understand, for example, what exactly is so attracting about the Korean Wave to the worldwide audience, what role does the popular culture play as an instrument of national and global economic strategy, how does a certain culture get glocalized that is, culturally adopted and consumed, and what changes does *Hallyu* bring to South Korea and other consumer-countries. Firstly, the research will present a brief general review of answers to the aforementioned issues. Then, it will specifically examine how the hybrid nature of *Hallyu,* with male singer-performers' representation of versatile and overlapping masculinities, has significantly contributed to the process of redefining conceptualizations of masculinity not only in East Asian region but across the world, I will particularly focus on the case of Kazakhstan.

The emergence of *kkonminam* (which means, "flower-like handsome men") as well as the dissemination of *soft masculine* images in modern Korean popular culture suggest that they represent a new type of masculinity, that is embraced by men who less likely to correspond with the hegemonic discourses of hypermusculinity and aspire to adhere another set of standards and principles (Jung 2011; Moon 2002; Choi 1998). In contrast to hegemonic representations of masculinity, soft masculinity typically features attentive, tender, expressive and emotive images. According to Joanna Elfving-Hwang, soft masculine men are "well-groomed and fashionably dressed, accessorized with the latest man-bag, excessively concerned with their looks, and not averse to showing off their well-toned muscular bodies when an opportunity arises" (2011:2). The soft masculine imagery may thus be considered as one element of a far broader dissemination

of what Laura Miller (2006:5) calls as "transnational body aesthetics and practices", where contemporary South Korean concepts of male beauty are built on.

The research on representations of masculinity in popular culture and its possible influence goes beyond the East Asian context to study a group of young fans, anti-fans and performers of *Hallyu* and *K-pop* inspired *Q-pop* (Kazakh – Qazaq – popular music) in Kazakhstan. Drawing on theories of gender studies, performance studies, media studies as well as on the analysis of bodily representations and public reception of hybrid masculinity from Kazakhstani media coverage, I examine how contemporary Kazakh society experiences the emergence of soft masculinity represented in the cultural industry and how it allows Kazakh young men, who are marginalized to embody rather inclusive forms of hegemonic masculinity, to construct and practice new types of masculine identity in a socially conservative society. In other words, the question is whether or not the increasing occurrence as well as acceptance of these allegedly new types of masculinities evidence a change in the symbolic order which informs Kazakh cultural portrayals of gender? The current situation with the popularity of *Hallyu* and *Q-pop* in Kazakhstan suggests that embodiment of soft masculine images lead to a sense of concern and fear from the part of conservative-patriarchal society about the practice of crossing borders of gender identity, which seriously disputes the dynamics of cultural gender hegemony.

1.2. Theoretical Framework

As the main question of this study examines the possible changes in masculine identity of young Kazakh fans of *Hallyu* and *Q-pop* with the following change in their Kazakh identity, the discussion should start with identifying what identity is at the first place. Stuart Hall asserts that identities have an ability to change over the time, "instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished historical fact, we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production', which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside" (1989:68). In popular culture discourses, the performance of inauthentic gender identity is a frequently raised question.

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According to Matthew Stahl, it is not only boy group music but also a particular type of masculinity embodied by them that makes these groups keep "struggling to conform to different criteria of authenticity and legitimacy" (2002:324). The way how they perform gender is also mostly viewed as rather "inauthentic" since it is often considered as not masculine enough. Judith Butler in her book *Gender Trouble* asserts, that social world has predominant gendered essentialism in it and yet to fully recognize that, "[t]here is no gender identity behind the expression of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results." (1999:33). Therefore, masculinity should be regularly negotiated within the framework of both social and cultural basis, or as asserted by Butler "gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts" (1988:519). In other words, gender identity is unstable and socially constructed.

Also, her theory of gender performativity challenges idea of gendered body in contrary to its performance, in the book *Bodies that Matter*, Butler points out that "hegemonic heterosexuality is itself a constant and repetitive effort to imitate its own idealizations" (1993:85), and argues that the very concept of gender is a burden and drag because it should constantly imitate socially accepted norms of masculinity and femininity. Erving Goffman in his book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life,* using the theater, also examines people's interpersonal interactions and how they in a way "perform" to display a certain image. He refers to a person's social life is a large stage where he or she performs, and as a result of his or her contrasting behavior in private – backstage setting, and public – frontstage environment the social order as well as conventional communication rules are maintained (1990). Discussing Butler is important because the question of gender is raised in the moments when the socially defined boundaries of gender are blurred and crossed. The case of portraying gender in South Korean popular culture illustrates how boy groups stretch borders of masculinity as they perform alternative masculinity when a certain

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environment and situation require them to do so.

As a result of gender-polarized society, where societies tend to have femininity and masculinity at the opposite ends of gender relations and identity, representations of soft masculinity by idols, which are seen as more feminine encounters a criticism from a mainstream society appreciating the embodiment of hegemonic masculinity, since these versatile masculinities threaten the stability of socially conventional gender identities. R.W. Connell's theory on *masculinity* is considered as the most significant in the field of man and masculinity. Similarly, to Butler, Connell suggests that rather than "being masculine", there is a concept of "doing gender", which explains that masculinity is culturally constructed. According to Connell, the production and maintenance of masculinity is done by culturally distinctive repetitive practices, and these practices such as, acting, dressing, or speaking are performed in specifically gendered ways (Connell 1995: 6, 35, 80). Drawing on Connell's masculinity concept as being non-singular and heterogeneous, this part of the thesis will discuss the ways in which Kazakh masculinities have gone through the process of deconstruction and hybridization in relation to contemporary Kazakhstan's specific social and political context and cultural dynamics.

Taking into account how conservative and traditional Kazakh society heavily criticizes local *Q-pop* performers for their physical appearance that reflects soft masculine traits and threatening effect on "Kazakhness", a sociological concept of *"moral panic"* introduced by Stanley Cohen (1972) will be used to explain mainstream society's overreaction on the issue of masculinity and loss of 'true' Kazakh identity. Also, it is possible to understand why a certain group of people is blamed to be a threat to societal values and morality, by recognizing the special roles men and women, as well as sense of identity occupy in the honor and shame system of Kazakh culture. Applying the concepts honor and shame to the issue of versatile Kazakh masculinities, the majority of Kazakh male community shame the Q-pop performers because by their appearance the performers "dishonor" hyper-masculinity. David Gilmore (1987) suggests that the

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uncertainty among men about the fulfillment of a masculine role by other men is a contributing factor for a rather aggressive defense of honor.

1.3. Methodology and Main Case study

I conducted in-depth interviews with *Hallyu* and *Q-pop* fans during my fieldwork in Kazakhstan (Astana, Almaty) to address the ways in which Korean popular culture is capable of offering Kazakh men an opportunity to question, criticize, and may be reject the hegemonic masculinity provided by historical and cultural roots of the state and similarly suggest an alternative type of masculine identity more pertinent to the changing context of local popular culture landscape. I used the semi-structural format of interviewing to offer research participants a freedom to express their thoughts on the issue beyond the scope of asked questions. I interviewed 25 Kazakh men and women who are between 18 and 25 years of age and were undergraduate or graduate students. Some of them identified themselves as Korean culture fans that had been enjoying the culture for one to four years. The group of participants that identified themselves as *K-poppers* was purposely recruited to take part in the interview. I was curious about their K-pop cover dance performer identity in addition to their fan identity. In general, participants were selected by university student clubs, with additional interviewees identified through the means of snowballing method.

The participants responded to a set of questions from around a variety of specific topics, for example, (1) How did you become interested in joining Korean Wave fandom? (2) What is your attitude towards the nature of Korean Wave's gendered construction in Kazakhstan? (3) How do you understand and accept the gendered construction of masculinity in Korean popular culture texts as opposed to what masculinity means in Kazakhstan? (4) Are these Korean constructions of masculinity appealing or threatening? (5) How do you interact with and react to a new model of masculinity represented in Korean popular culture and that is today glocalized in Kazakhstani popular culture?

As aforementioned, I will also focus on male *Q-pop* groups that lend themselves as a case study of constructions of versatile masculinities in the Kazakhstani media. The global spread of Korean Wave and desire to adopt some of its features gave these male performers an opportunity to experience the moment of glory and rebellion on the rather conservative and traditionalist Kazakhstani media scene. Examining their appearances on different Kazakhstani media outlets – from music and concert videos, photoshoots and social media updates – this research attempts to identify the diverse types of masculinity represented by *Q-pop* groups' specific characters, and takes into consideration emerging masculinities' possible importance and influence within the bigger Kazakhstani popular culture landscape wherein they have been dispersed and consumed.

