

# Reconsidering the “Ukrainization” Policy: The Case of VUFKU

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The adoption of the *korenizatsiia* policy at the Twelfth Congress of the Russian Communist Party (RCPb) in April 1923 reflected the Russian Bolsheviks’ inability of managing the massive Ukrainian peasants and the necessity of forming alliances with the local rulings elites. The policy was initiated as the last will of Lenin’s relatively liberal stance towards the non-Russian national republics before his death in January 1924. However, as early as 1922, Stalin, as the People’s Commissar of Nationalities Affairs, already proposed the “autonomization” approach in bringing Ukraine and all other Soviet republics into the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) with a certain degree of autonomy, which then Lenin rejected. After Lenin’s death, the “internationalist” approach won the day as Stalin and the centralist leaders accelerated the all-Union centralization process in assimilating the national republics and creating the common Soviet identity. Soviet Ukraine and other republics enjoyed a short-lived cultural, sometimes political autonomy before 1928 when the Cultural Revolution and the first Five-Year plan were initiated.

The localization of the *korenizatsiia* policy in Soviet Ukraine took place two month after the Russian Party Congress in June 1923. The Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine (CPbU) adopted a set or resolutions regarding the *Ukrainizatsiia* policy in Soviet Ukraine. In August 1923, the Council of People’s Commissar of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (UkrSSR) passed the resolution detailing the principles of means by which the *Ukrainizatsiia* policy was to be implemented. By recruiting Ukrainian elites into the party and state organ, and promoting the Ukrainian language and culture, the policy was used by the central authorities as a temporary means to achieve the final goal in establishing an ideologically merged all-Union Soviet entity.

In the past decades, the content, outcomes, and effects of the *Ukrainizatsiia* policy have been widely discussed and evaluated, e.g., its underlying tension between the Moscow authorities and the Ukrainian elites (Mace 1983), its linguistic aspect of development (Shevelov 1989, 109-140), its synergy with urbanization and demographic change (Liber 1992), its implementation in the educational system (Pauly 2014), its influence on Ukrainian publication and readership (Shkandrij 2016, 160-183), and its impact on literature and cultural politics (Palko 2021). As the artistic aspect of the *Ukrainizatsiia* policy is still less discussed, this paper investigates the policy's influence on the 1920s Ukrainian cinema and film industry by examining the cadre change, thematic planning, and artistic output of the All-Ukrainian Photo-Cinema Administration (*Vseukraïnaske Fotokinoupravlinnia*, VUFKU). This paper aims to discuss issues such as: What were the major influences of the *Ukrainizatsiia* policy on VUFKU's cadre policy and cinematic production? Did Ukrainian cinema manage to achieve a certain degree of cultural autonomy as other sectors did? Who were the leaders, and what was the content during the implementation of the *Ukrainizatsiia* process in the 1920s Soviet Ukrainian cinematic activities?

### ***Korenizatsiia vs. Ukrainizatsiia: different approaches and interpretations***

One of the leading studies of the Soviet nationality policy in Ukraine was performed by James Mace in 1983. Mace applied the idea of "National Communism" to analyzing the *Ukrainizatsiia* process, which was stumbled throughout the 1920s Soviet Ukraine. By indicating the three crises of the *Ukrainizatsiia* process, he identified Oleksandr Shumskyi, Mykola Khvył'ovy, and Mykhailo Volobuiev as the key national-minded promoters in the fields of education, literature, and economy, respectively, and detailed the defeats these Ukrainizers met under the suppression from Moscow. Mace concluded with the assertion that Mykola Skrypnyk was the one who managed to led a short-lived Ukrainian national autonomy to a certain extent before the initiation of the centralization process (Mace 1983).

George Liber combined the nationality policy with the parallel development of urban growth and identity change in Soviet Ukraine after the collapse of the Russian Empire. He traced the impact of the rapid urban growth at the beginning of the twentieth century upon the implementation of the *korenizatsiia* policy and showed

how the interplay between industrialization, urbanization, and *korenizatsiia* produced a modern, urban Ukrainian identity (Liber 1992).

Terry Martin proposed the concept of “Affirmative Action Empire” to explain the rationale of the Soviet nationality policy and its consequences. By providing a broader context of the policy, he argued that the “Affirmative Action Empire” was designed as a strategy to avoid the perception of empire by the nascent Soviet regime. Martin detailed the implementation, challenges, and revisions of the policy and linked them to the Great Famine, the ethnic cleansing, and the Great Terror in the 1930s as the consequences and reaction to the 1920s national projects (Martin 2001).

