



Ca' Foscari  
University  
of Venice

Master's Degree Programme  
in European, American and Postcolonial  
Languages and Literatures

Final Thesis

# **Vladimir Klavdiyevich Arsenyev's Literary Framework and its Orientalist Implications:**

Study on Travelogue in the Russian Far East  
from a Postcolonial Perspective

**Supervisor**

Ch. Prof. Evgeny Dobrenko

**Assistant supervisor**

Ch. Prof. Aldo Ferrari

**Graduand**

Filippo Boscolo Gioachina

Matriculation Number 875538

**Academic Year**

2022 / 2023



Ca' Foscari  
University  
of Venice



Ca' Foscari  
University  
of Venice

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis is the result of extensive research conducted at the Russian State Library between 2022 and 2023 and multiple visits to the Kunstkamera and Russian Museum of Ethnography in Saint Petersburg.

I wish to extend my heartfelt gratitude to Professor Evgeny Dobrenko for his support during my Master's research project. Additionally, I want to express my appreciation to Professor Aldo Ferrari for his course on the history of religions in the Eurasian space, which sparked my interest in Shamanism and the religions of the Siberian peoples.

Furthermore, my gratitude goes to Professor Alessandro Farsetti for introducing me to the field of Russian Studies five years ago and to Daniela Rizzi, who, over the years, first as Professor of Russian Literature and then as Director of the Italian Institute of Culture (IIC) in Moscow, has remained a great source of inspiration academically, professionally, and personally.

I would also like to thank Professor Natalya Smykunova for teaching me the Russian language and conveying her passion for Russian culture. Special thanks to Aglaya Gulakova, who assisted me both linguistically and in researching particularly challenging sources.

Lastly, I am grateful to my parents, my brother Riccardo, and my sibling-in-law Melissa for their unwavering support in my pursuit of a career in Russian Studies.

This thesis is the culmination of five years of intense study, hard work, and a great deal of passion for Russia, its language, culture, and literature.

*A mio nipote Leonardo*

## A NOTE ON DATES, TRANSLATION, ROMANIZATION, AND HISTORICAL SOURCES

In the present study, transliterations adhered to the romanization of the 1947 BGN/PCGN system, which was adopted for the transcription of names written in the Russian Cyrillic alphabet, except for names and words widely known in English by other spellings. Thus, for example, the spelling of “Maxim Gorky” is used rather than “Maksim Gor’kiy.” Where Russian surnames were adapted from German or other Western languages, it was employed the spelling common to such languages, as in the case of the Soviet composer “Isaac Schwartz” rather than “Isaak Shvarts.”

The sources used for the historical framework of the Far East are mainly Andreas Kappeler’s *Rußland als Vielvölkerreich. Entstehung. Geschichte. Zerfall* and Zenone Volpicelli’s *Russia on the Pacific, and the Siberian railway*. Furthermore, the official websites of the Russian Geographical Society and the Center “Amurskiy Tigr” have provided valuable historical and ethnographic information.

All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

Finally, all the Russian dates prior to the 1918 reform were written in accordance with the Gregorian calendar.

Ты орел мой сизокрылый  
Где ты долго так летал?  
Я летал там за горами,  
Где стояла тишина.

Ты орел мой сизокрылый  
Где летаешь, мой орел?  
Я летаю в небе синем  
За высокою горой.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Isaac Schwartz. Movie Music 6. From the movie *Dersu Uzala* (1975) by Akira Kurosawa. Symphony Orchestra of Leningrad Radio and Television.



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction .....	I
Автореферат .....	III
CHAPTER I – Vladimir Klavdiyevich Arsenyev (1872–1930): geographer, ethnographer, writer, researcher of the Far East, and military orientalist.....	1
1.1 – Life, achievements, and death of a “kind man” .....	1
1.1.1 – “Den mutigen gehört die Welt”: the early life of Vladimir Arsenyev .....	4
1.1.2 – <i>Na Vostok</i> : the year 1900, transfer to the Russian Far East.....	12
1.2 – Soviet power and the confiscation of the author’s papers.....	22
1.2.1 – The case of <i>The Land of the Udege</i> : the writer’s <i>magnum opus</i> .....	23
1.3 – Establishment as a writer.....	31
1.3.1 – A traveler among writers .....	32
CHAPTER II – The literary framework of Vladimir Arsenyev .....	38
2.1 – Unveiling the Far East to the world.....	38
2.1.1 – Between Fiction and Scientific literature: defining the author’s prose .....	41
2.1.2 – The lyric self and the author: similarities and discrepancies.....	45
2.1.3 – Union of poetic and scientific traits: examples of “ <i>Arsenyevskaya proza</i> ” ..	46
2.2 – <i>Putevye pis'ma</i> , travel reports as drafts for literary works.....	49
2.3 – <i>Across the Ussuri Krai</i> (1921).....	53
2.3.1 – Pondering the volume: the unintentional birth of <i>Dersu Uzala</i> .....	56
2.3.2 – <i>Amba!</i> Shamanism and beliefs of the Nanai people .....	58
2.4 – <i>Dersu Uzala</i> (1923) .....	64
2.4.1 – The Literary <i>Dersu</i> . Mirroring the author’s personality .....	68
2.4.2 – The unembellished <i>Dersu</i> : P. P. Bordakov’s travel writings.....	71



2.5 – The last expedition: <i>Through the Taiga</i> (1930) .....	74
2.5.1 – The origin of the <i>povest</i> ’ .....	74
2.5.2 – Text in translation: considerations on the style of Arsenyev’s last short story: examples of “ <i>Arsenyevskaya forma</i> ” .....	75
2.6 – Arsenyev’s fame in the international arena: <i>Dersu Uzala</i> (1975) by Akira Kurosawa .....	79
CHAPTER III – A Colonial Travel Literature? Methodological considerations of Vladimir Arsenyev’s prose according to the Orientalist approach .....	84
3.1 – <i>Orientalism</i> by Edward Said .....	84
3.1.1 – The representation of the East in literature.....	85
3.1.2 – Latent and Manifest Orientalism.....	89
3.1.3 – Praise and criticism of Said’s methodology .....	89
3.2 – Implementing Orientalist views to the works of V. K. Arsenyev: A European perspective on the Russian Far East.....	94
3.2.1 – Sympathies and antipathies toward the ethnic groups of the Far East.....	94
3.2.2 – Industrialisation and repudiation of progress: “ <i>Razve eto tsivilizatsiya?</i> ” Civilization–nature juxtaposition .....	103
3.3 – Was this a different kind of colonial process? Albert Memmi’s considerations on the relationship between <i>The Colonizer and the Colonized</i> and the Russian Far East .....	108
3.3.1 – The intertwinement of the colonizer and the colonized .....	112
3.3.2 – A “spontaneous” colonialism? Arsenyev’s proposal for coexistence with Far Eastern natives: criticism of Tsarist and Soviet policies .....	116
CONCLUSION: One hundred years of <i>Dersu Uzala</i> (1923–2023). Further analysis of the bond between colonizer and colonized could provide valuable insights for Orientalist and Postcolonial studies.....	119
Bibliography .....	125

## Introduction

The present thesis seeks to undertake a literary analysis of the multifaceted persona of Vladimir Arsenyev (1872–1930), an explorer, ethnographer, and writer of the Russian Far East.

This study, which is structured into an introduction, three chapters, and a conclusion, includes a brief background of the writer's life to better comprehend his moral upbringing by distinguishing the youth spent in Saint Petersburg from the transfer to the Far East, where Arsenyev was symbolically reborn as an explorer and writer. The work touches upon events following the writer's death and the repercussions on his family members. After exploring the aftermath of the author's conflict with Soviet power, it provides an in-depth examination of Vladimir Arsenyev's lost monograph *The Land of the Udege*, also referring to contemporary Russian Arsenyevists, such as Ivan Yegorchev (1951–2017) and Aleksandr Lobychev (1958–2018), and their recent studies on the figure of the explorer.

This research analyzes the author's correspondence with his prominent Soviet fellows, who officially proclaimed Arsenyev as a writer and facilitated the distribution of his literary works in the Soviet Union and abroad. Specifically, the interrelations with Maxim Gorky, Aleksandr Fadeyev, and Mikhail Prishvin are taken into consideration.