Chapter 2: The New Era of Korean Popular culture

The historical perspective is important to understand the cultural industry in contemporary South Korea, therefore, the chapter discusses the Korean Wave in a more detailed way. In order to begin the discussion, I should refer back to the definition of the Korean Wave to, Mark Ravina (2009:1) asserts that, "in the narrowest sense, the "Korean Wave" (*hallyu* 한류 in Korean) refers to a surge in the international visibility of Korean culture. Because the Korean Wave involves the export of Korean culture, it is inherently both a national phenomenon and a transnational phenomenon". Numerous studies on *Hallyu's* (See, for example, Ju 2014; Jung 2014; Joo 2011) regional and global popularity indicate that, the phenomenon outbreak from an unprecedented success of Korean TV dramas in China and Taiwan back in late 1990s. Two of those dramas, namely *What is Love All About?* and *Stars in My Heart,* aired on a public Chinese TV station (CCTV) in 1997 and gained an enormous popularity among the viewers. The success of these K-dramas[1] eventually paved the way for *Hallyu* in China and other neighboring Asian states (Kim, 2007:15). Interestingly, these were the first foreign contents shown to the local audience. According to Sue Jin Lee (2011:86), "The trend soon spread out from the mainland to Taiwan,

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[1] Short for Korean TV dramas

Hong Kong, affecting ethnic Chinese in other Asian countries and eventually Japan, leading all these Asian peoples to be fascinated by not only Korean music and drama, but also its films, food and fashion. Accordingly, Korean cultural products have become a catalyst for curiosity about Korean culture and Korea itself". As mentioned earlier, the popularity of the Korean popular culture rapidly exceeded the Asian borderlines and started spreading around the world, and as of today, K-dramas are not only broadcasted in state-run TV stations of different countries but also remade locally. The most recent US remake of a Korean drama − The Good Doctor − was broadcasted in ABC channel and got recognized as the biggest hit of 2017 with a possibility for a second season extension (Nevins, 2017). Doobo Shim argues that, the fact that Korean popular culture was caused an interest and were appealing to neighboring Asians was particularly significant for the government because "the country's national image has not always been positive in neighboring countries" (2006:6). In the following section I will discuss how South Korean government used *Hallyu* as an intentional strategy to internalize national cultural contents with an aim to manifest its economic development.

2.1. *Hallyu* **as Governmental policy**

Historically, South Korean society has been greatly influenced by outside actors[2]. Marcus Noland (2011:3) and John Walsh (2014:17) assert that "The preceding Yi dynasty as well as the Japanese colonial period and the US-influenced postwar controls all featured extensive state intervention as a deliberate strategy for governance and development and this precedent was followed into the period of rapid economic growth". South Korean government chose the model for an economic growth that did not look only for markets with importing and exporting production, but also for the goods that need to be produced[3].

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[2] That is, the influence of Chinese forces is found to be the strongest, which is confirmed by the great number of Sinicized entities in the country (Walsh, 2014:17). In the Oxford dictionaries, "Sinicize" is defined as making something Chinese in character or form.

[3] According to Linsu Kim (2013), most of the production in the early periods of economic development was working according to the schema of importing foreign products and later reverse engineering the goods up to the time that local companies have developed ways of making acceptable alternatives and variants.

South Korean's development strategies and policies after the post-Korean War period can be divided into specific phases: "import substitution (1954-1960) with a devotion to build physical and human capital infrastructures; export-based industrialization (1961- 1979); and balance and stabilization (post-1980) with an efficient allocation of investment" (Kwan, S. Kim, 1991:2-3). By the 1990s, the country went beyond state what Ronald Ingelhart (1999:219) referred as the desire to "emphasize economic growth at any price". Then, by the period when South Korea reached the *middle-income trap[4],* the government tried to find other ways of changing the structure of the national economy[5] and increasing its global involvement. The *other* strategy that significantly changed the South Korean landscape and set the stage for the existence of the Korean Wave was related to specific historic events of 1990s (Jang and Paik, 2012:200). It should be noted with the evolution of economic policies, the country also implemented cultural policies that aimed at developing national culture and arts, as well as promoting cultural industries. The government for the most part was concerned with constructing the nation's cultural identity.

One of those historic events that vastly changed the country's landscape was The Olympic Games, which was held in Seoul, Korea back in 1988. The games which captures the global community's attention in one place once in four years were conducted on the South Korean territory; which formerly unremarkable Northeast Asian country think was feasible since the 1950s. Jang and Paik claim that "the Games brought brand recognition, forged international partnerships and bolstered the national image, all of which stoked the fire of Korea's slow-growth nationalistic pride" (2012:200). One the other hand, 1988 was also the year when all restrictions on foreign films was lifted, as a result, Hollywood films were allowed to be directly distributed to the local theaters. This 'lifting the band' decision led to a drastic decrease in popularity of domestic film industry, as a testament for it, statistics illustrate that more than 80% of foreign

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[4] To what Breda Griffith (2011:39) referred as "a situation whereby a middle-income country is failing to transition to a high-income economy due to rising costs and declining competitiveness".

[5] The effort has taken place within the context of shifting towards democratization and emergence of neoliberal policies, which were brought to the country as a consequence of financial crisis of 1997 (Walsh, 2014:20).

visual contents enjoyed the market distribution by 1994 (Yi, 1994). American culture industry's rapid development and dominance in the context of state modernization was discussed in the governmental agenda because South Korea was concerned about the possible loss of national culture and sense of Koreanness. Thereafter, "in 1994, the Presidential Advisory Board on Science and Technology submitted a report to the president suggesting that the government promote media production as the national strategic industry"[6] (Shim, 2006:32). The report indicated that the total income that came from the Hollywood film – Jurassic Park – was the amount of Hyundai cars' overseas sales. This striking comparison between the film and car sales was enough to convince the public of a necessity to promote national culture as the industry. The submission of the report and public agreement led to the creation of a number of entities like the Culture Industry Bureau that actively worked to attract corporate as well as financial investment to the promotion of media industry. The involvement of both public (state grants to the organizations) and private sectors (for example, investment capital from corporations like Hyundai, Samsung or LG) hugely developed domestic manufacturing as well as consumption of local cultural contents (Jin, 2006). In this sense, "the promotion of 'Brand Korea' or distribution of Koreanness around the world as the state strategy means promoting Korea as a country, society, tourist destination, and place of manufacturing of reliable products" (Walsh, 2014:20). This is believed to be a win-win situation for both local companies that enjoyed the financial profits and local consumers that take a great pride in participating in and promoting the culture.

2.2 *Hallyu* from the perspective of *Glocalization*

The rapid development of *Hallyu* resulted in making South Korean's media industry one of the leading agents of global media exchange. That is, it has become an example of an international-

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[6] Suggestion to promote media content in a form of "national strategic industry was related to taking note of overall revenue (from theatre exhibition, television syndication, licensing, etc.) from the Hollywood blockbuster, Jurassic Park, which was worth the foreign sales of 1.5 million Hyundai cars. The comparison of a film to Hyundai cars – which at that time were considered the 'pride of Korea' – was apt enough to awaken the Korean public to the idea of culture as an industry" (Shim, 2006:32).

local interrelation of media exchange in terms of producing, distributing, and reproducing cultural contents. Ronald Robertson (1995) defined to such a process as glocalization, which means that a country customizes its services or products for export in accordance to the specificities and demands of customers. Therefore, this section discusses how *Hallyu* is "a reflection of "glocalization" by the Korean media industry, which entails adaptation, accommodation, and innovation of a local–regional– global network." (Ju, 2014:34). In the context of culture, glocalization implies for a mixture of several elements from a variety of unique cultures, such as culture-specific preferences, likings, or sensibilities, which results in a creation of a popular culture product that is suitable and easily receivable by different local, regional or international audiences because they start obtaining universal characteristics (Ritzel, 2011).

