

The National Consciousness of Ukraine and Its Evolution During the Soviet Era

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Abstract. During the Soviet period, Ukrainian national consciousness underwent a complex evolution. At first, Ukrainians had a stronger sense of identity with their language, culture, and history, and Ukrainian culture received some level of support. However, during the Stalinist period, Ukraine suffered from cultural repression and large-scale man-made famines, which dealt a heavy blow to Ukrainians' sense of nationhood. This paper discusses Ukrainian national consciousness and its evolution in Soviet-era Ukraine from historical, political, and social perspectives. Over time, Ukrainians began to pay more attention to and study Ukrainian history and culture, ultimately ushering in Ukrainian independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s. During this period of time, Ukrainian national consciousness was further enhanced and consolidated, and Ukrainians became prouder of guarding and passing on their national identity to younger generations. By combing and analyzing the history of Ukrainian national consciousness, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the historical roots of Ukrainian national consciousness in the context of the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war.

Keywords: Ukraine, national consciousness, national identity, Soviet Union.

1. Introduction

Ukrainian national consciousness refers to how Ukrainians perceive themselves as members of the Ukrainian nation. It includes their recognition of Ukrainian history, culture, language, traditions, and values, as well as their support for Ukrainian independence and national sovereignty. However, Ukraine faced many challenges and repressions in the early 20th century, especially during the Soviet period. Under Soviet rule, Ukrainian national consciousness was restricted and manipulated. The Ukrainian language was suppressed, and events in Ukrainian history were either reinterpreted or erased.

The policies of industrialization and agricultural collectivization implemented by the Soviet government in the 1930s had a profound effect on Ukraine. Industrialization brought about significant urbanization and factory construction. Meanwhile, collectivization triggered peasant protests and dramatic upheavals in agricultural production. For example, the collectivization of agriculture, which deprived peasants of land and property ownership, including the expropriation of food and the expulsion of uncooperative peasants, sparked great controversy and discontent in Ukraine. This led to a decline in agricultural production, leading to severe famines and food shortages in Ukraine. In particular, millions of people lost their lives in the Ukrainian Holodomor of 1932-1933. This catastrophe caused immense suffering in Ukraine and created a deep rift between Ukraine and the Soviet government.

In addition, on the human side, the Soviet regime sought to weaken Ukraine's independent culture and language. The Russian language was forcefully imposed on Ukrainians, leading to the suppression and restriction of Ukrainian culture, art and literature. Many Ukrainian writers and artists were persecuted as they were considered anti-Soviet. The Great Purge campaign conducted by the Soviet Union also resulted in massive repression and persecution in Ukraine. The government arrested, executed, and exiled Ukrainian intellectuals, cultural figures, and political dissidents in order to eliminate any potential threats to Soviet rule.

These instances represented just a part of the Soviet oppression endured by the Ukrainian nation. Nonetheless, they served as a stark illustration of the hostile and repressive policies of the Soviet

authorities towards the Ukrainian nation. This oppression had a serious negative impact on Ukrainian national consciousness and identity, leading to long-term social and political consequences.

However, despite the oppression, the Ukrainian people remained steadfast in their national identity and cultural traditions, maintaining a profound sense of Ukrainian independence. The first large-scale demonstration demanding independence and democracy in Ukraine took place in 1989. Subsequently, in 1991, when the Soviet Union collapsed, Ukraine declared its restoration of independence and became an independent state. This further strengthened Ukrainians' sense of nationhood and their connection with their homeland.

This paper discusses Ukrainian national consciousness and its evolution in Soviet-era Ukraine from historical, political, and social perspectives. It explores the impact of the early Ukrainianization movement and the Soviet policy of unification on Ukrainian national consciousness, as well as the process of oppression during the Stalinist period and the re-identification of Ukraine after gaining independence. The study also addresses the influence of several factors, including economic, linguistic, cultural, and political, on the development of Ukrainian national consciousness [1]. By combining and analyzing the history of Ukrainian national consciousness, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the historical roots of Ukrainian national consciousness in the context of the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war.