Olena Palko traced the political and ideological roots of the Ukrainian Bolsheviks and political parties from the times of the civil wars and emphasized the role of the *Borot'bysty* within the Soviet Ukrainian power hierarchy (Palko 2020). Furthermore, Palko indicated that most of the existing studies “analyze the intentions and political objectives of the party centrally” and suggested another layer to the understanding of the policy by separating it as the “*korenizatsiia* in Ukraine” from the central perspective and the “*Ukrainizatsiia*” as the local perception (Palko 2021).

The above-mentioned approaches and interpretations provide us different angles to analyzing the *Ukrainizatsiia* process. However, to see the phenomenon either from the centralist perspective or from the local viewpoint, one must take into consideration the tensions that existed not only between Moscow and Kharkiv but also among the Ukrainian communist leaders themselves, and scrutinize the internal mechanism and reaction to the policy.

### ***The Ukrainization policy and VUFKU***

In an article titled “Hollywood in Odesa,” published in the May issue of the movie magazine *Kino* in 1926, the renowned Ukrainian writer Yuri Yanovs'kyi depicted how the liberal atmosphere it was in Odesa for the nurturing of young artists by the Black Sea shore and how the then most creative brains of Ukraine – the futurist poets were gathered in the port city to create one after another masterpiece in the new form of cinema (Yanovs'kyi 1926, 20). Yanovs'kyi's claim might seem optimistic or exaggerated from today's point of view; however, one cannot deny that the 1920s Ukrainian cinema did help to promote Soviet cinema to a new level and brought new

talents and cinematic works to the stage of the world cinema.

Acknowledging cinema as an effective propaganda tool, Lenin nationalized the Russian film industry in 1919. Similarly, the communist leaders in Ukraine integrated the film sectors in Ukraine by founding VUFKU in March 1922. VUFKU, a state trust supervised by the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment (Narkomos) of the UkrSSR, plays the role of a national-level governmental organ that vertically integrated all spheres related to the cinema on the territory of Ukraine, including film production, film distribution, film exhibition, and film education. Before it was liquidated by the centralization policy posted by the center in Moscow in 1930, during its seven and a half years of existence, VUFKU managed to produce more than 140 full-length feature films and nurtured countless talents in the cinema world (Nebesio 2009; Oleksandr Dovzhenko National Centre 2018; Prymachenko 2015, 2017).

During the early stage of the Soviet state-making, it is no surprise the Russian leaders in Moscow kept in mind that Ukraine would be troublesome, even the thorniest republic to administer based on its early histories of the Central Rada, the Ukrainian People's Republic (UNR), Symon Petliura, and Nestor Makhno. In response to the potential resistance from the republics, the Moscow leadership disclosed the policy of *korenizatsiia* policy in each republic, which in Ukraine received the name – *Ukrainizatsiia* policy.

The *korenizatsiia* policy was announced in April 1923 but was thoroughly implemented only around 1925. The Ukrainian Bolsheviks were diversified on the policy orientation and the approach in promoting the Ukrainian language and culture. Old Bolsheviks like Emanuel Kivring, Vlas Chubar, and Stanislav Kosior were either indifferent or opposed to advocating for national advancement. In contrast, figures from the old *Borot'bysty* party such as Mykola Skrypnyk and Oleksandr Shumskyi were enthusiastic supporters of the nationalist policy (TsDAVOU f. 166, op. 7, s. 9, ark. 21-22).

Ironically, the sound implementation of the *Ukrainizatsiia* policy was secured by the notorious Lazar Kaganovich. A Jew from Odesa and Stalin's longtime right hand, Kaganovich was appointed as the first secretary of the CPbU in April 1925. To materialize the policy, Kaganovich was a strong advocate of promoting the use of Ukrainian language and culture, and advancing Ukrainian cadres in all institutions

(Rees 2012, 65-67). Unsatisfied with the result of the previous initiatives, Kaganovich prompted the Ukrainian Central Committee to set 1 January 1926 as the deadline for the full use of Ukrainian in the state administration.

The policy core of the *Ukrainizatsiia* policy focused mainly on language, education, press, and cadre policy. Measures like opening Ukrainian language courses in state administration and organs are obligatory. All the public servants must pass the exam in the Ukrainian language, those who failed to pass will be laid off. Another characteristic of the policy is to nationalize the party and state bodies, including both bringing Ukrainians into the party and state cadre and inviting Ukrainians in exile to be back to Ukraine.