One can explain the successfulness or unsuccessfulness of a glocalized popular culture product if interconnectedness between different audiences and cultures can be found. There are a couple of examples of successful glocalization in the context of *Hallyu*, for example, the original movie *My Sassy Girl,* which was able to make different international audiences laugh, cry, and worry for the main protagonists. The worldwide success of the film motivated foreign film companies to remake it by adapting the plot to the context and preferences of their local audiences. Glocalization does not mean a mere imitation of an original product, it means a creation of a new product based on the original but with the addition of local sensibilities. There are four not certainly commercially successful, but anyways recognized remakes of *My Sassy Girl* that experienced the process of glocalization. The filmmakers from America, Japan, India, and China attempted to adapt the plot of "boy meets girl, boy falls in love with girl, boy loses girl, boy gets girl back" to the unique context, expectations, and demands of their local audiences because they wanted the viewers to be able to relate to the main protagonists (Ju, 2014:91). For example, in Japanese remake the main characters were made into professionals, Indian remake incorporated singing and dancing routines specific to Bollywood produced films, American remake stressed

the issue of socio-economic distinctions between the protagonists, Chinese remake changed the plot dramatically as to make more appealing to the local audience. It is worth to note that, despite filmmakers' effort to remake the film by adapting it to the local context, the remakes could not match the success of the original *My Sassy Girl* because of varying degrees of success of glocalization as well as persistent cultural distinction from the Korean version that seem amplified in the adaptation attempts. The example of *My Sassy Girl* illustrates how consumers tend to have different expectations and demands for foreign produced products and locally produced products. It is not always easy to satisfy high expectations for local adaptations, because consumers may not find it relatable enough or because they would compare it with the original version which they liked first.

2.3   *Hallyu* and the coming of digital age

In this section, I will discuss how the situation with the growing popularity of Korean popular culture has evolved since the late 2000s.

Late 2000s marks a period when the Western fandom of *Hallyu* has started to expand, which is attested by their growing interest towards K-pop, Korean entertainment programs, K-drama, and digital games. If to talk about K-pop, it was not very much popular among North Americans up until 2012 when Psy became a global phenomenon with his song "Gangnam Style" and viral horse-riding dance choreography [7] . Several K-pop idol bands like Wonder Girls have unsuccessful experience of trying to enter the North American music market even before Psy's breakthrough (mostly unintended) success. But the situation has changed ever since Psy's global recognition, and it is attested by the fact that groups like "Girls' Generation, Twice, EXO, and BTS, have substantially increased their activities in several parts of the world" (Jin, 2018:405).

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[7] Psy' music video was the most watched video of 2012 on YouTube (3.1 billion views as of June 2018).

Researchers like Dal Yong Jin (2018), Claire Seungeun Lee and Yasue Kuwahara (2014) assert that the phenomenal success of Psy's "Gangnam Style" may be considered as a turning point not only for *Hallyu,* but also to the global entertainment as a whole. This is mostly related to the significant role that social media has played in distributing the Korean popular culture to global audiences. According to Jin who has analyzed the recent growing popularity of the Korean Wave, "tech-savvy young people have shifted their habits in consuming popular culture by heavily relying on social media, which indicates the emergence of social media as one of the most significant breakthroughs in both circulation and consumption of popular culture" (2018:405).

Compared to earlier phases of the Korean Wave that were reliant on K-dramas and films, the new *Hallyu 2.0* that begun in the late 2000s and is mostly focused on K-pop with its transnational circulation by social media (Jin, 2016; S. Lee and Nornes, 2015). The new phase is apparently more popular due to the dramatic development of social media, which allows the moving force of *Hallyu 2.0* – global fans – to enjoy the culture by searching up music videos and entertainment content on platforms like Youtube, Facebook; download music on platforms like iTunes and Spotify; and share their fan arts, stories and excitement about their favored artists on platforms like Twitter (Jin, 2016). As Choe and Russell (2012) have also observed, *Hallyu* has been dominating Asia even before the penetration of social networks; however, "YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter make it easier for Kpop bands to reach a wider audience in the West, and those fans are turning to the same social networking tools to proclaim their devotion."

To summarize, the international popularity of *Hallyu* can be explained by the rapid growth in use of social networks that facilitates and shapes the construction of media content production and its consumption in accordance with the expectations and needs of both local and global fandoms.

2.4 Case: *Hallyu* in Kazakhstan

Korean Wave reached Kazakhstan when national television channels started broadcasting

Korean dramas like a teenagers-oriented *Boys over Flowers* and historical drama *Jumong*. Moreover, as a way to enhance the relationships between countries, the Kazakhstani government announced that 2011 will be South Korea's year in Kazakhstan. This meant that organizers have prepared a year long list of various of interesting activities related to the Korean culture such as concerts, film and food festivals, art exhibitions. The very first cultural event marking the beginning of Korea's year in Kazakhstan was a concert of Korean artists in the capital of Kazakhstan, Astana. The concert was held in one of biggest concert halls of the city and estimated 3500 people to show up, but surprisingly for the organizers, the number of people willing to get a ticket exceeded the allowed capacity of the concert hall, which proved that Korean popular culture was loved by Kazakhstanis (Showasia, 2012).

Supporters of *Hallyu* did not limit themselves to the attendance of various cultural events, and started showing interest in learning Korean language and traditional art. This trend gave rise to the opening of cultural centers in a number of cities in Kazakhstan. The centers aim is to function as a bridge between cultures as people go there to study Korean language, its traditions and history, music, and national art. Today, people wait for months to get an opportunity to enroll in language courses. This notion confirms the popularity and ever-growing demand for *Hallyu* products.

The growing *Hallyu* fandom of Kazakhstan do not only watch K-dramas and K-variety[8], listen and download K-pop songs on their digital devices, but they also make cover dances and upload them on their social media accounts and even participate in national as well as international K-pop dance contests. One of those annual dance and song contests was held on April 28, 2018 in Astana, it was a selection round of the Korean popular music festival "2018 Changwon K-Pop

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[8] Short for Korean variety program

World Festival"[9], organized by the Korean Cultural Center and the Embassy of the Republic of Korea (Korean Cultural Center, 2018). I have a personal experience of attending K-pop festivals and K-pop cover dance concerts in the past two years. The most recent *Hallyu* oriented event I have attended was "K-Culture Party", which was held by South Korean Pavilion during EXPO 2017 in Astana. It was held in the city's biggest stadium and was able to fill in all the stands. The reason for such an increased interest was due to the list of performers, who were among the most popular Korean artists both locally and internationally: AOA, B1A4, and Highlight. Korean artists shared the stage with the "founders" of Q-Pop genre – Ninety One and former K-pop cover dance group, which is now also a Q-pop group – MadMen. During the ending speech, a member from AOA talked about how cheers from the crowd were as loud as in South Korea implying they are pleasantly surprised to know that their Kazakh fandom is as strong as anywhere else.

Sun Jung (2011:15-16) says that South Korean popular culture's "diversity together with the various aspects of its hybridity are the key factors behind its success in the various global markets. The hybridity of South Korean popular culture enables transcultural flow, a flow of culture that is neither uni-directional nor bi-directional, but multi-directional." This multidirectional flow is especially apt in looking at the Kazakh remake of K-pop, which is called as Q-pop (Qazaq pop). The remake can be seen as the Kazakh media industry's attempt to localize the global trend. The structure of Q-pop does not just imitate the structure and system of K-pop, but it tries to adapt and develop it by relying on the preferences and demands of the Kazakhstani audience. The question of its successfulness is yet be examined, as the public reception of Q-pop as a whole and towards Q-pop oriented boy or girl groups is ambiguous and in a sense conflicting. I will examine the nature of Q-pop in more detail in the following chapters.

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[9] Highlights from the festival: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uRQwGyx0HWs&feature=youtu.be; 1st place winner - Chkhinson Family performing JBJ's "My Flower",
https://www.facebook.com/kbskpopworld/videos/1852257364835734/ 2nd place winner – Yeoboseyo team performing BTS' "Mic Drop" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iB0QqrfzxuY

The popularity of Korean popular culture in Kazakhstan, especially that of K-pop, is rapidly increasing and spreading within the country as a result of social media. When *Hallyu* was making its first steps in the country, fans were limited in their choice to watch or listen what they wanted due to a language barrier. The national TV stations translated and broadcasted a specific amount of Korean dramas, K-pop was not to be found in open to Kazakhstani youth sources. But as the time has passed, the emergence of a digital age with a variety of social media sites facilitated a creation of a numerous amount of Korean to Russian or Korean to Kazakh language translation communities, which in turn brought another wave of success to the globalization of *Hallyu.* Since the language barrier was lifted with the emergence of Russian-translation groups and Kazakhstani fans' ability to understand the contents translated from Korean to English, the local fandom has been contributing to the global popularity of the *Hallyu*. Furthermore, today, K-pop takes one of the leading positions in Kazakhstani youth's musical preferences, which is confirmed by the popularity of K-pop charts and K-pop news in TV channels like Muzzone.