The second chapter begins with a brief introduction to the birth of Far Eastern literature and investigates Arsenyev's literary style, with a particular focus on *Across the Ussuri Krai*, *Dersu Uzala*, and *Through the Taiga*, from their drafts in travel diaries to travelogues. In this regard, the writer's lyrical and scientific traits are examined, followed by an in-depth analysis of the books' main leitmotifs. Therefore, the issues discussed in the following sections refer to substantial differences between the unembellished version of *Dersu Uzala* based on P. P. Bordakov's *Poberezhnye Yaponskogo Morya* and the literary world-renowned portrayal in the book by Vladimir Arsenyev. Furthermore, the cinematographic version of *Dersu Uzala* in the 1975 award-winning movie by Akira Kurosawa is considered. Moreover, the thesis covers the beliefs and religion of the Nanai people and delves into Arsenyev's last literary expedition: *Through the Taiga* (1930). The short story, which covers the adventure on the Sovetskaya Gavan – Khabarovsk route, is examined in detail by focusing on instances of 'Arsenyevskaya forma,' namely episodes in which the scientific traits of the author blend with passages of extreme artistic flair.

Finally, a brief overview of Edward Said's renowned work (*Orientalism*) is provided in the third chapter. Through an analysis of the portrayal of the East in literature, the distinction

between Latent and Manifest Orientalism is presented. Furthermore, both praise and criticism of Said's methodology are considered. The second part of the chapter attempts to employ the Orientalist and Postcolonial approaches to the prose of Vladimir Arsenyev, therefore examining the East-West dichotomy and the juxtaposition between civilization and nature in the author's writing. These theoretical perspectives play a significant role in exploring the writer's relationship with different ethnic groups in the Far East and categorizing Arsenyev's literature as a colonial travel genre.

In conclusion, the present thesis is dedicated to the discussion of the literary portrayals of the colonial processes that took place in the Russian Far East and their specificities, thus highlighting the relationship between the Russian colonizers in the region, the Asian peoples, and Vladimir Arsenyev's social position in this regard. It proceeds with the analysis of the interconnections between the two, by referring to Albert Memmi's *The Colonizer and the Colonized* and to Arsenyev's idea of a "spontaneous colonialism," that is, the practices for the integration of Far Eastern aborigines or their coexistence, which went against both Tsarist and Soviet policies on the so-called "*inorodtsy*."

This study aims to constitute a basis for further research on the literary depiction of the bond between the colonizers and the colonized in the works of other Far Eastern writers and provide potentially valuable insights for Orientalist and Postcolonial studies.

## Автореферат

Владимир Клавдиевич Арсеньев — известный путешественник, исследователь и писатель, внесший неоценимый вклад в изучение Дальнего Востока России. Проведя большую часть своей жизни в данном регионе, он возглавил ряд экспедиций, материалы которых составили основу его трудов *По Уссурийскому краю*, *Дерсу Узала*, *В горах Сихотэ-Алиня*, *Сквозь тайгу*, считающихся по праву фундаментальными для развития как отечественной науки, так и художественной литературы. Изучение населяющих дальневосточные территории коренных народов, описание характера их расселения, жизненного уклада и духовной культуры, занимающее особое место в его работах, и по сей день представляет интерес для российских и зарубежных ученых. Наряду с этим стоит отметить усиливающуюся популяризацию таких подходов к анализу всевозможных исторических и социологических вопросов, как Ориентализм и Постколониализм, что в сочетании со специфическим характером колониальных практик, проводившихся на Дальнем Востоке России, определяет актуальность темы данной диссертации.

Кроме того, необходимо отметить научную новизну, обусловленную недостаточной изученностью как самих работ В. К. Арсеньева, отсутствием публикаций его дневников и писем, полного собрания сочинений, так и колониационных процессов Дальнего Востока России. На сегодняшний день в большинстве исследований рассматривается экологический аспект произведений Арсеньева, а также связь между представителем цивилизованного общества и человеком в «естественном состоянии», не предполагая, однако, более глубокий анализ присущей его книгам интроспекции лирического героя. Кроме того, отсутствуют какие-либо работы, содержащие анализ прозы Арсеньева в колониальном дискурсе. Таким образом, научная новизна работы заключается в привнесении нового подхода в понимание особенностей двойственной природы писателя как колонизатора и сочувствующего колонизируемому, ввиду чего упор делается на Постколониальную теорию.

Суммируя всё вышесказанное, можно обозначить объектом исследования личность и творчество В. К. Арсеньева, а предметом исследования — методологические рассуждения относительно его произведений в соответствии с Ориенталистским и Постколониальным подходами.

Хронологические рамки диссертации охватывают годы жизни В. К. Арсеньева (1872–1930 гг.), затрагивая период более ранних экспедиций в регионы Сибири и Дальнего Востока, а также развитие отношений России с Китаем, граничащим с исследовавшимися территориями, для подробного раскрытия контекста динамики их освоения, отраженного в работах автора.

Жизнеописание и анализ произведений В. К. Арсеньева широко представлены в русской литературе, в частности, Анной Ивановной Тарасовой, составившей одну из наиболее полных биографий писателя, Игорем Сергеевичем Кузьмичевым, а также Василием Олеговичем Авченко, чьи исследования характеризуются преимущественным изучением литературных аспектов жизни В. К. Арсеньева. Тем не менее, работы в постколониальном ключе отсутствуют в связи с недостаточным распространением данного подхода в академических кругах России.

Проблематика экспансии России на восток частично рассмотрена в некоторых отечественных и зарубежных исследованиях, в число авторов которых входят в первую очередь Вера Тольц, Дэвид Хендрик Схиммельпенник ван дер Ойе, Андреас Каппелер, Альдо Феррари, обращающие внимание на необходимость проведения анализа таковой с учетом ее специфики, отдельно от экспансии европейских стран. При этом их работы имеют теоретико-исторический характер и сопоставления с жизненным и литературным опытом Арсеньева не проводят.

Основные источники исследования – это биографические материалы и данные об анимистических верованиях нанайцев, опубликованные на официальных сайтах Русского географического общества и Центра «Амурский тигр». Кроме того, необходимо отметить издававшуюся в СССР газету «Красное знамя», содержащую некоторое количество статей с критикой в адрес В. К. Арсеньева, позволивших составить представление об отношении советской власти и коллег к нему в последние годы жизни писателя.

Целью исследования является изучение творчества Владимира Клавдиевича Арсеньева и возможности применения к его анализу Ориенталистского и Постколониального подходов. Для достижения поставленной цели необходимо реализовать следующие задачи:

1. Рассмотреть биографию В. К. Арсеньева, разделив ее на два этапа (до и после переезда на Дальний Восток) и сопоставив его трансформацию из исследователя в писателя.

2. Обозначить литературную рамку работ В. К. Арсеньева, выявив характерные черты его прозы на примерах путевых писем и таких произведений, как *По Уссурийскому краю* (1921), *Дерсу Узала* (1923) и *Сквозь Тайгу* (1930).

3. Раскрыть содержание Ориенталистского и Постколониального подходов, в частности, в рамках работ Эдварда Саида и Альбера Мемми, применительно к взаимоотношениям В. К. Арсеньева с различными этническими группами Дальнего Востока.

В основу методологии исследования легли положения Ориенталистского подхода Эдварда Саида, анализирующего репрезентацию «Востока» в литературе в его негативных коннотациях стереотипного восприятия Западом «Другого» с целью последующей легитимации своего доминирующего положения. Кроме того, в рамках данного исследования используются идеи Альбера Мемми, предложившего классификацию акторов колониальных практик (колонист, колонизатор, колониалист) и раскрывшего специфику взаимоотношений колонизатора и колонизируемого.

Диссертация состоит из введения, трёх глав и заключения.

Работа начинается с обзора биографии Арсеньева с целью раскрытия оказавшего существенное влияние на его исследовательскую и творческую деятельность нравственного воспитания. Освещается то, как имя автора увековечено в названиях географических объектов и памятниках в доказательство значения, широко признаваемого как на территории России, так и за рубежом, что выделяет Арсеньева среди прочих исследователей.

Рассматриваются подробности детства автора и устанавливается разграничение между юностью, проведенной в Санкт-Петербурге, и переездом на Дальний Восток, где он прошел через символическое перерождение в исследователя и писателя, познакомившись со множеством малочисленных народов, что побудило Арсеньева к детальному их изучению, в особенности племени орочи-удэхе, которому посвящено произведение *Страна Удэхе*. Далее анализируется переписка автора с видными советскими литературными деятелями, официально провозгласившими Арсеньева писателем и поспособствовавшими распространению его произведений в СССР и за рубежом. В частности, отражаются взаимоотношения с Максимом Горьким, Александром Фадеевым и Михаилом Пришвиным.