### ***The implementation of the policy and the attitude of VUFKU management***

Since its initiation in April 1922, most of VUFKU's moviemakers worked in the Russian-speaking city of Odesa, where the most productive film factory of VUFKU was located. In response to the implementation of the *Ukrainizatsiia* policy, VUFKU opened the Ukrainian language courses for the employees in August 1925 and held the qualification test in January 1926. Unsurprisingly, the result was not satisfying as lots of employees are non-Ukrainian-speaking Russians and Jews. Among the management team of VUFKU, fourteen people received the first level proving the excellent command of Ukrainian. Those who passed were mostly writers from Kharkiv and Kyiv and then worked as editors or scriptwriters in VUFKU, such as Mykola Bazhan, Maik Iohansen, Yuri Yanovs'kyi, and Yuri Tiutiunyk. Twenty-seven people were recognized as the second level with basic or intermediate command of the language, primarily administrative and technical staff. Ten people fell into the third level with poor knowledge of Ukrainian, including VUFKU's head – Zakhar Khelmno (TsDAVOU f. 1238, op. 1, s. 55, ark. 366). Although the staff's language command is not satisfying, the composition of VUFKU's personnel was indeed "Ukrainianized" somehow. For example, the number of ethnic Ukrainians served at the management team of VUFKU increased from three out of fifteen in December 1925 to seven out of twenty in December 1926.

One can also observe from the conference proceedings the orientation of the VUFKU management members and their aspiration in developing the national film

industry and implementing the *Ukrainizatsiia* policy. Short of film materials, equipment, and professionals, the first four years of VUFKU's operation was disorganized and produced only twenty-nine feature films (one in 1922, four in 1923, fifteen in 1924, and nine in 1925), compared with that only the year 1928 produced thirty-eight films. It was not until Zazhar Khelmno took the position as VUFKU's head in the summer of 1924 and Pavlo Neches was appointed as Odesa film factory's director in 1925, the situation became getting to the right track. Neither Khelmno nor Neches was an experienced filmmaker. Still, they were both eager to restructure the bureaucratic system, reboot the cultural production, and improve the filmmakers' technical conditions and environment (Naumova 2011, 2014; Musiienko-Fortuns'ka 2014).

Seeing the problems of the existed administration and film studios, Khelmno set out his reform priorities. Firstly, the whole Soviet film industry suffered from the shortage of film materials and equipment in the aftermath of the long-lasting war and the recovering economy. In autumn 1924, Khelmo decided to send a specialist group to Europe to buy quality materials and new equipment. Secondly, to solve the "script crisis" that long existed in VUFKU's film factories, in 1926, Khelmno invited renowned writers such as Yanovs'kyi, Bazhan, and Semenko to the Odesa film studio working as editors and screenwriters (Pasichnyk 2017, 2017). This move can be seen as an "internal" *Ukrainizatsiia* process within the organization. The fruitful results were shown in a majority of Ukrainian-themed feature films of VUFKU released since 1927, comprising a variety of topics and genres such as national minorities, female rights, psychological thrillers, and historical adventure, etc.

Thirdly, except for the literary circles, Khelmno appealed to the theater talents. He proposed to the famous theater directors Les' Kurbas and Marko Tereshchenko to come to Odesa working on moviemaking. The former stayed less than half a year while made five films for VUFKU; the latter managed to adapt the new art form and shot a number of successful pictures. Lastly, Khelmno gave birth to the construction of the Kyiv film factory (today's Dovzhenko studio). In all, Khelmno energetically and efficiently laid the foundation for further developing VUFKU and its future cinematic output within his three-year term as the head.

Compared with Khelmno's achievement in materializing the infrastructure for

VUFKU, Pavlo Nechesa – the director of the Odesa film factory and later the Kyiv film factory, was the one who firsthand administered the many artists in the studios. Probably the most decisive contribution Nechesa ever made for Ukrainian cinema was that when Yanovs'kyi and Bazhan were invited to work in the Odesa studio as editors, they brought with them their roommate Oleksandr Dovzhenko together from Kharkiv. Dovzhenko started working as a movie poster designer at VUFKU, then was asked by Nechesa to write scripts and direct films for VUFKU.

During the *Ukrainizatsiia* process in VUFKU, while prominent Kharkiv writers joined the editorial and screenwriting squad of VUFKU in boosting the national cinematic content, it is these film administrators such as Khelmno and Nechesa who, on the one hand, prompting the advancement of cultural production and, on the other hand, defending the ideas and debating with the conservative leadership on the potential “bourgeois nationalist” or “national deviant” elements of VUFKU’s works.