To further explore the Kazakhstani youth's fan identity, I want to emphasize on discussing the reasons why they entered the K-pop fandom: the first reason - modern and unique (Kpoppish) sound; the second reason - difficult yet beautiful dance routines that always accompany the song; the third reason - the appealing visuals and physiques of Korean singers; the fourth reason – the outgoing, charismatic, tender, and cute character. These reasons were voiced by the interview participants who identified themselves as fans. As a part of my observation, I have also analyzed a number of Instagram fan accounts dedicated to sharing photographs, videos, and fan-created illustrations of their favorite idols. There were a number of accounts dedicated to share K-pop dance and song covers. As far as I have noticed, the fans do not hesitate to like, share, repost, and comment on the posts related to their *bias*[10]' activities (which means, 'favorite'), two of the

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[10] Urban dictionary defines *bias* in the context of K-pop as "the member of an idol group that is your favorite. A person may have one ultimate bias, and many other biases from other idol groups, or only have one ultimate bias.

most frequently left comments are "I don't understand what they are talking about but I love it", "*Oppa[11], I hope to meet you someday*".

At first, the chapter discussed how the products of Korean popular culture have been serving as a significant contributor to the country's economy and national pride[12]. Since the government decided to promote its cultural contents globally, it started allocating large sums of financial grants to a variety of organizations which worked on that. As a result of this cooperation between public and private sectors, *Hallyu* keeps developing and promoting the national brand (Walsh, 2014).

Secondly, the chapter discussed is the glocalized and transnational nature of the Korean popular culture. As mentioned earlier, aside from being compared and contrasted as countries, Korean and Japanese popular cultures are also frequently compared with each other, and perhaps this is due to their historic ties and geographic closeness. It is interesting to note that while the worldwide successfulness of Japanese popular culture is oftentimes explained by their targeted efforts to produce and promote—what Koichi Iwabuchi (2002:27) calls—"culturally odorless products", the success of Korean popular culture is attributed to its focus on hybridity. According to Kuwara, "even though Korean popular culture products are intended and produced for international consumption, their appeal in the global market is mainly due to their 'Koreanness'" (2014:4). In the meantime, as the examples of PSY's *"Gangnam Style"* or *My Sassy Girl* demonstrate, the cultural content gets localized and adjusted in accordance to the demands as well as needs of exported markets.

This term is derived from "having a bias towards a particular person."
https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=bias
[11] Urban dictionary defines *oppa* in the context of Korean culture as "a term that is used in Korean by a girl to call a man who is older than her" https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Oppa
[12] "South Korea's Pop-Cultural Exports: Hallyu, Yeah!" *The Economist*, January 25, 2010, accessed June 1, 2018, https://www.economist.com/node/15385735

Thirdly, the chapter discussed how the current worldwide dissemination of *Hallyu* can be explained by the influences of Internet and the social networks – relying on fandom's culture of participation and voluntary work in rapid updating, reposting as well as sharing with broader audiences, while visibly influencing the production, circulation and perception of *Hallyu* cultural contents. Here, the power and impact of social media channels should be explained as a mere technological determinism, because in the context of *Hallyu* there is another type of power, which is material and intangible *online* fan labor. That is, fans contribute to the imagined community by encouraging participation in different activities.

Lastly, the case of *Hallyu's* popularity in Kazakhstan was examined as an introduction to understand what type of transformations does the foreign culture bring to the conservative country.

Chapter 3: *Hallyu* and representations of transnational hybrid masculinity

As a part of 4th year anniversary, a male K-pop group BTS organized a concert called "BTS Home Party" for their fans. During the concert, the group performed a set of different songs from their albums. For one of the stages the members were dressed in edgy suits and performed "Blood, sweat and tears", a song in trap genre that have a powerful choreography with hip-hop elements. Their appearance was chic and sexy. For the next stage they performed a remix of their songs "Fire" and "Boy in Luv" in a 'children song' arrangement, while wearing pink overalls, singing in children's voice and dancing in a cute manner. Here, they appeared as cute and soft. A comparison of these two performances highlights how K-pop does not stick to one concept in promoting artists and represents the versatile masculinities included in these concepts.

In this chapter, I will discuss the nature of South Korean multiple masculinities, but first it is necessary to understand the main subject of the matter - masculinity discourses.

3.1 Masculinity Discourses

Michael Foucault sees sexuality as formed by historical apparatus. In his book *History of Sexuality,* he writes that "sexuality must not be thought of as a kind of natural given which power tries to hold in check, or as an obscure domain which knowledge gradually tries to uncover. It is the name that can be given to a historical construct" (1979: 152). Understanding that such a concept as sexuality is constituted by various social and historical structures, one should realize that the very essentialist notions of masculinity and femininity as being biologically defined must also be challenged. Judith Butler is one of those scholars who questioned the essentialism related gender with the introduction of a concept called "gender performativity". Butler in the article "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution," writes:

"Gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time — an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts. Further, gender is instituted through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self". (1988: 519).

She argues that both notions of sexuality and gender are cultural constructs that become established as essentialist and natural, as a result of repetitive acts of stylized gender (bodily) performances throughout the time. R. W. Connell similarly to Butler, initiates a discussion on the concept of "doing masculinities" in an attempt to explain nature of masculinity that tends to be culturally constructed. He asserts that, "different cultures, and different periods of history construct masculinity differently ... masculinities do not exist prior to social behavior, either as bodily states or fixed personalities. Rather, masculinities come into existence as people act. They are accomplished in everyday conduct or organizational life, as patterns of social practice" (2001:16,18).

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R.W.Connell in his book *Masculinities* clarified what type of culturally distinctive and repetitious everyday praxis produce and maintain masculinity. He argues that when a person behaves, speaks, and gets dressed in a certain gendered way, he or she simultaneously contributes to the construction and maintenance of masculinity or femininity in the society (Connell 1995: 6, 35, 80). In this way, the above-mentioned concepts of sexuality as well as masculinity accentuate three moments: 1) masculinity is established and reestablished on a regular basis; 2) masculinity should not be treated as having a single and constant value because its nature is rather fluid, as a result of this fluidity masculinity may be constructed in various ways depending on different cultural circumstances; 3) there is no single image of masculinity, since depending on a certain historical context leads to a construction of multiple masculinities.

Relying on R.W. Connell's conception of masculinity as being multiple as well as diverse in character, this passage reviews the directions in which South Korean as well Kazakh masculinities have been constructed, deconstructed as well as hybridized due to countries' specific socio-political situation and cross-cultural dynamics.

3.2 Asian Men in Light of Masculinity Studies

Towards the later part of the 20th Century Masculinity Studies started to position itself as an academic discipline. Trailblazers in the field like R.W. Connell already knew that large share of the world's men, or those who represent men away from the Euro-American areas, tend to receive only a limited attention in gender studies, and that this ignorance was a serious problem in the field. R.W. Connell advocated for a more comprehensive understanding of the global gender order. But as the literature on gender studies demonstrate, these concerns did not change a trend completely as most researches on masculinity continue to focus on primarily white Western societies. Even in the situations when other ethic or race groups were researched, they fell under a title of "minorities": for instance, as black, Asian, or Hispanic men living in America. According to Kam

Louie (2012), who examined masculine ideals in the East Asian region, studies about Asian masculinity and men are not only restricted, but also obstructed by the vast amount of research devoted to Asian women and femininity.

3.3 South Korean Hegemonic Masculinity

Drawing on R.W. Connell's (1995) research on masculinities, Moon Seung-Sook uses "the term 'hegemonic masculinity' to refer to the dominant notions and practices of masculinity that largely are accepted by various social groups as an integral part of the seemingly natural or sensible order of things" (2002:79). She describes and defines the dominating praxis of South Korean masculinity in the framework of Confucianism, militarization, and concise industrialization. Moon refers to three elements that generate hegemonic masculinity in the specific local context. These elements include: being a breadwinner, serving in military, and non-involvement in sharing everyday domestic labor (2002:80).

Relying on Moon's characterization of hegemonic masculinity, this section will review the visible stereotyped representations of South Korean masculinities: patriarchal authoritative, traditional *seonbi (*Chinese Confucian *wen),* as well as aggressive hegemonic masculinity.

3.3.1   Patriarchal authoritarian

South Korean hegemonic masculinity incorporates *patriarchal authoritarianism* under the setting of which traditionally and historically South Korean men were considered as being leaders of households and the principal breadwinners. The gendered division of responsibilities was based on ideologies of Confucian patriarchy. As Moon explains, "by the 1980s, after two decades of industrialization, the normative gender constructs of husband-provider and housewife became firmly established" despite the fact that the Confucian patriarchy turned into modernized industrial patriarchy (2002:85). Moon further explains that South Korean men's ability to provide the family by earning money became a key indicator of their level of manliness.