В работе затронута неоднозначная история происхождения семьи Арсеньева, его отношения с отцом, школьные годы, наполненные событиями, поспособствовавшими

зарождению в нем стремлений к странствиям и сформировавшим характер будущего писателя. Особое внимание уделено периоду воинской службы автора, обострившему его интерес к путешествиям и исследованиям и пробудившему в нем страсть к литературе, в первую очередь научной – посвященной изучению Азии и Восточной Сибири.

Далее проводится анализ второго этапа жизни писателя, проведенного между Владивостоком и Хабаровском, где тот получил шанс изучить малочисленные народности Приамурья напрямую. Рассматривается развитие карьерного пути Арсеньева как исследователя, возглавившего две экспедиции в горы Сихотэ-Алинь, продуктом чего стали путевые и тематические записи, выделяющиеся содержанием как ценной научной информации, так и духовным самовыражением писателя и его размышлениями о социальных, культурных и экологических вопросах. Отдельно отмечается, что выпадавшие за время путешествий на долю Арсеньева невзгоды ни на одном этапе не смогли сломить его дух благодаря внутренней энергии и решительности, подкрепленной ценностями, усвоенными в детстве.

Отмечается признание, полученное Арсеньевым за его работу, а также перипетии, с которыми ему пришлось столкнуться в связи с событиями Гражданской войны и после ее окончания. Подчеркиваются упорство в работе в последующие годы и патриотизм, проявленный писателем в нестабильный исторический период развития его Родины, несмотря на направленную против него критику за обратное, что также отяготило тяжелое эмоциональное состояние, испытываемое им в последние годы жизни.

Далее рассмотрены репрессии в отношении семьи Арсеньева, его знакомых и творчества, в частности конфискация архива с последующим исчезновением его *magnit opus Страна Удэхе*, история написания и сюжет которой в деталях представлены во второй главе первой части работы. Отмечается, что несмотря на длительный срок написания произведения, оно так и не было закончено в связи со смертью его будущего редактора, многочисленными обязанностями, взятыми на себя Арсеньевым в рамках занимаемых должностей, и мнением автора о недостаточности собранных материалов для завершения и окончательной публикации исследования. Упоминаются некоторые сведения, обнаруженные так называемыми арсеньеведами, чей интерес к работе был подстегнут ее таинственной пропажей, а также причины таковой и различные версии судьбы, постигшей произведение.

Третья часть первой главы посвящена продвижению Арсеньева на литературном поприще, его дневниковых записях, переложенных на путевые письма и травелоги,

содержащие не только хронику событий экспедиции, но и его размышления на социальные и нравственные темы с особым акцентом на глубокой любви к природе. Кроме того, дается более детальное описание связей, поддерживаемых Арсеньевым с несколькими выдающимися советскими писателями, такими как Максим Горький, Михаил Пришвин и Александр Фадеев, давших высокую оценку его трудам, разделив точку зрения автора по многим вопросам, и испытавших влияние творчества Арсеньева на своем собственном. Их помощь сыграла немаловажную роль в принятии Арсеньевым решения продолжать работу несмотря на переживаемый им экзистенциальный кризис в первой половине 1920-х гг., вызванный, среди прочего, участившимися обвинениями в поддержке интересов буржуазии, образом чересчур спорного и недостаточно компетентного писателя, составленного его коллегами, и желание бежать от цивилизации ввиду глубокого недовольства городским обществом.

Вторая глава, содержащая анализ творчества Арсеньева с литературной точки зрения, начинается с краткого обзора более ранних изображений Дальнего Востока в произведениях отечественных и зарубежных авторов, выделяя, однако, именно заслуги Арсеньева в открытии региона для читательской аудитории за пределами России.

В качестве отличительной черты творчества Арсеньева определяется беллетризация, характеризующаяся сочетанием в произведениях художественного и научного стилей, на что оказал влияние яркий жизненный опыт писателя. При этом в рамках анализа «Литературного Арсеньева» поднимается вопрос достоверности описываемых им событий и явлений, а также возможности приложения Постколониального подхода к исследованию фигуры писателя. Подчеркивается такая специфика работ Арсеньева, как содержание противопоставления между цивилизацией и природой, так называемый «таежный пафос», а также эмоциональная окраска событий и описаний местности.

Ценность творчества автора заключается в поддерживаемом балансе. Несмотря на частое использование различных средств художественной выразительности, автор сохраняет научную точность и достоверность приводимых фактов. Тем не менее, отмечается, что при всей той точности лирическое «Я» Арсеньева отличается от его действительной личности, приобретая некоторые черты, характерные для таких исследователей, как Пржевальский и Невельской, а также героям книг его детства. Помимо этого, отмечается свойственный «Арсеньевской прозе» контакт, который автор



стремится установить с читателем, и прямая связь между его путевыми письмами и литературными произведениями.

Во второй части второй главы рассматриваются особенности путевых писем Арсеньева, в частности *Отчет о деятельности Владивостокского общества любителей охоты*, включающий детальный анализ флоры и фауны региона и знакомящий читателя с позицией автора по таким нравственным вопросам, как экологический. Особое внимание уделяется письмам, публиковавшимся в газете «Приамурье», получившие в дальнейшем широкое признание как первые сочинения Арсеньева именно литературного характера. Упоминается также о посмертном опубликованном собрании писем, не отличающихся, однако, той же полнотой информации и ритмом передачи событий, что подчеркивает невозможность воспроизведения уникального стиля автора. Кроме того, раскрывается значение путевых писем как источника менее приукрашенного повествования о произошедшем в рамках экспедиций и как материалов, на которые Арсеньев опирался при написании литературных произведений.

Далее осмысливается ценность для Арсеньева путешествий, играющих роль нескончаемого источника новых знаний для удовлетворения его интеллектуальных потребностей, и освещаются такая работа писателя, как *По Уссурийскому краю*, в которой отражены события экспедиции 1906 г., представлены контраст между природой и цивилизацией, особенности сосуществования русских и туземцев Дальнего Востока, а также его восхищение природными ландшафтами Приморья. Уделяется особое внимание описанию личности сопровождавшего Арсеньева в рамках экспедиции охотника из племени гольдов Дерсу Узала и их с автором встреча, ставшая для последнего поворотной. Отмечается существенное отличие произведений от путевых писем, заключающееся в присутствии лирического элемента и высокой образности.

Анализируется характерный произведениям Арсеньева лейтмотив верований и традиций народов Дальнего Востока, что дает возможность глубже понять контраст между мышлением цивилизованного человека и «дикаря». В данной связи описываются черты анимизма, исповедуемого представителями тунгусского племени, встречи с которым проиллюстрированы автором в его работах, сказавшись на построении им онтологических предположений о природе человеческого существования и концепций счастья и свободы. Однако подчеркивается, что в большей степени на изменения в мировоззрении Арсеньева повлияла именно встреча с Дерсу Узала, принадлежавшему нанайскому племени, придерживающемуся специфическим духовным практикам и

глубокому уважению к дикой природе («таежной этике»), благодаря чему «дикари» оказываются цивилизованнее европейских колонизаторов, стремящихся подчинить ее своему контролю.

Далее рассматривается книга *Дерсу Узала*. Приводится краткий обзор истории ее написания, отличающийся абсолютной внезапностью, и причина, по которой оно было отложено. Упоминается, что произведение было переиздано и объединено с предыдущей работой писателя *По Уссурийскому краю*, получив яркий успех за рубежом и послужив основой фильма японского режиссера Акиры Куросавы 1975 г. При этом отмечается схожесть двух версий, заключающаяся в затрагиваемой теме смерти в контексте нанайского племени, кульминацией чего становится кончина Дерсу, олицетворяющая собой закат культуры гольдов под давлением цивилизационного прогресса. Указывается, что в отличие от предыдущей работы в ней поднимаются глубокие экзистенциальные вопросы и дается более подробный портрет Дерсу Узала, чье литературное изображение, как и в случае лирического «Я» Арсеньева, заметно отличается от характера его реального прообраза, являясь отчасти отражением самого автора. Преподнося героя в качестве нравственного эталона, писатель поднимает посредством этого социокультурные проблемы, актуальные для региона. Глубокий кризис, переживаемый Арсеньевым в связи с гибелью Дерсу, подчеркивает раздвоение личности автора, воплотившего в гольде самого себя. Кроме того, проводится анализ образа героя в изложении Петра Петровича Бордакова, сопровождавшего писателя в экспедиции 1907 г. и имевшего возможность лично познакомиться с нанайским охотником, опубликовав впоследствии о нем статью, отличающуюся меньшей идеализацией Дерсу в отношении его поведения, веры и даже пристрастий, и развенчивав миф о «благородном дикаре».