### ***VUFKU’s reaction to the Russian counterpart***

In securing their power in the remote republics, the nascent Soviet regime not only designed the *korenizatsiia* policy to appease the local elites but also adopted a compromised capitalist approach of the market system to boost the post-war economy. The essence of this “New Economic Policy” (NEP) was to solve the severe shortage of agricultural and industrial production caused by the “War Communism” policy adopted during the war. The direct consequence is the 1921-1922 famine and the peasant uprising. Though still exploited by Moscow, NEP has approved a success, especially in Ukraine. By the early 1920s, state trust like VUFKU was financially much robust than its Russian counterpart – Goskino (later Sovkino).

Before the establishment of the Soviet Union in December 1922 and the adoption of the first Soviet Constitution in January 1924, the central-peripheral relationship and power hierarchy between the UkrSSR and the RSFSR was complex and in some parts ambiguous. The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk signed in 1918 recognized the Central Rada and its General Secretariat as the sovereign government and independent state. Up to 1923, Soviet Ukraine conducted foreign relations, signed international treaties with other countries, and carried foreign trade completely separated from Soviet Russia.

Soviet Ukraine promulgated its first Constitution in March 1919, and an economic and military union treaty was signed in December 1920 between Soviet Ukraine and Soviet Russia. Before the 1924 Soviet Constitution took most of the executive powers from the union republics, the 1920 union treaty already indicated that in order to bring closer economic and military relations between the two countries, the power of Soviet Ukrainian commissariats of defense, communication, and economy should be shared with its Russian counterparts. In practice, it means that these branches were to be subordinate to the central commissariats in Moscow.

Such contradictory power distribution of diplomatic, economic, and foreign trade authorities leads to the following mutual blockade and economic war between VUFKU and Sovkino during 1926-1927. While most Soviet film studios were still struggling with producing quality films and reaching self-efficient capability, VUFKU's output made up forty percent of the all-union's demand. However, the Russian film monopoly Sovkino banned the film trade with VUFKU, and the conflict thus became a mutual boycott.

As early as 1924, VUFKU's films were not shown in the RSFSR. Later in 1926, Bazhan, as the chief editor of *Kino*, claimed in the editorial that it's a mere fact either the quality or the number of Ukrainian films are much better than the Russian pictures at the time. It provoked condemnation from the Russian film circles. In short, between 1924-1927, VUFKU's films were not allowed to be released in the RSFSR, while Russian masterpiece like *Battleship of Potemkin* was not premiered in Ukraine either.

In reality, VUFKU had the total monopoly of deciding film screening on the territory of Ukraine. Regarding the film exhibition in other republics (including the RSFSR), a purchase-permission contract must be concluded between UkrSSR and the other republics. However, such an agreement negotiation process was not always smooth and was usually stuck because of the disagreement of the purchasing price. It often leads to a delay, even non-screening of the Ukrainian films in other republics.

An unknown critic named Kertes wrote an article titled "Film production of RSFSR and VUFKU," published in the tenth issue of *Kino* in 1926. He pointed out the fact that how the Russian film industry declined within the past few years, merely the operational year 1925/1926, four out of seven film studios in the RSFSR were closed or disbanded. Although the authority recognized the inefficiency of Goskino



and transformed it into Sovkino, the reviving of the film industry in the RSFSR would not be materialized in the short term (Kertes 1926, 1-3).

VUFKU's head Pavlo Nechesa expressed his view on the intense relations between VUFKU and Sovkino in an interview. It stated that it was Sovkino who long viewed VUFKU as its main competitor. As Sovkino was not strong enough to merge VUFKU; it could only boycott its works and complain to the high party officials.

The boycott was lifted in 1927 as Oleksandr Shub was appointed the new head of VUFKU and signed an agreement with Sovkino. However, similar controversies continued in the following years. Though VUFKU was managed to sell its own films to the U.S. through a French film company in 1926, later in 1929 and 1930, there were cases that Sovkino negotiated and concluded trade of certain VUFKU's films without even notifying the producing company.

From VUFKU's case, one can see that the centralization initiatives were on their way despite the simultaneous implementation of the *Ukrainizatsiia* policy in the second half of the 1920s. As early as 1926, the recommendation of an all-union level film organization was proposed, and similar proposals were discussed in 1927 and 1928 on different occasions. Although Ukrainian activists such as the then Commissar of Enlightenment Mykola Skrypnyk vehemently opposed the idea and hoped to preserve the national cinematic autonomy, the liquidation was inevitable. In the end, VUFKU was merged into the newly founded Soyuzkino in October 1930.