2. Stages in the Formation of National Consciousness

Language serves as one of the cores of Ukrainian culture. Ukrainian stands as an independent Slavic language with its distinct grammar, vocabulary, and phonological system. They remained despite the existence of widespread use of the Russian language during the Soviet period. However, the Ukrainian people insisted on the use of their mother tongue and developed them through literature, media, and education. One of the most important factors in the formation of Ukrainian national consciousness was the official recognition of the Ukrainian language. At the beginning of the 20th century, Ukraine as an independent state promoted the Ukrainian language as an official language. This meant that Ukrainians were free to use the Ukrainian language in public, in government institutions, and within the educational system [2]. This official recognition provided a more conducive environment and opportunities for the development of the Ukrainian language, allowing Ukrainians to use their language with pride and to express the uniqueness of Ukrainian culture through it.

The official recognition of the Ukrainian language had other positive effects. First, it facilitated the establishment of an educational system that popularizes the Ukrainian language, enabling more people to learn and master it. This contributed to the consolidation of the Ukrainian national identity and strengthened the transmission and development of Ukrainian culture. Second, the use of the Ukrainian language in governmental and administrative bodies also facilitated the participation of Ukrainians in the affairs of the State and in the decision-making process, and strengthened their sense of belonging to and participation in the country.

Ukraine has a long historical tradition in the field of culture and art. In spite of political restrictions during the Soviet period, Ukrainian culture retained many unique elements, including language, music, dance, literature and folk art. Ukrainian cultural works and artists made an important contribution to the cultural life of the Soviet Union and brought a sense of pride and identity to the Ukrainian people. Ukrainian literature also had an important place during the Soviet period. For example, many famous Ukrainian writers, such as Taras Shevchenko, Ivan Franko, and Mikhail Bulgakov, added brilliant chapters to Ukrainian literature with their works. Their works explored Ukrainian historical, cultural and social topics and profoundly influenced the development of literature in the Soviet Union as well as other Slavic countries.

Ukraine's cultural status during the Soviet period can be traced to a long historical tradition and unique cultural elements. Despite the political restrictions that existed during the Soviet period,

Ukrainian culture retained its own identity and made an important contribution to the cultural life of the USSR.

In addition, Ukrainian dance music, folk art, and craftsmanship constitute an important part of Ukrainian culture. By preserving elements of their own culture and continuing to create and express them in a restricted environment, Ukrainian cultural works and artists brought a sense of pride and identity to Ukrainians. These cultural achievements not only provided artistic enjoyment for the Ukrainian populace but also contributed richness and diversity to the broader cultural tapestry of the Soviet Union as a whole [3]. The place of Ukrainian culture was not negligible during the Soviet period and provided a solid foundation for Ukraine's continued development after gaining independence.

3. Repression of Ukrainian National Consciousness and Its Resistance

The process of collectivization of Ukrainian farmland began in 1929, driven by Stalin's aspiration for Ukraine, endowed with incredibly fertile black soil, to become the breadbasket of the Soviet Union. He wanted to feed key party officials and export grain abroad to finance his vast industrialization program [4]. However, it was a total disaster. Peasants were no longer paid for their production but worked under a rationing system based on productivity. This transformation did not elicit gratitude toward the party, which controlled their finances and every aspect of their lives. They found themselves unable to purchase food.

From 1931 to 1934, the Soviet Union experienced a severe famine that resulted in the deaths of at least 5 million people, including 3.9 million Ukrainians [3]. Although some Soviet historians dispute this, Applebaum argues that these deaths were not accidental. In her book, she argues that it was due to the disastrous decisions of Joseph Stalin, the general secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, to force peasants to give up their land and join collective farms, to expel the so-called "rich peasants," and to the ensuing chaos.[4]

In parallel, the Soviet Union persecuted intellectuals and officials with tenuous ties to Ukrainian nationalism. This was part of a systematic attack not solely on Ukraine but also on the ideology of Ukraine. Ukrainian nationalism refers to Ukrainians' identification with and esteem for Ukrainian independence and their own national identity. Ukrainian nationalism is significant in a historical context where Ukraine has always faced influence and control from outside forces [5]. However, during the Soviet era, the regime attempted to consolidate a unified system by suppressing Ukrainian nationalism. During the famine, the Soviet secret police began to suppress Ukrainian intellectuals and officials who attempted to propagate the Ukrainian language or history. Anyone with the faintest connection to Ukrainian nationalism could be vilified, arrested, sent to labor camps, or even executed.