Обзор литературных произведений завершается последней менее известной работой Арсеньева *Сквозь Тайгу*, включающей помимо таких классических черт его прозы, как красочные описания флоры и фауны Дальнего Востока и сцен общения с обитающими его малочисленными народами, тему испытываемой автором меланхолии, вызванной размышлениями о прошлом и погибших спутниках его путешествий, что сопровождается прощанием с миром природы, обреченным на исчезновение в результате бесконтрольной советской урбанизации.

Отмечается присутствие характерного «Арсеньевской форме» сочетания научных фактов и поэзии. Однако в отличие от предыдущих работ, *Сквозь Тайгу* мало диалогов и большее внимание уделяется отсылкам на ранние встречи с представителями коренных

народов и рассуждениям автора при заметном сокращении дистанции между ним и лирическим «Я», благодаря чему по написанию произведение кажется более сходным с путевыми письмами Арсеньева.

В третьей главе предпринята попытка применить методологию Ориенталистского подхода к прозе писателя. В данной связи предлагается краткое описание теории, выдвинутой Эдвардом Саидом, чей труд *Ориентализм* является основополагающим для Постколониальных исследований и раскрывает концепцию «Востока» в его восприятии европейскими странами, присвоившими себе право, определять все, относящееся к обществу, отличному от западного, различными негативными коннотациями, вытекающими из существующих стереотипов и имеющими цель возвысить Запад над «Другим». Выделяется существование Раннего и Современного Ориентализма. Согласно первому «Восток» ассоциируется в первую очередь с Дальним Востоком, что соотносится с проводимым исследованием, сосредоточенном на анализе творчества Арсеньева, посвященного путешествиям в данном регионе.

Далее раскрывается то, как «Восток» представлен в литературе, и продолжается анализ подход Саида, утверждавшего об отсутствии объективного «Востока», существующего лишь в контексте взаимоотношений власти и подчинения различного характера, лежащих в основе западной гегемонии и нацеленных на легитимизацию претворения в жизнь имперских устремлений посредством обладания знаниями. При этом отмечается необходимость наличия взаимодополняемости, заключающейся в невозможности самоопределения Запада или Востока без столкновения одного с другим.

В качестве примера составления подобного негативного образа со стороны России приводится использование таких терминов, как «Желтая Угроза», «китайщина» или же «азиатчина», вызванное страхами в отношении Азии, в частности Китая, что отражается и в творчестве Арсеньева, высказывающегося с критикой в отношении опасности, которую представляет регион. Кроме того, указывается на связь негативного изображения не только с «Востоком», но и с населяющими его людьми, что расходится с образом Дерсу Узала, запечатленным в работах Арсеньева, но отчасти согласуется с представлениями Бордакова и заставляет поднять вопрос об их объективности. В данной связи отмечается ее невозможность в полной степени по мнению Саида, подтверждающаяся примером Арсеньева, находившегося в постоянном контакте с исследуемым регионом в связи с занимаемыми постами. Помимо этого, приводится описание двух видов Ориентализма: скрытого и явного, – соответствующих

мировоззрению Арсеньева на различных этапах его жизни, плавно перетекая из одного в другой.

Затрагивается также оценка методологии Саида таким теоретиком, как Ноам Хомский, отметившим влияние работы Арсеньева на европейского читателя, погружившегося в размышления о собственной культуре. Обращается внимание на уникальное изображение взаимосвязи Востока и Запада сквозь призму различных дисциплин, как и ее особое понимание, составленное под совокупным воздействием культур Востока и Запада на прошлое автора. Раскрывается также критика политизации данного подхода Саидом в связи с его позицией по вопросу Палестины и редукционизма, выражающегося в анализе исключительно европейского и американского восприятия и отсутствии упоминаний положительного эффекта культурного обмена между Востоком и Западом.

Кроме того, поднимается вопрос необходимости исследования Ориентализма в контексте России, являющейся, согласно историку Альдо Феррари, одновременно объектом и субъектом изучения в рамках данного подхода и характеризующейся присутствием широкого спектра «Востоков» и историко-географических особенностей, позволявших стране в разные периоды обращаться как к Восточной, так и Западной идентичностям, что требует рассмотрения ее случая отдельно от европейского. Отмечаются сложности в определении Востока и Запада в том числе Арсеньевым, углубляющимся в размышления относительно различий в своем восприятии данных концептов до и после переезда в Уссурийский край, и делается отсылка на представления писателя Джона Лондона о закате Западе и «пробуждении Азии» в контексте поражения России в войне с Японией.

Во второй части третьей главы предпринимается попытка приложения вышеописанной методологии к работам Арсеньева в первую очередь в рамках описания симпатий и антипатий в адрес различных этнических групп Дальнего Востока как впечатления, произведенного на автора их представителями в ходе его экспедиций. Упоминаются отношения дружбы, взаимного доверия и уважения, установленные с племенами нанайцев и орочи-удэхе, наиболее ярким свидетельством чего является исключительно положительный образ Дерсу Узала, и все действия которых, по мнению автора, пронизаны «первобытным коммунизмом». Кроме того, благоприятная оценка дается крестьянам-переселенцам деревни Пермское за их здравомыслие и рассудительность. В то же время прослеживается противоположное восприятие

староверов как ленивых и нетерпимых людей, потенциально занявших бы позицию нейтралитета в случае войны с Японией.

Вслед за кратким анализом исторических контактов нанайцев и китайцев в регионе отмечаются критика писателя по отношению к последним за их жестокость к природе и туземному населению, а также предложенные Арсеньевым меры по избавлению от их присутствия как от «Желтой Угрозы», волновавшей страну еще в период существования Российской империи. Схожим образом представлены японцы, обвинявшиеся автором в шпионаже, и корейцы, изображенные как мошенники, косвенно повлиявшие на проведение советским правительством этнических чисток в регионе. В данной связи указывается на схожести в восприятии Арсеньева и Дерсу исходящей от народов Азии опасности и стирание грани между колонизатором и колонизируемым, что подтверждает тезис об отражении личности автора в герое.

Далее проводится сопоставление цивилизации и природы и вновь обращается внимание на литературного Дерсу Узала, представляющего собой «благородного дикаря», сумевшего остаться в естественном состоянии. Ввиду этого делается отсылка на философские размышления Жана-Жака Руссо, утверждавшего о потере сопереживания и эмпатии, присущих находящемуся в нем человеку, при его интеграции в общество, что сходится с историей нанайского охотника, чья внутренняя энергия иссякла вслед за переездом в комфортные условия жизни цивилизации. Отмечается, что последующая смерть героя ознаменовала закат культуры гольдов в результате начавшейся бесконтрольной урбанизации региона и тяжелой ношей легла на плечи Арсеньева, отождествлявшего себя с Дерсу. В данной связи упоминаются предостережения автора относительно угрозы, исходящей от бездействия местных властей в сфере охраны дикой природы региона. При этом подчеркивается использование писателем голоса «Литературного Арсеньева» с целью отражения парадоксальной трансформации взглядов европейского империалиста под влиянием уроков, преподанных ему спутником-«дикарем», как доказательства высокой сложности взаимодействий человечества и природы и существующей способности людей преодолеть свои предвзятые представления для принятия более целостного понимания мира.

В третьей части приводится точка зрения Альбера Мемми, выраженная в его труде *Колонизаторы и колонизованные*, и описывается биография философа для проведения параллели между его личной историей и исследуемым вопросом. Раскрывается ценность

работы, заключающаяся в составлении психологического портрета двух основных субъектов колониального дискурса, исследовании их взаимоотношений, внутренних противоречий и влияния колониализма на их психологическое состояние, что, по мнению автора, соответствует контексту различных регионов мира. В данной связи предпринимается попытка вписать фигуру Владимира Арсеньева в колониальный дискурс, проанализировав особенности его личности и колониальных процессов, происходивших на Дальнем Востоке России, с опорой на терминологию, предложенную Мемми.