3.3.2 Mandatory military service

As Moon explains, in South Korea, serving in the military has been a crucial indicator of hegemonic masculinity and manhood because they are regarded as defenders of the nation "in the context of the national division and the ongoing military confrontation" (2005:89). Despite the fact that soldiering is not willingly embraced by all South Korean men, due to its dangerous, stressful and time-consuming nature, the government was able to militarize masculinity and keeps maintaining it as such with the help of ideological as well as coercive strategies. In ideological terms, the government promotes the image of soldiers as primary protectors of the nations from the evils North Korea. In coercive terms, males in a specific cohort are obliged to serve in military for 21 months with rare exceptions of those who cannot serve due to the health conditions; South Korean men who want to work in public or private companies should submit their military ticket in order to be recruited and gain economic advantages.

Moon further explains that there are growing debates on the issue of mandatory military service's relevance in the contemporary South Korea, "The end of the Cold War and contemporary South Korea's overwhelming economic superiority to North Korea have allowed a younger generation of men to begin to challenge the imperative of military service" (2005:102). She suggests the government to offer future soldiers better material rewards because the argument of nationalism is less motivating in the capitalist society, where 21 months is a big sacrifice.

3.3.3 Separation from domestic activities

Moon (2002) with an eye to explain the relation between hegemonic masculinity and the indispensable separation from daily domestic labor, suggests to analyze the form of *seonbi* masculinity, that started existing during the Korea's Joseon era (1392–1910). Moon writes,

"The Confucian scholar-official (*seonbi*) of the Joseon period (1392–1910) embodied a masculine ideal strictly separated from the life-sustaining activities of the household. To be free

from the drudgery of daily life, the *seonbi* was dedicated to studying Confucian texts in order to obtain "wisdom" (*wen*) with which he advised the sovereign king. Furthermore, he was not supposed to degrade himself by engaging in any form of manual labor or any economic activity" (2002:99).

Confucian ideology suggests that an ideal person is expected to incarnate and represent a balance between mental achievements (*wen)* and physical working capacity (*wu)*. Nonetheless, obtaining *wen,* the constutient of *seonbi* masculinity, was regarded as superior (Moon, 2002: 17–18). Louie with his theory of "Chinese *wen* masculinity" asserts that the example of the "binary opposition between the mental or civil, and the physical or martial" is significant in the Chinese understanding of masculinity, but not obviously important to the same extent in the Western understandings of maleness (2002:10). Chinese *wen* masculinity had its impact on Korea's *seonbi* masculinity since South Korea has been both historically and culturally influenced by the Chinese Confucianism. Moon (2002) points out that conception of *seonbi* masculinity contrasts with contemporary South Korean hegemonic masculinity, because today men do both physical work as well as business activities as to provide their families. This divergence can be justified from the point that Korean masculinities transformed into multifold and heterogeneous.

Despite *seonbi* masculinity's sexist nature, Jang-Tae Geum argues that it is still regarded to represent an ideal form of South Korean masculinity as it values traditional merits like politeness, uprightness, fidelity, loyalty and cultural-academic attainment (2000: 59–92). The fact that this type of masculinity is still valued in contemporary South Korea can be noticed from the domestic and regional popularity of male protagonists, who embody *seonbi* masculinity, such as in K-drama *Winter Sonata.* Sun Jung's analysis of South Korean masculinities and their transcultural consumption finds that Bae Yong-joon (BYJ) who plays the male lead in *Winter Sonata* portrays "a gentle and cultured mentality, not strong physical achievement" throughout the series. She concludes by stating that *seonbi* masculinity is partly responsible for the construction of Korean

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soft masculinity (2011:28).

3.4 Soft masculinity in Korean Popular Culture

Sun Jung (2011) in her book "Korean Masculinities and Transcultural Consumption" talked about the diversity of masculinities represented by males in Korean popular culture. When she described a phenomenal popularity and success of a Korean TV series *Winter Sonata* and its male lead Bae Yong-joon in Japan, she asserted that one of the main reasons behind the craze around this TV series is related to the type of masculinity BYJ embodies. She referred to this masculinity type as *"soft masculinity"*. As she explains, "this soft masculinity is a hybrid product constructed through the transcultural amalgamation of South Korea's traditional *seonbi* masculinity, Japan's *bishonen* (pretty boy) masculinity, and global metrosexual masculinity. This transculturation creates *mugukjeok* (non-nationality) which helps BYJ's soft masculinity to freely travel across national boundaries" (Jung, 2011:39).

Jung (2011) explains that up until late 1990s South Korean film industry was focused on portraying men as fearless tough guys and machos but this tendency started disappearing, when *kkonminam* (literally, flower beautiful man) characters were introduced. She defines the term as, "generally, *kkonminam* refers to men who are pretty looking and who have smooth fair skin, silky hair, and a feminine manner" (2011:58). Kim Yong-Hui asserts that "the *kkonminam* syndrome is developed from a consequence of the deconstruction and the hybridization of female/male sexual identities rather than males merely becoming feminized" (2003: 104). The emergence of this phenomenon marks a beginning of soft masculinity era.

Since the performers of *Hallyu* content incorporate soft masculinity which might seem inclusively feminine to cultures representing rather hegemonic masculine traits, Kam Louie argues that the physical appearance of male K-pop idols "confound twentieth-century Euro-American concepts of what is male and what is female" (2012: 936). When male idols embody overlapping masculinities, they violate the emasculation of stereotypes and dispute the Western

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defined masculinities.

Chapter 3 covered a wide variety of topics: (1) from providing an overview of masculinity discourses; (2) talking about the significance and relevance of Asian masculinities, which continues to be overlooked and conflated with femininity in contemporary popular culture, especially in the West; (3) and focused on exploring the South Korean masculinity. It was discussed how in contemporary South Korea, men often have a hybrid masculinity that combines hegemonic masculinity and newly emerging alternative mode of masculinity - soft masculinity. The overlap of these masculinities are critically considered to challenge hegemonic masculinity, which is believed to be a normative in a way that "it embodied the currently most honored way of being a man" (R.W. Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005:832).

Next chapter will focus on exploring how the global spread of *Hallyu* introduced alternative modes of masculinities to Kazakh society.

Chapter 4: Kazakh identity, *Q-pop* and the emergence of alternative masculinities

While soft masculinity can describe the popular culture in East Asia, it may not characterize popular culture in the region where the codes of hegemonic masculinity prevail. The difference between masculinity ideals found in Kazakhstan may explain why the embodiment of soft masculinity by young male Q-pop artists is judged with animosity and why such a model of masculinity might look appealing to younger generations. In other words, culturally defined and maintained hegemonic masculinity in Kazakhstan can explain the reasons why a conservative and traditionalist part of the society finds the spread of Hallyu with its 'promoted' type of soft masculinity among youth highly problematic and threatening. This chapter will start with the discussion on how the nature of Kazakh identity and gender identity were constructed to later explain why the cultural dissonance caused by the introduction of soft masculinity was specifically apparent in Kazakhstan, where *Hallyu* and *Hallyu-inspired* contents are one of the dominant forms of popular culture.

4.1 Constructing identity in a post-Soviet Kazakhstan

Since the collapse of Soviet Union, Kazakhstan and other post-Soviet states were challenged to develop as separate states with new regimes, and differentiating approaches to the process identity-building. Kazakhstan's identity-building approach is influenced by several significant implications, such as its Soviet past. Historically, Kazakh society had experienced the merciless and extensive socio-economic and cultural conversion under the Soviet regime, as a result of which it had become "the most Sovietized and Russified nation of all Soviet nation. By the 1970s, wholly European dress, the almost total eradication of Islamic practices and the lack or very poor knowledge of the Kazak language among the majority of young, urban-based Kazaks had become the characteristics of the Soviet Kazak people. `Nevertheless, there was still a strong awareness of a specifically Kazakh identity, even if this was based more in self-perception rather than in identifiable cultural indicators" (Sarsembayev, 1999:322).

The Soviet government's policies to socialize neighboring countries were planned to firstly disprove traditional models of collective identity and secondly substitute them with universal set of values. At the same time, socialization validated national identities. But neither of these policies succeeded, because traditional patterns of national identities did not only survived forces of socialization, in some senses, they revived and intensified during that period. For example, traditional patterns of Kazakh identity like family institutions and kin relationships served as counteracting forces against alien consequences of the irresponsive and bureaucratic government (Spehr and Kassenova, 2014:141).