In a way, it can be said that the *Ukrainizatsiia* policy endorsed and sponsored the cultural autonomy VUFKU managed to achieve in the cinematic sphere in the mid-1920s. Thus the boycott and the economic war between VUFKU and its Russian counterpart can be seen as one of the side effects of such autonomy.

### ***Thematic plans and national narratives***

The 1923 passed *Ukrainizatsiia* policy had a direct influence on the thematic planning of VUFKU's films. Compared with the pre-revolutionary films that mainly depicted melodrama of the upper-class life or adapted from the Russian classics, VUFKU managed to produce Ukrainian-themed pictures in a variety of genres.

The implementation of the *Ukrainizatsiia* policy in cinematic production was

announced at the first issue of *Kino* by the editorial board in November 1925. In an article titled “Cinema Policy in Ukraine,” the editor Yu. Ozers’kyi disclosed four critical tasks for the future development of Ukrainian cinema, including the monopoly of film screening, the *cinefication* in Ukrainian villages, the adjustment of scriptwriting policy, and the *Ukrainizatsiia* of Ukrainian cinema. Three goals were elaborated regarding the *Ukrainizatsiia*: (1) the *Ukrainizatsiia* of inscription and writing; (2) the *Ukrainizatsiia* of content including digging more from the Ukrainian revolutionary histories and the everyday life of peasants and workers; and (3) the *Ukrainizatsiia* of movie directors, scriptwriters including learning the Ukrainian language and creating a Ukrainian-style environment (pp. 1-2).

VUFKU’s many Ukrainian-themed films best showcased the effect of the *Ukrainizatsiia* policy on cinema since its implementation in 1925 in Soviet Ukraine. According to the editorial meeting chaired by the newly appointed head of VUFKU – Oleksandr Shub, held on June 1927, it was concluded that the thematic plan of future production should comprise at least sixty percent of Ukrainian-themed films, either historical-social features or historical-revolutionary ones (TsDAVOU f. 1238, op. 1, s. 137, ark. 68). By shooting historical drama and biopic feature films, both Ukrainian and non-Ukrainian moviemakers from VUFKU, for the first time, had the chance to interpret their view on the Ukrainian past.

As mentioned above, in the early years of VUFKU, there were few experienced filmmakers and few Ukrainians at hand. The first director who was able to create quality national films was the Russian veteran – Pyotr Chardynin. Chardynin belonged to the pre-revolutionary generation and shot his first feature film in 1909. During the civil war era, he emigrated to Latvia; upon his return in 1923, Chardynin took the Odesa film factory’s invitation to continue his filmmaking career, where he used to work before the war. Chardynin directed sixteen films in eight years in Odesa. Two historical pictures were regarded as the most national ones: the biopic *Taras Shevchenko* and the historical drama *Taras Tryasylo* (Pashkova 2013; Yehorov 2019). Both films were released in 1926 and starred the most talented actor of the time – Amvrosiy Buchma from Kurbas’s *Berezil’*. The former was the first Ukrainian biopic of the national poet and was a costly production; the latter was adapted from Volodymyr Sosiura’s verse novel depicting the uprising of the seventeenth century Cossacks and was released and highly acclaimed in the U.S. and Europe (Myslavs’kyi

2016, 2019).

Vladimir Gardin is another Russian veteran who dealt with Ukrainian themes in the early stage of VUFKU. His 1924 film *Ostap Bandura* was written by the Ukrainian writer Mykhailo Mais'kyi which tells the conflict between a Ukrainian coachman and a landlord. VUFKU also invited foreign professionals to Odesa; the German cameraman happened to direct two Ukrainian-themed pictures for VUFKU - *Boryslav is Smiling* (1927) and *Zakhar Berkut* (1929). The former sketches the workers' life in the 1870s Halychyna, while the latter was adapted from Ivan Franko's famous historical epic.

To ask what made VUFKU's existence and its works "national," one can not avoid the name of Oleksandr Dovzhenko. A former Borot'bist' activist, teacher, diplomat, painter, and cartoonist, Dovzhenko worked at VUFKU firstly as a poster designer, screenwriter, and assistant director. He made his fame to his Soviet colleagues and the world with the famous Ukrainian trilogy – *Zvenyhora* (1928), *Arsenal* (1929), and *Earth* (1930).