В первую очередь выделяется лишенный обусловленных европейским происхождением привилегий колонист, не существующий в действительности ввиду невозможности утраты им таковых. Проводится сопоставление с российской экспансией Дальнего Востока, в частности в принятии Устава об управлении инородцев (1822 г.), чья изначальная цель защиты и постепенной интеграции данной группы населения была вытеснена дискриминационными мерами в русле следования «цивилизаторской миссии», превращая гражданина в колонизатора или колониалиста. Таким образом, колонизатор представляет собой совершающего акт создания колонии человека, отличающегося в свою очередь от колониалиста, поддерживающего колониальную систему и непосредственно участвующего в ее расширении, принимая свое превосходство над коренным населением, что резко контрастирует с ролью «колонизатора, который отказывается», отводимой себе Арсеньевым. Отмечается, что, оказавшись на распутье между решением уехать и остаться с целью борьбы против сложившейся ситуации, герой выбирает последнее, всеми силами пытаясь помочь народам Дальнего Востока посредством своего привилегированного статуса, не стремясь при этом нарушить их «природное состояние».

В продолжение рассуждений об анализе Мемми колонизируемого, изгнанного из языка колонизатора и представленного обладающим отмеченными Саидом негативными чертами характера, раскрывается также соотносимая с данной фигурой терминология, в частности термины «туземцы» и «инородцы». Первые определяются как прибывшие из дальних краев и поставленные в подчиненное положение, лишившись прав и привилегий, и многократно встречаются в произведениях Арсеньева в связи с широким использованием на данных территориях. Термин «инородцы» же применялся преимущественно в административной сфере, не обладая, таким образом, той же эмоциональной окраской.

Далее раскрывается антропологическая специфика колонизации Дальнего Востока, заключающаяся в отказе от интеграции населявших его народов в общество ввиду отсутствия региональных элит, и проводится параллель между представлениями Запада XIX века о «Востоке» как о неполноценном и морально отсталом мире с комплексом превосходства России по отношению к коренным жителям, примером чего служит практика осуществления этнографических экспедиций с целью последующей классификации народов Сибири в соответствии с их эволюционным развитием. Таким образом, устанавливается связь с изображением колонизатора Мемми и такими тремя определяющими его идентификацию факторами, как прибыль, привилегии и узурпация, которые существуют лишь в силу его взаимоотношений с колонизируемым и против которых стремится идти Арсеньев.

Отмечается, что, согласно философу, подобные действия ведут к вступлению в состояние конфликта колонизатора с его собственным обществом, что подтверждается на примере Арсеньева, испытывавшего отчуждение от наполненного лицемерием Санкт-Петербурга, резко контрастирующее с покоем, ощущаемым автором в кругу нанайцев. Как следствие, указывается на стремление писателя приблизить качества колонизируемого к своим собственным, идеализируя его и связывая мировоззрение туземца с идеологией государства с целью поиска точек соприкосновения между цивилизованным советским обществом и дикарем из тайги, следующим ценностям солидарности и общности, что определяет «переплетение» судеб колонизатора и колонизируемого.

Работа завершается исследованием трансформации взглядов Арсеньева на общественный прогресс посредством исключительно интеллектуальных достижений вслед за пережитым психологическим кризисом, вызванным столкновением с «Другим» в лице представителей коренных народов, пострадавших от жестоких и несправедливых колониальных практик. Раскрывается резко негативное восприятие колониационного процесса, осуществлявшегося как в имперский, так и советский периоды. Наконец, рассматриваются выдвинутые автором идеи по благоприятному сосуществованию с туземными народами с опорой на принципы, изложенные этнографом Штернбергом, и его собственное видение стихийного и ненасильственного колониализма как наиболее предпочтительного.

Таким образом, в диссертации представлен многосторонний анализ трудов В. К. Арсеньева, что позволяет убедиться, как в обоснованности его научных представлений,

так и писательской приключенческой мифологии. Применение теоретических рамок Ориенталистского и Постколониального подходов играет немаловажную роль в исследовании взаимоотношений автора с различными этническими группами Дальнего Востока, определяя жанр его работ как колониальный травелог, с целью чего были проанализированы изображения колониальных процессов, происходивших в регионе, в литературе, их специфических черт, в частности отношений между русскими колонизаторами и азиатскими народами, а также социальной позиции В. К. Арсеньева по данному вопросу.

Диссертация представляет особую ценность, поскольку потенциально может быть полезна и для последующих исследований литературных произведений российских дальневосточных авторов с применением аналогичной методологической базы.

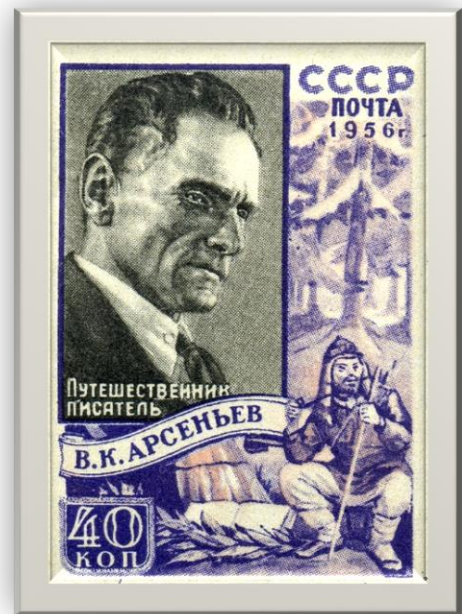


# CHAPTER I – Vladimir Klavdiyevich Arsenyev (1872–1930): geographer, ethnographer, writer, researcher of the Far East, and military orientalist

## 1.1 – Life, achievements, and death of a “kind man”

The town of Arsenyev, located in Primorsky Krai, was known as Semënovka until 1952 and was merely one of the numerous working settlements built along the banks of the Ussuri River and its tributaries. In Soviet times, there was built the monument to Vladimir Klavdiyevich Arsenyev, the “traveler-writer” (*“puteshestvennik pisatel”*), as indicated by the plaque at the base of the memorial erected in 1975. His surname can be found everywhere in the Far Eastern Federal District: The Arsenyevka River, a village located in the Nanayskiy District of Khabarovskiy Krai, one of the peaks of the Sikhote-Alin mountain range, herbaceous plants, and even a glacier on the Avachinsky hill, an active stratovolcano in the Kamchatka Peninsula. His name was given to streets and alleys in many settlements of Primorsky Krai, secondary school No. 18 in Vladivostok was named after him, and the international airport of Vladivostok was dedicated to Vladimir Arsenyev in 2018. Moreover, since 2019, the “V. K. Arsenyev Literary Prize” has been awarded for the best works on the subject of the Far East.

The square devoted to the explorer and his companion Dersu Uzala underwent a comprehensive renovation in 2022 to coincide with the 150th anniversary of Vladimir Arsenyev’s birth.<sup>1</sup> It now features benches and an observation deck overlooking the city that bears his name.<sup>2</sup> Vladimir



USSR post stamp of 1956 with the picture of Vladimir Arsenyev and Dersu Uzala: <https://stamps.ru/catalog/pisatel-vk-arsenev-1872-1930>

<sup>1</sup> Kseniya Orekhova, “Otdat’ dan’ uvazheniya: v chest 150-letiya so dnya rozhdeniya velikogo puteshestvennika v Arsenyeve otrestavirovali skver,” *dv.kp.ru*, September 11, 2022, <https://www.dv.kp.ru/daily/27443.5/4646024/>.

<sup>2</sup> A more detailed list of all that has been dedicated to Vladimir Arsenyev over the years was drawn up by scholar Anna Ivanovna Tarasova in the 1980s, as part of a scientific biography dedicated to the writer, ethnographer, and explorer of the Russian Far East. Her study *Vladimir Klavdiyevich Arsenyev*, published for the series “*Russkie puteshestvenniki i vostokovedy*” is considered to be one of the most

Arsenyev was a well-known traveler, geographer, explorer, and ethnographer, but also a very prolific writer, who contributed significantly to the knowledge of the Russian Far East. While his persona is well-known in Russia, the writer is perceived as a national hero in the Far Eastern territories of Khabarovsk and Primorye. Yet, there were several like him who contributed to the conquest and understanding of the region at the ends of the Russian Empire, such as the legendary Cossack Yermak, Yerofey Khabarov, Nikolay Amursky, and many others.