These policies and repression had a severe impact on Ukraine, ultimately leading to the Sovietization of Ukraine, the destruction of the idea of Ukrainian nationhood, and the neutralization of any Ukrainian challenge to Soviet unity. This history has taken a huge toll on Ukrainian society and culture and has left a lasting memory. By weakening the Ukrainian intellectual class, famine and repression led to the Sovietization of Ukraine, the destruction of the idea of the Ukrainian nation, and the neutralization of any Ukrainian challenge to Soviet unity. However, despite the regime's attempts to stifle nationalism and the idea of independence, Ukrainian nationalism persisted in later historical developments and became one of the key driving forces of the Ukrainian independence movement.

During the Second World War, Ukrainian national consciousness was reawakened and expressed in various forms. During the Second World War, Ukraine became one of the most important and intense areas of the European theater. Due to its strategic location and rich resources, Ukraine became a center of contention for the major fighting groups [6]. As a multi-ethnic country, Ukraine has a unique history, culture, and language. Nazi Germany tried to persecute Ukrainians by occupying the country and tried to implement a policy of genocide. This caused Ukrainians to develop a stronger sense of defending their national and ethnic identity. In this war, Ukraine suffered great harm and destruction, but at the same time, it evoked a renewed expression of Ukrainian national consciousness.

In World War II, Ukrainians organized underground resistance movements, engaging in partisans and guerrilla tactics. They carried out attacks and sabotage operations against the Germans while providing intelligence and support to the Soviet Red Army. These actions of resistance to German aggression demonstrated the loyalty and steadfastness of Ukrainians to their country and national identity [7]. They rejected the rule by Nazi Germany and bravely fought the invaders in defense of their national dignity and independence. The acts of resistance to the German aggression made Ukrainians further realize their importance and value as a nation and fostered a deeper connection with their culture, language, and history, leading to greater solidarity. It also enabled them to gain support from the international community and recognition of Ukrainian national consciousness. Many Ukrainian writers also produced literary works reflecting the resistance movement and the fate of Ukrainians during World War II. Through realistic portrayals and emotional resonance, these works evoked the suffering of Ukrainians and the spirit of resistance.

During the late Soviet period, the Soviet government gradually loosened its grip on freedom of speech and culture. This change provided space and opportunity for the revival of Ukrainian national consciousness. The Soviet government relaxed censorship and restrictions on some sensitive topics, and people were able to discuss and express their views more freely. This gave Ukrainians the opportunity to openly discuss issues such as their national identity, history, and culture [8]. The Soviet government began to encourage individual ethnic groups to preserve and develop their cultural identity. This provided Ukrainians with more platforms to display and express their national consciousness. The use of the Ukrainian language has gradually been emphasized and promoted, and has contributed positively to the revival of Ukrainian national consciousness. The use of the Ukrainian language in education and media communication has also fostered their sense of national identity and provided a platform for the spread and promotion of Ukrainian national consciousness.

After mission and development of Ukrainian national consciousness. The declaration of Ukrainian independence cemented Ukraine's status as an autonomous nation and gave Ukrainians the opportunity to explore and express their national identity more freely and fully. No longer belonging to the Soviet Union, becoming an independent state likewise meant that Ukraine was able to autonomously determine its own internal and external policies, including economic, cultural, and ethnic affairs, which provided more freedom for the transmission and development of Ukrainian national consciousness [9].

After Ukraine's declaration of independence, there was a gradual effort to de-Sovietize the country in order to rid it of its dependence on and influence over the past Soviet period. This further strengthened Ukraine's independence and national consciousness. Ukraine undertook reforms to history education, revising history textbooks to tell a more objective story of Ukraine's history. This includes highlighting uniquely Ukrainian historical events and figures and reducing the glorification and distortion of the Soviet period in order to strengthen the transmission and development of Ukrainian national consciousness.