Ronald Grigor Suny analyzed the post-Soviet identity politics in Kazakhstan and Armenia and also advocated that "nations are articulated through the stories people tell about themselves. The narrative is most often a tale of origins and continuity, often involving sacrifice and martyrdom, but also of glory and heroism" (2001:866). Such kind of articulations are particularly impactful

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and significant for the former Soviet Union countries. Considering the fact that Soviet government initiated cultural policies that tried to define the clear borders between ethnicities and convert these ethnic groups into separate nations and encouraging them to cultivate peculiar national cultures, the collapse of Soviet Union provided these ethnic groups with an opportunity "to re-evaluate and/or re-affirm their identities as members of a specific "nationality"" (Rancier, 2009:387). Nevertheless, in certain instances, these ethnic communities have encountered a noticeable disconnection from their traditional cultures as well as ancestral lifestyles, which made a process of national identity reconstruction difficult to accomplish. Such a situation is taking place in Kazakhstan with its titular ethnic group - Kazakhs. Since Kazakhs have aspired to culturally "recover" the state from Russification policies and to confirm their historical right to the territory, historical representations of the traditional culture were frequently used as a means of that recovery. These historical symbols still contain significant emotive power for Kazakhs notwithstanding that not everyone have a personal experience with them.

According to Azamat Sarsembayev, "history as a narrative of identity" was used in Kazakh nationalists' efforts to create a collective identity, specifically "four aspects of Kazak identity have gained prominence in the creation of this narrative: Islam, Turkic-ness, an elusive nomad legacy and a passionate attachment to the land" (1999:330).

In the next section I will list specific aspects of Kazakh identity that contribute to the perception of transcultural flows from South Korea, that is, I attempt to examine what exactly causes animosity and rejection of *soft masculinity* represented by Q-pop male groups as an appropriate additional gender construction.

4.2 The *batyrs* as a representation of nomad legacy

"We shouldn't forget that we are the descendants of great *batyrs*"[13]

Harun Yilmaz (2014) in the book "*Social and Cultural Change in Central Asia: The Soviet legacy*" explains how and why stories of Kazakh folk heroes or *batyrs* were used in the Soviet cultural policy. According to Yilmaz, "A *batyr* is a folk hero among pastoral nomadic Kazakh tribes, who achieved the title by his heroic deeds" (2014:45). The meaning behind the word *batyr* indicates that a person proclaimed like that is courageous, resolute, manly, fearless, charismatic, valorous hero and leader. He asserts that Kazakh Soviet historians started using *batyrs* as well as other valiant figures involved in the anti-Russian oppression revolts in the 19th century to build and develop a national narrative. Despite the commonly held notion that these *batyrs* were known figures only in specific regions, but not throughout the great Kazakh land, Kazakh historians were able to transform them into nationwide heroes. As he writes, "These tribal or local figures and events turned into an all-national heritage, transcending strong tribal or regional affiliations. This aspect of Soviet modernization and its construction of Kazakh national history (and identity) in Stalin's time had a lasting impact, even up to today" (2014:45-46).

Thomas Barfield (1993:131) claimed that any member of the community could become *batyr*, because every nomad Kazakh was able to combine a couple of roles, for example: being a hunter, shepherd, or warrior. *Batyrs'* skills like fighting abilities, physique, and personal charisma were major agents for their promotion. In general, Kazakh nomadic culture celebrated military experience as well as valiant individual achievement. The reason why *batyrs* were promoted as key instruments in the process of Soviet Kazakhstan's nation-building is related to the idea that any ordinary laborer can become a heroic figure by working as educators, engineers in various factories or doctors and be active actors of Soviet modernization project. The tales about *batyrs*

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[13] Quoted from the anonymous interviewee

offered symbols and narrations that Soviet rule wanted to draw parallels with, by providing Kazakh nomads with admirable example of "nobodies becoming somebodies".

According to Diana Kudaibergenova, who examined representations of femininity and masculinity in Central Asian art, the official formations of the nations in the region were symbolically transferred into the male images of defenders, *batyrs,* and rulers that were projected in various sculptures around the cities (2015). She argues that sculptures, statues, and pictures of significant Soviet rulers like Lenin or Dzerzhinsky were replaced by alternatively popular Kazakh portrayals of nation defenders such as *batyrs* and ancient leaders to replace Soviet ideology. The government ruled a shift in symbolic and visual representations leaders from Soviet to Kazakh because there was a tremendous need for a national awakening. Basically, the government wanted its people to know and remember their historic roots that were related to the images of batyrs.

These are only a few examples of *batyrs* and *khans (rulers)* depictions in the art form:

Figure 1. Statue of Kabanbay batyr in Almaty

Taken from: almatyregion-tour.kz

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Figure 2. Picture of Kabanbay batyr

Taken from: zharar.com

Figure 3. Statue of Er Zhanibek batyr with two of his wolfs in The East Kazakhstan region
Taken from: ruh.kz

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Figure 4. Statue of Kerey and Zhanibek, the founders of the Kazakh Khanate in the 15th century in Astana

Taken from: azattyq.org

Valeria Ibraeva, who examined art the post-Soviet period Kazakhstan, argues that "Monuments like that [male conquerors and dominant male figures] trace a specific period of state-building – nationalism as an official institution which probably is the necessary element of compensating practices [of the state] to overcome the inferiority complex" (2014: 52-53).

4.3 Muslim identity as a part of Kazakhness: Kazakh=Muslim

"Muslim men are not allowed to wear earrings"[14]

As mentioned earlier, being a Muslim is a significant part of Kazakh identity. There is quite an extensive list of researchers who studied an importance, role, and nature of Islam in Kazakhstan such as DeWeese, 1990, 1994., Privratsky, 2001 and others. According to Trofimov (2001) and Telebaev (2003), Muslim community constitutes up to 52-65% of believer population in Kazakhstan. Islam is one of main widespread religions in Kazakhstan as its significant presence

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[14] Quoted from the anonymous interviewee

is confirmed by the amount of following as well as the acknowledgement of how important Islamic faith is for Kazakhs' culture and history. According to Mariya Omelicheva, who studied Islamic trends in Kazakhstan, not many Kazakh Muslims fulfill all of the canonical Islam duties since the majority of Kazakh Muslims are more of lightweight observers of the religious principles and prohibitions (2011).

Due to the fact that there a lot of non-titular nationalities living in specific geographical regions of the country, the spread of Islamic society is uneven across the Kazakhstan. This simply means that there is a higher proportion of Muslims living in certain cities and regions (for example, Atyrau, Kyzylorda and Shymkent, which are located in Western and Southern Kazakhstan) when compared with other cities, where the majority of population is not Kazakh or do not identify themselves with Islamic religion (for example, Pavlodar, Petropavl located in Northern and Eastern Kazakhstan). Despite this regional differences, the number of practicing Muslims has dramatically increased since the establishment of country's independence in 1991. Omelicheva refers to statistics and states that "If in 1989 there were only 46 mosque congregations in Kazakhstan, by 1998 their number expanded to more than 1000" (2011: 244).

For historical causes, Islam became an integral part of Kazakhs' traditional life, this developed into something what some academics called as the "local contextualization of Islam (Privratsky 2001:15). Studying the nature of Islam in Kazakhstan, scholars have noticed that one of the determinant characteristics of Kazakh Islam is related to its connection to ethnic identity as well as traditions but not to Islamic theory and practice (Hann and Pelkmans 2009:1524). As a result of this interrelation between ethnic and religious identity, Kazakhs support a prevailing belief that having been born Kazakh or being a descendant of the community that valued and made Islam a key component of life cycle makes a person Muslim by default. This kind of correspondence developed before the Russian conquest of the region as people were already identifying themselves with Islamic faith, but being Muslim did not mean mastering Quran and

living according to *shariat,* instead, religious identification indicated a sense of belonging to a society that positioned itself as being Muslim one (Khalid 2007:21).

Since Islam occupies a special place in Kazakh people's lives and minds, being Muslim has become an appropriate indicator of their Kazakhness and vice-versa (Ro'i and Wainer 2009:306).