Nevertheless, although these personalities are well-known in Russia, the figures of Vladimir Arsenyev and Goldi Dersu Uzala have broken through borders and spread to the West, Europe, and the Americas, therefore becoming part of the common imagination analogous to Daniel Defoe's Friday in the famous novella *Robinson Crusoe*. In the West, this success is attributed to Akira Kurosawa's award-winning film *Dersu Uzala*. In Russia, Arsenyev's prose is known much better and admired for its peculiar style somewhere between fictional and scientific. It is noteworthy the definition of the author's peculiar prose given by the ethnographer, personal acquaintance, and researcher of Arsenyev's biography Mark Konstantinovich Azadovskiy (1888–1954), who described Arsenyev's texts as “monuments of scientific literature” (*pamyatniki nauchnoy literatury*),<sup>3</sup> whereas the Russian and Soviet novelist Mikhail Prishvin, as well as Maxim Gorky, acclaimed his style and writing skills.<sup>4</sup> The charm of the Far Eastern landscapes, from the Sikhote-Alin mountain range to the banks of the Amur, Khadi, and Kopi rivers, the coniferous forests, and the jagged coastline that encircles the port of Sovetskaya Gavan outlining a “coulisse-like”<sup>5</sup> feature, is portrayed by the traveler-writer in a way that is both meticulously scientific and deeply lyrical, resulting in a unique collection of extravagant literary descriptions. Nonetheless, to comprehend the origin of Arsenyev's refined literary taste, it is important to provide context for his life. Failing to do so could make it difficult to gain insight into Arsenyev's literary background, which may have influenced his decision to transform his travel letters (*putevye pis'ma*) into literary masterpieces such as *Dersu Uzala* and *Across the Ussuri Krai*, which established his status as a great author of odeporic

---

solid materials on the explorer: Anna Ivanovna Tarasova, *Vladimir Klavdiyevich Arsenyev*, Russkie puteshestvenniki i vostokovedy (Moscow: Glavnaya redaktsiya vostochnoy literatury izdatel'stva “Nauka,” 1985).

<sup>3</sup> Igor Sergeevich Kuz'michëv, *Pisatel' Arsenyev* (Leningrad: Sovetskiy pisatel', 1977), 8.

<sup>4</sup> Regarding Vladimir Arsenyev's affirmation as a writer and his relationship with Mikhail Prishvin and Maxim Gorky respectively, see § 1.3.1.

<sup>5</sup> Vladimir Klavdiyevich Arsenyev, *Skvoz' Taygu*, Pal'mira-klassika (Saint Petersburg; Moscow: T8 Izdatel'skiye Tekhnologii, 2022), 11.

and ethnographic literature, in which, as Azadovsky claims, Vladimir Arsenyev holds: “an exceptional, singular and unique position.”<sup>6</sup>

This chapter is primarily dedicated to introducing the figure of a legendary explorer. It chronicles the early years of his childhood in Saint Petersburg, with a particular emphasis on the values that shaped the author’s upbringing. The title of this section is derived from chapter five of Igor Kuz’michëv’s analysis, which is entitled *Slava dobrego cheloveka (The glory of a kind man)*. Arsenyev’s values and the genuine bonds of friendship that he formed with prominent writers, but also Goldi<sup>7</sup>, Nanai, and other minorities of the Russian Far East, are reflective of his character as a gentle man of firm moral values (that eventually led him to clash with the policies of the Soviet regime), as described by both Kuz’michëv and other scholars such as Nikolay Kabanov and Anna Tarasova.

The chapter also delves into the “second phase” of the author’s life, which commences with his relocation to the Far East, where he is symbolically reborn. In the Far East, Arsenyev met not only Russian settlers who had migrated to the Empire’s eastern frontier, but also Old Believers (*Starovery*), Chinese, Koreans, and a multitude of smaller indigenous peoples, such as the Orochi, Udege, Taz, Goldi, and Nanai. The encounters sparked his interest in the study of these ethnicities, with a particular focus on the Orochi-Udege. Therefore, the explorer dedicated more than two decades to researching and composing a comprehensive monograph on this subject, titled *The Land of the Udege*. Despite his efforts, the author was unable to secure publication of the work (§ 1.2.1).

In Section 1.3, the focus shifts to a more literary and artistic examination of Arsenyev’s figure, highlighting his contribution as a writer rather than a scientist. This analysis explores his career trajectory and personal interests in the Orochi-Udege, as well as his connections with prominent Soviet writers who played a significant role in promoting his works and furthering his renown both within and beyond the borders of the Soviet Union. His epistolary exchanges serve as a means to re-discover Vladimir Arsenyev through the lens of travel literature, which is analyzed in greater detail in subsequent chapters of this thesis.

---

<sup>6</sup> «Исключительное, единственное и неповторимое положение». Igor Sergeevich Kuz’michëv, *Pisatel’ Arsenyev*, 8.

<sup>7</sup> An exhaustive contribution by V. N. Yernakov asserted that the Goldi are a Tungus tribe known in Russia as the Nanai (in China they are known as the Hoche), who live from a fishing and hunting economy in an area that stretches around the lower course of the Sungari River and along the confluence of the Ussuri and Amur Rivers, on the borders of China and Russia. V. N. Yernakov, “Goldi in Northeast China,” *Zeitschrift Der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 122 (1972): 173–79.

An examination of the “Literary Arsenyev” provides an opportunity to explore various issues that have arisen among scholars, as noted by literary critic Igor Sergeyeovich Kuz'michëv in *Pisatel' Arsenyev*. Specifically, there is a scarcity of substantial writing on Arsenyev's literary style and intermingling of his scientific research. In addition, the accuracy of the author's literary works is uncertain as it is unclear to what extent his exploration accounts are fictionalized and how much is veridical (§ 2.1.1). Furthermore, a more recent approach in the field of Postcolonialism may warrant further consideration regarding Vladimir Arsenyev's figure as an internationally acclaimed successful writer (§ 3.3).

### **1.1.1 – “Den mutigen gehört die Welt”: the early life of Vladimir Arsenyev**

“The world belongs to the courageous” (*“Den mutigen gehört die Welt”*), this German saying is crucial for comprehending Arsenyev's moral upbringing. Despite spending more than 30 years in the Far East, Vladimir Klavdiyevich Arsenyev was born in Saint Petersburg into a family of nine children of Klavdiy Fëdorovich Arsenyev (1848–1918), a railway clerk of the former Tsarist Empire. Concerning their genealogical tree, as reported by the writer's first biographer, Fëdor Fëdorovich Aristov (1888–1932), the ancestor of the Arsenyev family was a wealthy Dutch called Got Meyer, who moved to Russia to work as a chemist and later married a Russian woman, eventually converting to Orthodoxy and taking the Russian surname Arsenyev from his godfather. As noted by Igor Kuz'michëv, Arsenyev's great-grandfather was a man addicted to alcohol and spent a substantial portion of his fortune on it, which led to his premature death and forfeiting all rights to his father's estate<sup>8</sup> in Germany. This is corroborated by a letter written on October 20, 1912, to his namesake, the historian Vladimir Sergeyeovich Arsenyev (1883–1947):

Мой прадед был вывезен в Россию Петром Великим. Он был немец, но жил раньше в Голландии; фамилия его была Гот Мейер [...] Он был человек очень образованный и, кажется, занимался химией. Мой дед был помещик в Пермской губернии и имел уже русскую фамилию – Арсеньев. Как это случилось, сказать не могу. Что-то очень смутно помню, мне рассказывала мать, что наше духовенство будто бы не хотело венчать лютеранина на русской, требовало от него, чтобы он перешел в православие. Он не хотел. Моя бабушка, с которой он жил без брака до самой смерти, имела сына, которому, возможно, и дали фамилию Арсеньева [...] Впрочем, возможно, что это было не так. Дед мой разорился, и имение его было продано. Вот и все, что я знаю.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Aristov attributes this to the author's great-grandfather's acquisition of Russian citizenship.

