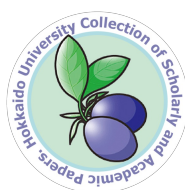




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Olga Khomenko, *Dalekoskhidna odisseya Ivana Svita* (Kyiv: Laurus, 2021), 584 pp.

This thoughtful and meticulously researched book is far more than a biography of a Ukrainian in Manchuria. Olga Khomenko, a renowned Ukrainian scholar of Japanese history at Oxford University, conducted illuminating research on a relatively unknown subject. This book tells the story of a journalist, Ivan Svit, exploring the forgotten world of Ukrainians in the Far East and their encounters with foreign cultures (most notably Japan). It reveals the truly global dimension of the Ukrainian issue.

The book tells the story of the “Far Eastern Odyssey” of Ivan Svitlanov, as was the main protagonist’s real name. Born in 1897 in the Kharkiv Gubernia of Russia, he came to Vladivostok during revolutionary upheavals in the empire. In 1922, Svit arrived in Harbin, an important international city that had acquired a large “Russian” colony as a result of the building of the Chinese Eastern Railway. His first breakthrough as a journalist happened in Harbin, where he worked for Russian and Chinese newspapers (p. 40). Harbin emerged as a center of “captive Soviet nations” during the 1920s, with activists establishing contacts with European powers. It became evident when the Ukrainian movement in the region had to contend with much stronger “White Russian” influences.

Following the Japanese seizure of Manchuria in 1931 and the establishment of Manchukuo, the new administration had to legitimize these actions. The Japanese saw this region as a showcase for multiculturalism and European–Asian cooperation. Having previously been estranged from the Chinese authorities, who seized Harbin’s Ukrainian House, local Ukrainians enthusiastically welcomed Japanese occupation. Over time, the Japanese perception of the Ukrainian question changed from sympathy (1932–1935) to more pragmatism (1935–1937). In the first phase, the author shows that Ukrainians reclaimed the Ukrainian House and established publishing capacities. It was Svit who became editor-in-chief of the weekly “Manchurian Herald.” As a result of Ukrainian emigrants’ anti-Communist orientation, the Prometheus Club was established in 1932 under the leadership of Svit. The club was part of the anti-Soviet international Promethean movement, which was orchestrated by some Western rivals of the USSR, particularly Poland. Unlike Polish Prometheans, who genuinely supported the cause of the Soviet “captive nations,” Japanese authorities had a more pragmatic approach, using the Prometheans to pursue their imperial ambitions. The Japanese may have used Svit and his publishing activities to counter Soviet influence in Harbin and elsewhere. It is clear from the author’s findings that Ukrainophiles received support from the Japanese military circles, and Svit had a particularly close relationship with Horie Kazumasa, a Japanese military counselor and diplomat (pp. 67, 185).

During the mid-30s, Japanese attitudes toward Svit and the Prometheans changed due to a more radical imperial policy aligning them with Nazi Germany and shifting their support from Ukrainians to Russian fascists (pp. 54–55). In 1934, Japanese diplomats established their first relations with the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists in Berlin. After the foundation of the Ukrainian National Colony in 1935, German-oriented nationalists and hetmanates soon dominated it (p. 88). In 1937, OUN representatives in Manchuria orchestrated a coup against pro-Polish figure Ivan Svit, which resulted in de facto isolating him and other followers of the Promethean movement from the Ukrainian community. The new policies undertaken by the Japanese authorities were clearly in line with the growing influence of the OUN: the publication of Svit’s weekly was ceased

on behalf of the nationalist journal "Far East." A combination of the German–Japanese rapprochement of 1936 and the growing influence of Ukrainian nationalists in Manchuria may have led to it. Despite profound differences, Svit maintained contact with OUN representatives, perhaps to avoid provoking unnecessary divisions within the Ukrainian community. As a result, his publishing activities prospered. Khomenko discovered a valuable unpublished manuscript of his book on the history of Ukrainians in the Far East (pp. 89–97).

Svit arrived in Shanghai in July 1941, shortly after the Nazis invaded the Soviet Union. His transfer to Shanghai was likely motivated by the Japanese administration's increasing alliance with Russian exiles in Harbin and the signing of the non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union. The author describes how the Ukrainian community functioned in Shanghai, using material from Svit's personal archives never used before (pp. 114–134). As a resident of the French concession area in Shanghai, Svit helped edit the Ukrainian English-language journal "Call of Ukraine," published under Japanese auspices with strong anti-Soviet tendencies (pp. 140–141). Svit moved to the United States in 1951, where he eventually lost his significance in the Ukrainian community and instead struggled with poverty. Under the new name John V. Sweet, he established relationships with the émigré Ukrainian Free Academy of Sciences (UVAN) in New York and donated his archival collections to it after he passed away in 1989. The book heavily relies on sources from the UVAN archives. In addition to the manuscript of "The Brief History of Ukrainian Movement in the Far East (Asia)" (1938), the book also contains questionnaires, family documents, and maps of the "Zelenyi Klyn." It also provides a detailed index of names and geographical names.

Despite the book's excellent writing and extensive research, there are a few minor flaws that do not undermine its scholarly merits. First, Khomenko seeks to idealize Ivan Svit as a figure who "did not change his mind or identity and always called himself a Ukrainian" (p. 45). While he was an ardent Ukrainian patriot, he had to be flexible enough in his political orientations due to the times he lived in and the political regimes he had to deal with. Second, more Polish context is needed. Poland, alongside Japan, supported the Ukrainian cause against its principal enemy, the Soviet Union, during the interwar period. A prominent Promethean and Sovietologist, Włodzimierz Bączkowski, was raised in Harbin, and this experience shaped him to see the world through an oriental perspective. Svit's Polish connections should be studied more carefully as they would better explain the global context for Ukrainian activism in the Far East. Recent works by Paweł Libera and Hiroaki Kuromiya are of particular interest. Third, recent publications of archival materials may have helped broaden the author's perspective: to cite here declassified and published documents from the archives of the Foreign Intelligence Service of Ukraine (*Diyal'nist' UNR* in 3 volumes, 2019) and Russia (*Sekrety pol'skoï politiki*, 2009).

From 1914 onwards, the Ukrainian question has become a profoundly global issue—also in Eurasian terms. While previous works have well documented the Polish and German engagement with the Ukrainian problem, Olga Khomenko's book explores a much less acknowledged aspect of Japanese involvement. It also shows how naive many Ukrainian activists were, both Ivan Svit and his nationalist rivals, who pinned their hopes for independence on the victory of the Japanese (and Germans). In doing so, they cast a long shadow over Ukrainian independence, which the Western allies did not receive well. However, it is fair to say that the Ukrainian cause was doomed when the West supported Stalin against Hitler, while Tokyo saw Prometheans instrumentally. In Manchuria, Ivan Svit indeed "constructed his imagined ideal Ukraine," as the author nicely put it (p.

BOOK REVIEWS

199)—but this vision had to wait until the international situation became more amicable for Ukrainian independence.

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