4.4 Qazaq Pop (Q-pop): The influence of K-pop and Moral panic

The foundation for the musical style of Q-pop (Qazaq-pop, "Kazakh pop") was laid in 2015 when a five-member male group - Ninety One from Juz Entertainment agency made their official debut into the Kazakhstani popular music scene. The instant popularity of the group become a hot topic for a discussion within the music industry. Yerbolat Bedelkhan, CEO of Juz Entertainment, says that their popularity reflects the demands of Kazakhstani youth, "our music industry lacks high-quality modern pop or hip-hop music with texts in our native language, that's why the guys took the audience easily" (Svoboda, 2014). He also said that he has analyzed the successfulness of Korean popular culture in Kazakhstan for the past couple of years and realized that the trend will get even more popular and consumer-attractive. Furthermore, since the youth wanted to embrace fan identity appropriate to such popular culture to its fullest extent and have someone to cheer on, who most importantly is not miles and miles away, Ninety One was able to easily fill in the empty spot.

Ninety One and other Q-pop groups (Black Dial, MadMen, Newton) work according to the K-pop system of management and production. That is, each member has an appointed position in the group (for example, lead vocalist, rapper, dancer); they train for a year or more before the official debut, to improve their singing, dancing, and communication skills; and they attach great importance to their appearances.

My observation of mainstream audience's reception of the genre and the groups' image indicates that their sense of fashion and performances making style differentiates Q-pop groups from local

their colleagues, as noted by the members of a folk music group *Sons of Alash,* "Their appearances and frivolous behavior on stage make us think that they do not respect the *sacred* Kazakh music scene." The member of another young pop group *Alau* says, "Despite the fact that we are friends with Ninety One, we do not identify ourselves as singers of Q-pop. We have a more defined *Kazakh* feel in our songs and outfits." These opinions differs from what the fans have to say on the appearance and stage presence. They contrast the restrained, boring, and traditional singers to multitalented Q-pop groups. As 20-year-old male fan puts it, "Singers from the earlier generation look a bit awkward and boring when they try to entertain the audience during their performances". To which 18-year-old male listener added, "At least Q-pop groups try to be all-rounded performers, who do not stand on the stage moving their bodies from side to side or making the simplest dance moves." These interviewees express a positive reaction to the recent changes in the Kazakhstani popular music. But not everyone shares this positivity.

Being the founders of the Q-pop genre, Ninety One received a lot of criticism at the very beginning of their musical path, which is attested by young and mostly male people's boycotts against their concerts around the Kazakhstan. The aggressive reaction towards the group was primarily provoked by their atypical and in a sense unconventional appearance: basically, the members of the group dye their hair, apply full-face makeup up to the lipstick and eyeshadow, they wear flashy earrings, tight or ripped jeans, "feminine" short fur coats, and have tattoos on visible parts of their body (Figure 5-10).

Figure 5. From left to right: ZaQ, Alem, A.Z., Bala, ACE. (official poster before their debut)

Take from: Wikipedia

Figure 6. Photoshoot for the interview

Take from: hommes.kz

Figure 7. Screenshot from Ninety One's "Ah! Yah! Mah!" music video

Figure 8. Screenshot from Ninety One's "Bayau" music video

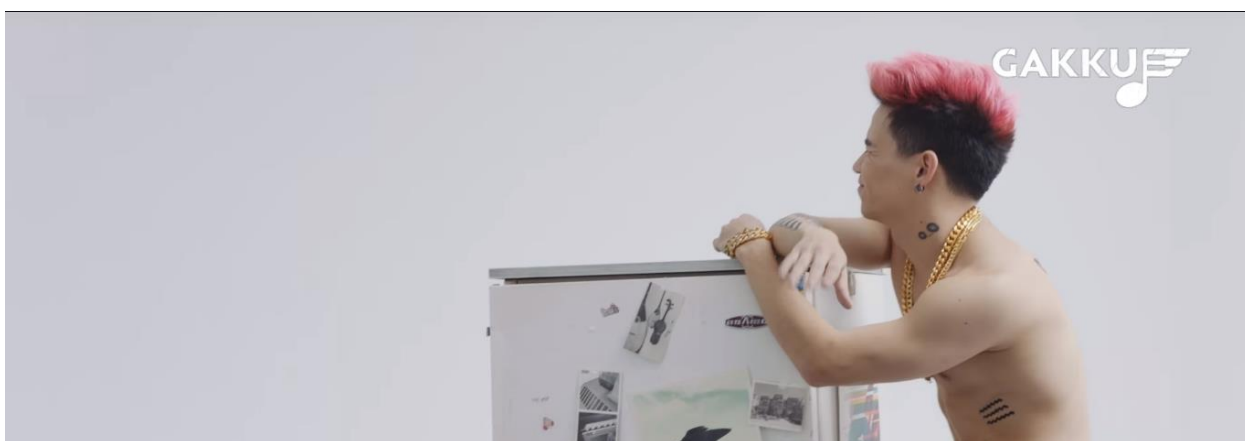Figure 9. Screenshot from Ninety One's "Su Asty" music video

Figure 10. Individual shot of Alem in "Su asty" music video

Mainstream Kazakh society knew that this type of appearance is a common for the K-pop

subculture, but they got outraged when the group of young *Kazakh* men adopted the same style and image. The key word here is *Kazakh* because from the perspective of genre's so-called critics, what these five *Kazakhs* do to themselves to the contradicts to the expectations and image of the *Kazakh man.* Yerbolat Bedelkhan in the interview with Caravan (2016) said that he has foreseen this kind of reaction and was more worried about preparing the members' parents for the future "visual" changes such as ear piercing or dyeing hair long before their official debut. He explained to the parents that these changes are just a part of their image as performers, and that they should not attention to negative opinions. But unfortunately, the level of animosity expressed to the group's softened or feminized masculinity exceeded his personal estimates. The situation got worse when the group started receiving verbal and written threats, for example, the comment section under their music videos on Youtube always have a couple of such messages "I want to punch them in the face. Don't you dare call yourself Kazakh"[15], or "I don't want other people here on Youtube think that Kazakh men dress like this, Kazakhs are not gays."[16]

In addition, the displeasure and conflict was caused by the very name of the group – Ninety One. The critics assert that they do not want the "amoral" group be called by the Kazakhstan's independence proclamation year. 21-year-old K-pop cover dancer deemed the name to be symbolically representative and memorable, "Doesn't Ninety One mean being independent, free, and liberal? I think the meaning behind the name is beautiful. We are young and free from the oppressions imposed by colonialism, where individuality wasn't welcomed, then why not to develop and explore new things?"

Due to the accusations that the members and their agency dishonors *Kazakh men* and the nation overall, the group had a hard time with holding concerts and even walking down the streets. When they went to Kyzylorda[17] young Kazakh men with intense level of conservative sentiments

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[15] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1leOcX-mHEI

[16] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A9QIgf50sh4

[17] City located in the Southern region of the country. In the previous section I talked about how the distribution of different ethnicities is not even, which means that some cities are more Kazakh than the others.

organized a meeting demanding the cancellation of the forthcoming concert. The main argument they played with was that the members are of homosexual preferences (gays), and that their appearance and behavior does not correspond to the image of the *Kazakh man,* especially in Kyzylorda – the land of our *batyr* ancestors. As observed by my investigation of online commentaries on this regard, Rinat Zaitov – Kazakh poet-improviser – said that he does not have any complaints about the group's music, but he has a lot to say about their appearance and bad influence on youth. He claims that their "as they want to believe, unique and modern look" is far from what is expected from Kazakh men with hard masculinity, and that the promotion of this "alien" culture through a means of social media pollutes the consciousness of a younger generation. He then continues his "attack" on the group by saying that he has a photo of his father in a military uniform serving in the army, which makes him a proud son because what the photo portrays is the true Kazakh man. He later asks the members (with a sense of sarcasm) of what kind of photos will their future children have when their parents are looking like this today. His usage of the soldier image can be explained from the notion that serving in the military is a characteristic of hegemonic masculinity. Also, we can draw parallels between the images of soldiers in contemporary Kazakhstan and the images of *batyrs* who also protected the nation, both of them are representations of men who has hegemonic masculinity in them. The summary of Rinat Zaitov's main accusations that the image of Ninety One does not suit Kazakh mentality. He says, "the younger generation is already under various "threatening" influences from the abroad and I do not want you to aggravate the situation".