<sup>9</sup> My great-grandfather was taken to Russia by Peter the Great. He was German but had lived earlier in Holland; his surname was Got Meyer [...] He was a very well-educated man and seems to have been a chemist. My grandfather was a landowner in Perm province and already had a Russian surname -

Nevertheless, the Arsenyev genealogy is much vaguer than it seems, since, as Kuz'michëv mentioned, it is sometimes referred to Arsenyev's grandfather as someone whose surname was Kornmayer, a composer and the first violinist of the Mariinsky Theatre in Saint Petersburg.

Further research was conducted by Ivanovna Tarasova, who studied Vladimir Arsenyev for many years and wrote numerous works on him. According to her, Klavdiy Arsenyev was the illegitimate son of a Tver burgher, Fëdor Ivanovich Got Meyer, and a serf peasant woman, Agrasen Filippovna.<sup>10</sup> Since the writer's father could not receive higher education, in the end, Klavdiy Arsenyev sorted out the correspondence at the Saint Petersburg post office and then joined the Nikolayevskaya Railway. As it is also recounted in the biography by Igor Kuz'michëv, at the age of twenty, the writer's father succeeded in passing the examination for home teachers. So, having brought up his oldest sons, Anatoliy and Vladimir, he provided them with private education himself, teaching them Russian language, arithmetic, and geography. Knowing from personal experience what it meant to be an autodidact, he wanted to give his children a proper education, although the writer's family was exceptionally large, as recalled by Vladimir Arsenyev in his memoirs:

Детей было много, когда вся семья садилась за стол, мать просто считала число голов, и, если одной головы не хватало, она спрашивала, кого нет, и мы сами называли отсутствующего [...]<sup>11</sup>

According to the memoirs, Arsenyev was enrolled in the private boarding school of the Tselau sisters, a modest establishment situated in close proximity to the Arsenyev residence. This educational institution was managed by two spinster sisters who provided childcare services to neighborhood children.<sup>12</sup> In his formative years, Vladimir Arsenyev did not achieve notable success and was known for causing mischief. Moreover, upon entering the Vladimir School, he struggled academically. He was described as forgetful, uncoordinated, and drawn to fantasy and drawings. However, during his summer visits to the village of Tosno, near Saint

---

Arsenyev. How it happened, I cannot say. I remember something very vaguely, my mother told me that our clergy, as it would seem did not want to marry a Lutheran to a Russian, demanded that he convert to Orthodoxy. He did not want to. My grandmother, with whom he lived unmarried until her death, had a son, who may have been given the surname Arsenyev [...] However, it is possible that it was not so. My grandfather went bankrupt, and his estate was sold. That is all I know. Igor Sergeevich Kuz'michëv, *Pisatel' Arsenyev*, 11–12.

<sup>10</sup> Anna Ivanovna Tarasova, *Vladimir Klavdiyevich Arsenyev* (Moscow: Glavnaya redakciya vostochnoy literaturny izdatel'stva "Nauka," 1985).

<sup>11</sup> There were many children, when the whole family sat down at the table, the mother would simply count the number of heads, and if one head was missing, she would ask who was absent, and we would name the missing one ourselves [...]. Igor Sergeevich Kuz'michëv, *Pisatel' Arsenyev*, 14.

<sup>12</sup> Amir Khisamutdinov, "'Chest imeyu' - Vladimir Arsenyev. Chast' 2," *Russkoye Geograficheskoye Obshchestvo*, June 29, 2022, <https://www.rgo.ru/ru/article/chest-imeyu-vladimir-arsenev-chast-2>.

Petersburg, he used to take long walks in the woods and fish, which is believed to have nurtured his interest in nature.<sup>13</sup> What is more, Arsenyev embarked on his initial “expedition”, which lasted for eighteen days, already at the age of nine: accompanied by the Kashlachev brothers, he planned to navigate the Tosna River down to the Mariinsky Canal and subsequently travel along the Volkhov River to reach Lake Il'men'.<sup>14</sup>

On the one hand, biographers attributed great significance to Arsenyev's involvement in the expedition and his visits to the *Kunstkamera* and zoological garden in Saint Petersburg, as they believed that these experiences instilled in him a strong desire to travel abroad, ultimately shaping his future endeavors.

On the other hand, unlike many biographers and memoirists, Kuz'michëv contends that Arsenyev's personal aspirations and desires play a far more significant role in his life narrative than external influences. Although the explorer was not as resolute during his childhood as he would later become, his determination and ambition would come to play a significant role in shaping his life and experiences. It was not until later that the purposefulness of Arsenyev's life emerged, as he was impulsive, agile, restless, and, as previously mentioned, not a diligent student.

The schooling of Klavdiy Arsenyev's children has been the subject of varying opinions among biographers, who proposed four different options for their education. It is well-established that the writer attended Vladimir School and subsequently studied alongside his older brother Anatoliy at the Saint Petersburg gymnasium between 1885 and 1886. However, the fact that Vladimir Arsenyev's name was not present on the list of graduates, coupled with Anatoliy's non-attendance at the school, ultimately prevented the father from achieving his aspiration of providing them with a higher education. Furthermore, the writer, in retrospect, expressed profound regret for his inability to pursue university education due to his modest



Vladimir Arsenyev in his youth. Late 1880s:  
<http://www.словесницауцкысстмв.рф/>

---

<sup>13</sup> Kuz'michëv, *Pisatel' Arsenyev*, 16–18.

<sup>14</sup> Kuz'michëv, 16–18.

social background.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, the father cultivated a lifelong passion for teaching, continuing to study and read Russian and classical literature to his children.

Kuz'michëv shared insights into the literary preferences of the Arsenyev brothers, revealing that they were particularly fond of tales like *One Thousand and One Nights* and *Robinson Crusoe*. Additionally, Jules Verne's novels captured their imagination, fueling their aspirations to travel and discover new lands. One of the major influences<sup>16</sup> for the author's value system came from the English writer Samuel Smiles (1812–1904), who, in the book *Self-help*, stated that the self-formation of a person constituted the development of the distinct aspects of human nature: the physical, spiritual, and mental dimensions. Moreover, Smiles believed that achieving success required not special talent, but 'determination':

Hence energy of will may be defined to be the very central power of character in a man, in a word, it is the Man himself. It gives impulse to his every action, and soul to every effort. True hope is based on it, – and it is hope that gives the real perfume to life.<sup>17</sup>

It is in this regard that the proverb used to open this section needs to be mentioned: "The world belongs to the courageous." Indeed, such was the temperament of Vladimir Arsenyev, who made his "energy of will" the main driving force behind his future expeditions in the Far East. Chapter VII of Samuel Smiles' work opens in the same manner, whereas in Kuz'michëv's work is remarked that:

Семья Клавдия Федоровича, уже в силу происхождения, настроена была демократически, патриотизм, Арсеньевых был исконным, интерес к простонародной жизни возникал у них сам собой, а чувство долга и гражданской самостоятельности отец настойчиво прививал детям с ранних пор.<sup>18</sup>

Regarding the author's interests, it is well-documented that his affinity for nature emerged during his formative years. Biographers have recounted that, at the age of sixteen, his inclinations were already turned to natural history and geography, and by his nineteenth birthday, he had been conscripted for military service, an experience that would have had a profound impact on the course of his life and shape his future endeavors. As Arsenyev recalled

---

<sup>15</sup> Igor Sergeevich Kuz'michëv, 29.

<sup>16</sup> *Tropoy Arsenyeva. Dokumental'nyy fil'm*, Documentary (Glavnaya redaktsiya literaturno-dramaticheskikh programm TST, 1984), accessed February 11, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z3nzuHyJM8>.

<sup>17</sup> Samuel Smiles, *Self-Help* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1862), 203.