A number of memorial sites have been established in Ukraine to commemorate important events and figures in Ukrainian history with the aim of strengthening Ukrainian national identity and national consciousness. For example, Ukraine abolished Soviet Union-related commemorative days and established its own independence commemorative days [10]. For example, the famous Victory Day, which was originally an important day in the Soviet Union to commemorate the victory in World War II. Ukraine abolished the celebrations associated with Soviet Victory Day and established its own Ukrainian Victory Day to honor the sacrifices and victories of Ukrainians in World War II. to emphasize the important contribution and unique identity of the Ukrainian people in history.

Ukraine's national consciousness as an independent state also contributed to global multiculturalism. Ukraine is a multiethnic and multicultural country, bringing together people from different regions and nationalities [11]. The Ukrainian national consciousness is characterized by respect for and tolerance of various cultures and nationalities and promotes multicultural coexistence. Numerous Ukrainian writers, poets, musicians, and artists conveyed Ukrainian culture and national consciousness through their works. Ukrainian literature has been published and distributed

domestically and abroad. They were also translated into other languages so that the unique features of Ukrainian culture are known and appreciated by a wider audience.

Today, Ukrainian national consciousness is widely recognized and valued in Ukrainian society. The Ukrainian language is widely spoken, and Ukrainian culture, history, and traditions are preserved and transmitted. The Ukrainian people are proud of their national identity and are committed to preserving the independence, sovereignty, and development of Ukraine.

The Russo-Ukrainian War reflected national consciousness in the strong opposition of Ukrainians to Russian interference during the war. The conflict between Russia's quest to consolidate its dominance in Eurasian regional affairs and the United States' quest to consolidate its global hegemony, as well as Ukraine's quest for the right to independence by joining the Western camp, were the main conflicts in the Russo-Ukrainian conflict. Internal and external factors drove the escalation of Russia's conflict with the West and Ukraine into a military conflict.

In Putin's view, Ukrainians are a part of the Russian people. Kyiv is the mother of Russian cities. But Ukrainians have gone through independent development and awakening of national consciousness. They hold the Soviet Union responsible for the outbreak of World War II and the "genocide" of Ukrainians. The Ukrainian people show strong feelings of patriotism and desire for the integrity of the country's sovereignty. The Ukrainian flag, national anthem and other symbols of the country became symbols of national unity and resistance to foreign interference. The Ukrainian people expressed their support and defense of the country through demonstrations, protests, and volunteers.

4. Conclusion

Ukrainian national consciousness both formed and died out during the Soviet period. In the early years of the Soviet Union, especially in the 1920s and 1930s, Ukrainian national consciousness was relatively elevated and encouraged. However, under subsequent Soviet rule, Ukrainian national consciousness faced many challenges and repression, and gradually weakened and died out.

The unique features of Ukrainian national consciousness during the formation and demise of the Soviet Union can be summarized as follows. First, the preservation and promotion of the Ukrainian language played a crucial role in shaping Ukrainian national consciousness. Despite the widespread use of Russian during the Soviet period, Ukrainians insisted on the use of their native language as a symbol of cultural identity. Second, Ukrainians are proud of their rich cultural heritage, including literature, music, dance, and folk art. Ukrainian cultural works and artists made an important contribution to the cultural life of the USSR, fostering a sense of pride and identity among Ukrainians. Last, Ukrainians maintain a strong connection to their historical roots and unique national identity. The historical experiences of Ukrainians, including the struggle for independence and cultural repression, have shaped their national consciousness and fostered a spirit of solidarity and resilience.

Overall, the characteristics of Ukrainian national consciousness during the formation and demise of the Soviet Union included the preservation of language, pride in cultural heritage, a strong historical and national identity, and resistance to foreign oppression. These unique features contributed to the formation of Ukrainian national consciousness in the context of the Soviet Union.

The independence of Ukraine had a profound impact on the national consciousness of Ukrainians. It created for Ukrainians an image of an independent State, promoted the revival of culture and the preservation of language, and strengthened Ukrainians' identification with their historical and cultural identity. Together, these factors have collectively encouraged Ukrainians to guard and pass on their national consciousness with greater pride.

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