The situation with the cancellation of concerts was the talk of the town for a couple of months and caused a moral panic. Stanley Cohen defines moral panic as "a condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people; socially accredited

experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions" (1972: 2). Ninety One with their embodiment of an alternative masculinity became the object of the panic which caused sensationalist reactions from the conservative part of the Kazakh society. In general, the complaints about Ninety One or any other Q-pop group were always linked to specific concerns: the appearance of musicians does not correspond to Kazakh traditions, the shift in gender constructions offends the memory of ancestors, feminized masculinity should not exist in the Muslim society, and etc. These accusations were started by a small number of fellow musicians, but the issue blew up when mass media started developing these accusations by interviewing more people, making new reports and reaction videos. As explained by Cohen (1972:10), media defines and shapes social problems, they operate "as agents of moral indignation in their own right: even if they are not self-consciously engaged in crusading or muck-raking, their very reporting of certain 'facts' can be sufficient to generate concern, anxiety, indignation or panic". People who did not even watch their videos were quick join into the discussion and have they couple minutes of fame on television or newspapers. As far as I observed, the media created a story of a someone from the industry not welcoming the 'new wave' of music because of its feminized nature and rejection of traditionalist and moral values. Since this opinion received a support from different places, the case turned into a bigger phenomenon. The reactions of young male traditionalists who were overly eager to boycott the group created further conflicts, and now the conservative society is quick to blame the group for all the evils of modernity, such as the younger generation is forgetting their Kazakh identity or that the boundaries of gender identity are getting blurred. For example, Arman Nurmuhanbetov (social activist) asserts that, "I understand that they want to be modern and unique, but don't they copy South Koreans too much? What is especially concerning is that they copy the manners of the alarmingly feminine Koreans. I consider this to be dangerous for our culture, that was always cherishing the brutal image of a real batyr, a courageous defender of the people."

As a result of such a widespread disturbance, Ninety One decided to tone down the flamboyance of their stage outfits and hair color for their next release. They also performed "Kalay Karaisyn?" on the stage of "Choice of the Year" awards ceremony, the performance was different from their usual performing style, in the sense that all of them were wearing black suits with white shirts and avoided dancing by standing in one place during the whole act (Figure 11). This performance is believed to be their response to 'haters' with the message is that their stage presence is powerful in any case.

Figure 11. Screenshot from "Kalay Karaisyn?" performance
Taken from: youtube.com

A number of my informants expressed their tolerance towards the changes in the hard Kazakh masculinity, because they do not necessarily perceive soft masculinity as diminishing their maleness. As 21 years-old K-pop cover dancer explained, "I understand that historically women and men were supposed to perform and do the gender in certain ways, like man should be manly. But the world is changing, nothing is eternal. I believe that a person can change his or her identity whenever there is an opportunity. I sincerely do not understand the problem with masculinity getting feminized", 20-year-old dancer also expressed his support in taking 'risks' and trying new things, "Sometimes I act like male protagonists from K-dramas or put makeup on and dye my hair for our dance cover performances. I enjoy showing my individuality and think that being hypermasculine or soft masculine should be not mutually exclusive concepts". This contradiction between those who reject any possibility of overlapping masculinities and those who support the

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nature of multiple masculinities indicates the complicated negotiation process popular culture contents experience during the distribution and consumption levels.

A more tangible demonstrations of celebrities' impacts on Kazakh men in general, which was identified by the interviewees, takes place on physical level. The girl from the K-pop cover dance club I interviewed claims that, due to the influences of ideal man images in *Hallyu*, 'ordinary' Kazakh men who she met within the club activities had started paying more attention to their physical appearances. Nonetheless, while the informants from the K-pop cover dance club had more expressed tolerance for their favorite idols' inclinations to wear makeup or coloring their hair, some of them felt differently in a situation of doing idol tendencies themselves. Some young fans' perception of increasing feminization of masculinity in Kazakh men can be summarized with this statement "I don't have any problems with men grooming themselves in *Hallyu,* or within the context of club activities, but wearing makeup outside those contexts is a no-no." While idols' involvement in gender-bending was mainly interpreted as a part of their constructed image, the interviewees' tolerance for 'ordinary' Kazakh men's engagement in those kinds of activities was not interpreted in the same way. It is worth noting that, anti-fans of Q-pop male group does not differentiate between their on-stage and off-stage images, which results in the accusations of contributing to gender-bending. As explained by Butler, gender identity is a social construct that changes in accordance to the social setting. That is, the fact that Q-pop or K-pop idols perform soft masculinity on stage does not necessarily mean that they stick to even after coming off the stage. They might recognize the benefits of feminization within the context of popular culture to lift the limits on the expected behavior, which are imposed by hegemonic masculinity. Therefore, the very fact they are "performers" should not take taken out of consideration when examining their gender identity.

The interviewees' equivocality towards what can be considered as a suitable behavioral pattern for males – in reality and within the South Korean or Kazakhstani media landscape – went beyond

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physical appearance choices. Informants struggled to evaluate what features were considered valuable and beneficial in a man. By talking about a mixture of 'modern men' characteristics (similar to the traits usually displayed by male celebrities) and 'traditional' values (reliability, defender factor, breadwinner) as essential qualities, informants considered the pleasant alternative modes of masculinity (that are proposed through the means of media) on the background of daily realities. For example, 22-year-old male informant wanted to balance between being sensitive and kind against being determined to financially support the family. In the meantime, 20-year-old female informant looks for a man of traditional values like her father; 21-year-old female said that wants her boyfriend to be gentle and considered of her, also she would like to be with someone who is egalitarian. In fact, when comparing older generation of Kazakh men to a younger generation, the position of young Kazakh men is not always positive in in the eyes of the mainstream Kazakh society and in interviewee's eyes. The older representatives of the mainstream society do not favor younger Kazakh's egalitarian behavior, saying that it disturbs some of the traditional values like man as a head of a household. Also they say that men got softer, less reliable, and do not have opinion of their own, that is – they get persuaded easily. The mainstream society also struggle to identify whether the inclination towards Westernization and capitalistic values are practically to blame for the supposed weakening of Kazakh men's character and forgetting of Kazakh mentality.

I hope this section has hinted at the complicated and mainly inconsistent nature of ongoing negotiation process that is taking place on Kazakhstani popular culture landscape as the texts and contents of it are being interpreted, distributed, and consumed in a traditionalist-conservative context. The multiple and overlapping masculinities embodied by *Hallyu* celebrities are being globally exported and reached Kazakhstan. The mainstream Kazakh society's and interviewee's ambiguity towards the situation of changing embodiments of masculinity and distinction between an idol and a real man reveals their either misunderstanding or understanding of masculinity

ideals as commercial constructions. I think that the recognition of the specifically hybrid nature of Q-pop and K-pop idols' masculinity as a rather pleasurable agent of enjoyment, would have helped to avoid the emergence of intense criticisms faced by Ninety One.

Conclusion

By examining representations of new or alternative gender identities in contemporary Kazakhstani popular culture and critically considering the phenomenon of feminization or softening of masculinity, I have made an effort to get to understand how Kazakh youth of both men and women explain and represent their gendered identities, and how those 'risky' attempts to embody soft masculinity were responded to by to the conservative-traditionalist Kazakh society that values hegemonic masculine constructs. From the above explained findings, I can conclude that the phenomenon of shifting between the modes of masculinities should be recognized and explained in the context of the emerging crisis of masculinity and re-traditionalizing society, whose cultural and traditional ideals – principles started losing their appealing as well as persuasive effectiveness with representatives of younger generation. However, it was relatively predictably that this crisis will be considered in the hegemonic discourse with regards to the fear of losing morality, culture and gender constructs – specific righteousness, and even fidelity to a nation. The moral panic caused by the emergence of Ninety One-like groups discloses the inability and unwillingness on the behalf of a patriarchal society to constructively respond to the emerging challenges. What patriarchal-traditionalist society could do was anxiously react to the 'destabilizing' impacts of popular culture. By observing how young Kazakh men and women tolerate and sometimes contribute to the development of alternative masculinities, I found how they look for possibilities to explore new identities. Also, I found that young generation is still not ready to fully reject dichotomist gender notions at the primarily hegemonic landscape. Thus, such fandoms should be interpreted as critics of patriarchy

rather than 'destroyers' of it. Moreover, the growing attempts to develop counter-hegemonic identities in the context of popular youth culture, such as gender-bending, cutting across generational boundaries, indicate that contemporary Kazakh cultural hegemony should formulate creative and persuasive responses as to better accept and accommodate the demands and expectations of youth. I would like to study how honour and shame systems embrace a gendered morality in Kazakh society. In general, it would be interesting to explore why contemporary Kazakh society is getting re-traditionalized, and why people find themselves in two extreme ends of the debate when it comes to the questions of threating Kazakhness and national morality?

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