Like Gogol and other intellectuals from the Ukrainian countryside, his childhood experience and humble origin enabled him to include elements of folklore, legends, and traditions into his works. *Zvenyhora* might be the best case exemplifying Dovzhenko's intention in honoring his native Ukraine by intertwining complex structure with historical narrative lines. A historical epic ranging from the thousands-year-old legend of Roxana to the eighteenth-century Haidamaky uprising to the current civil war, the film cleverly implied the Ukrainian national identity issue by representing the diverse orientation of two brothers, similar to Gogol's *Taras Bul'ba*. Through propagandizing the official collectivization policy, *Earth* took another approach to glorify Ukrainian elegance by showcasing the naturalist landscape of the Ukrainian steppe (Kepley, Jr. 1986; Trymbach 2007; Marochko 2019).

Though VUFKU started the Ukrainian-themed productions as early as 1925 in accordance with the *Ukrainizatsiia* policy, it was not until 1928 that the artistic department of VUFKU published the first annual thematic plan. In September 1928, the 1928-1929 thematic plan was published on the ninth issue of the movie magazine *Kino*. Five types of topics were identified as the main direction for the screenwriters, namely themes of social and everyday life, themes that cover national policies,

themes of the history of Ukrainian social movements, themes of the ancient past of Ukraine, and themes of children films. Among them, three example topics were given to the category “themes of the history of Ukrainian social movements”: the Decemberist revolt in Ukraine, the Surochyns’ka tragedy (the peasant uprising during the 1905-1907 revolution), and the revolts in the Carpathian regions. In the “themes of the ancient past of Ukraine” category, figures of legends such as Bondaryvna and Marusia Bohuslavka were suggested (pp. 17-24).

The 1929-1930 thematic plan was published in the thirteenth issue of *Kino* in July 1929. As the political atmosphere became ideologically stricter and the first Five-Year plan was introduced after 1928, it can be seen that the direction of the planned themes was accordingly shifted. Ten types of topics were announced as the principles: social-political themes, social-industrial themes based on urban cases, social-industrial themes based on country cases, cultural revolutionary and everyday life, anti-religious themes, themes of youth’s life, themes of children films, themes of Red Army’s life, social-historical, themes of national minority, and comedies. Examples were suggested to the “social-historical” category, such as the Bohdan Khmel’nyts’kyi uprising and the adaptation of Mykhailo Kotsiubyns’ky’s novella *Fata-Morhana*, which depicts the peasant revolution in 1905.

## ***Conclusion***

The intention of the *korenizatsiia* policy was to stabilize the rule of the remote republics and to recruit the local elites into the Soviet political system. However, the policy caused side effects, unexpected to the Moscow leaders, especially in Soviet Ukraine. National-minded communists such as Oleksandr Shums’kyi, Mykola Khvyl’ovy, and Mykola Skrypnyk, though all had diversified stances toward the Ukrainian autonomy and the Ukrainian-Russian relationship, became the thorns in the Bolshevik’s side and accordingly perished in different ways, respectively.

Such radical and public opposition to the centralist ideology did not take place in the cinematic field. However, artists such as Oleksandr Dovzhenko and Ivan Kavaleridze implicitly hid the “national messages” in metaphors and symbols in their creative works under the propagandistic cover (Musiienko 2018). Meanwhile, the *Ukrainizatsiia* policy favored VUFKU’s cultural autonomy in cinema, which was rarely seen in other artistic sectors. The *Ukrainizatsiia* policy not only helped to

recruit more Ukrainian professionals and potential talents to the cinematic circle, but it also contributed to the participation of the best Ukrainian literati of the time to cinema and the increasing number of Ukrainian-themed cinema production.

To thoroughly perform the *Ukrainizatsiia* policy, VUFKU organized the Ukrainian language course and the certification test for the primarily Russian-speaking employees. The thematic plans of film production were accordingly shifted to the Ukrainian-themed topics such as the biopic *Taras Shevchenko* (1926), the historical drama *Taras Tryasylo* (1926), and the literary adaptation *Sorochyns'kyi Fair* (1927). As a result of the cultural autonomy endorsed by the *Ukrainizatsiia* policy VUFKU also managed to bargain with its Russian counterpart regarding film trade and distribution. The institutional mechanism and artistic output of VUFKU served not only as a case study of the *Ukrainizatsiia* policy, it also shed light on re-evaluating some undiscovered aspects of the policy in the early Soviet period.

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