<sup>18</sup> Klavdiy Fëdorovich family, already by origin, was democratically disposed, the patriotism of the Arsenyev's was primordial, the interest in the common people's life arose in them by itself, and the sense of duty and civic independence the father persistently instilled in the children from an early age. Igor Sergeevich Kuz'michëv, *Pisatel' Arsenyev*, 21.

in a private letter he wrote thirty years later, he became an officer “unintentionally,”<sup>19</sup> yet as Kuz'michëv mentioned:

Однако без воинской службы не только нельзя себе представить дальнейшую жизнь Арсеньева – нельзя объяснить и многие его привычки, житейский уклад и понять само развитие его характера.<sup>20</sup>

The same is stated by Vasiliy Avchenko in *Literaturnye Pervoprokhodtsy Dal'nego Vostoka*: “[...] without the army, there would be no Vladimir Arsenyev.”<sup>21</sup>

At the Infantry Junker College Arsenyev was taught geography by Professor Mikhail Yefimovich Grum-Grzhimaylo, brother of the traveler Grigoriy Yefimovich Grum-Grzhimaylo, with whom he had conducted in the years 1887 and 1889–1890 several expeditions to the Pamir, the Tian Shan, and other parts of Central Asia. During his military service, his keen interest in travel and exploration, which had been evident since his childhood, further intensified:

Для Арсеньева М. Е. Грум-Гржимайло оказался настоящим даром судьбы, наглядным живым примером для подражания. Он поощрял географические интересы Арсеньева и, кажется, определил их главное направление [...] личное общение с ним сыграли немалую роль в биографии В. К. Арсеньева и в окончательном выборе им своего жизненного пути.<sup>22</sup>

As a result, Grum-Grzhimaylo is recognized for having introduced Arsenyev to Nikolay Mikhailovich Przheval'sky, due to the lecturer's profound admiration for the renowned Russian explorer, as indicated by the Soviet scholar Mark Konstantinovich Azadovskiy in his noteworthy essay *V. K. Arsenyev, puteshestvennik i pisatel'*.<sup>23</sup>

Arsenyev had the opportunity to meet an individual who had fulfilled his longstanding desire to travel. Furthermore, although the military path was not originally part of his plan, he gradually became accustomed to the rigor of the military infantry college.<sup>24</sup> During this period of his life, Arsenyev's literary inspiration emerged: raised on stories from *Arabian Nights* and

---

<sup>19</sup> “По недоразумению” . Igor Sergeyeovich Kuz'michëv, 26.

<sup>20</sup> However, without military service, it is not only impossible to imagine Arsenyev's later life, but it is also impossible to explain many of his habits, his way of life, and to understand the very development of his character. Igor Sergeyeovich Kuz'michëv, 26.

<sup>21</sup> «[...] без армии Владимира Арсеньева бы не было». Vasiliy Olegovich Avchenko, *Literaturnye Pervoprokhodtsy Dal'nego Vostoka, Zhizn' zamechatel'nykh lyudey* (Moscow: Molodaya gvardiya, 2021), 90.

<sup>22</sup> For Arsenyev, M. E. Grum-Grzhimaylo turned out to be a true gift of fate, a clear living example to follow. He encouraged Arsenyev's geographical interests and, it seems, determined their main direction [...] the personal communication with him played a significant role in the biography of V. K. Arsenyev and in the final choice of his life path. Igor Sergeyeovich Kuz'michëv, *Pisatel' Arsenyev*, 28.

<sup>23</sup> Mark Konstantinovich Azadovskiy, *V. K. Arsenyev, puteshestvennik i pisatel'. Opyt kharakteristiki: [k 25 letiyu so dnya smerti]* (Chita: Chitinskoye knizhnoye izdatel'stvo, 1955).

<sup>24</sup> This adaptability to the severity of life may also have come from the severity with which Vladimir Arsenyev was raised by his father, as seen above.

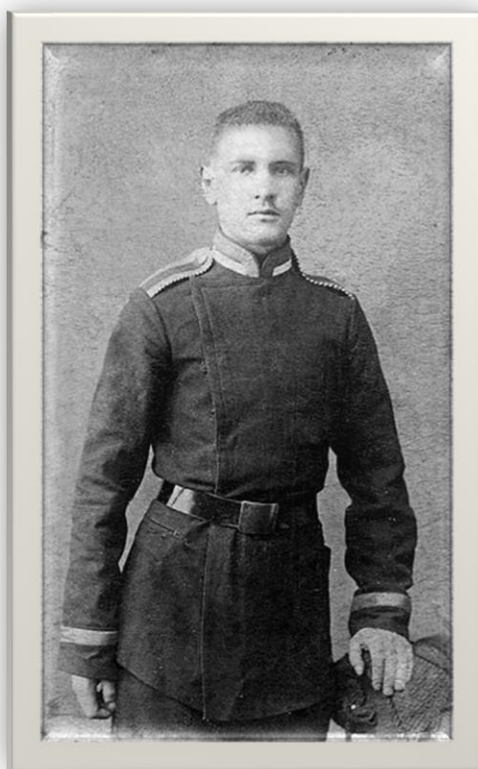


Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, the author's passion for literature persisted throughout his years of military service:

Когда все училище погружалось в сон, он спускался в курительную комнату и подолгу, иногда и ночь напролет, просиживал там над книгами. [...] это было начало серьезного чтения, продолжавшегося потом всю его жизнь, чтения не одного удовольствия ради, не только с целью приобрести знания, а чтения-творчества, чтения-единоборства, подчас изнурительного, чтения, ставшего важным плацдармом в борьбе за самого себя.<sup>25</sup>

The readings that interested the young Arsenyev were disparate, but overall, he was fascinated by geographical writings on Asia and East Siberia and natural history, subjects that, as noted above, he favored even in his gymnasium days in Saint Petersburg. Thus, it was these works that, as Kuz'michëv pointed out, laid the foundation for his worldview and views on the concepts of progress and morality (§ 3.2.2). During his military service, Arsenyev devoted a considerable amount of time to reading scientific literature, utilizing his free moments to attend lectures and visit the botanical and zoological gardens, as well as the Pulkovo Observatory of Saint Petersburg.

In January 1896, he was transferred to the Fourteenth Olonets Infantry Regiment stationed in Łomża, by order of the Minister of War. Arsenyev did not welcome the relocation, as he was eager to travel to the eastern borders of the Tsarist Empire and had expected to be stationed in a more exotic location. Instead, he found himself in a provincial Polish town on the western borders of the Empire, in a region that had been tripartitioned between Prussia, the Habsburg Empire, and the Russian Empire following the dissolution of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1795. Hence, the monotony of military life disrupted Arsenyev's motivation and desire for reading and further education. It



Vladimir Arsenyev as Podpraporshchik:  
[https://руни.рф/Файл:Vladimir\\_Arsenyev\\_as\\_Podpraporshchik.jpg](https://руни.рф/Файл:Vladimir_Arsenyev_as_Podpraporshchik.jpg)

---

<sup>25</sup> When the whole college was asleep, he would go down to the smoking room and sit there for extended periods of time, sometimes all night long, reading books. [...] this was the beginning of serious reading, which continued throughout his life, reading not just for pleasure, not just to acquire knowledge, but art-reading, fight-reading, sometimes exhausting, reading that became an important platform in the struggle for himself. Igor Sergeyeovich Kuz'michëv, *Pisatel' Arsenyev*, 30.

should be noted that the situation in Poland was very tense at the time due to the increasing influence of Polish nationalist movements that had refused for more than fifty years to be culturally assimilated by Russia.

At this time, Arsenyev pondered that his career path consisted of admission to the General Staff Academy. As Anna Konstantinovna Arsenyeva (the writer's wife) recalled: "Now books not only quenched his curiosity, not only multiplied his luggage of knowledge, but they also promised him salvation."<sup>26</sup> However, Arsenyev failed to enter the General Staff Academy and continued to devote himself to botany and ornithology.<sup>27</sup> The pivotal moment in the writer's life came about when he began working at the Regimental Court in January 1898, marking the start of his renewed fascination with East Siberia and the initiation of plans to embark on expeditions in the area.

In the Far East, at the close of the nineteenth century, following the signing of the Treaty of Aigun on May 16, 1858, and the Peking Convention on November 2, 1860, which officially established the borders between the Russian Empire and China along the Amur and Ussuri Rivers,<sup>28</sup> researchers were dispatched to the region to investigate the surrounding territories. Despite the efforts, many parts of the Ussuri Krai remained uncharted and unknown, due to the absence of cartographic materials that could depict passes or expedient routes for military purposes: "But if the banks of the Amur River were still somehow explored, the Ussuri Krai remained an absolutely unknown land."<sup>29</sup>

Besides, it is worth noting that the explorer Nikolay Mikhaylovich Przheval'sky (1839–1888),<sup>30</sup> Arsenyev's main source of inspiration, had already conducted explorations in these

---

<sup>26</sup> «Теперь книги не только утоляли его любознательность, не только умножали багаж его знаний, — они сулили ему спасение». Igor Sergeevich Kuz'michëv, 34.

<sup>27</sup> Vasily Olegovich Avchenko, *Literaturnye Pervoprokhodtsy Dal'nego Vostoka*, 90.

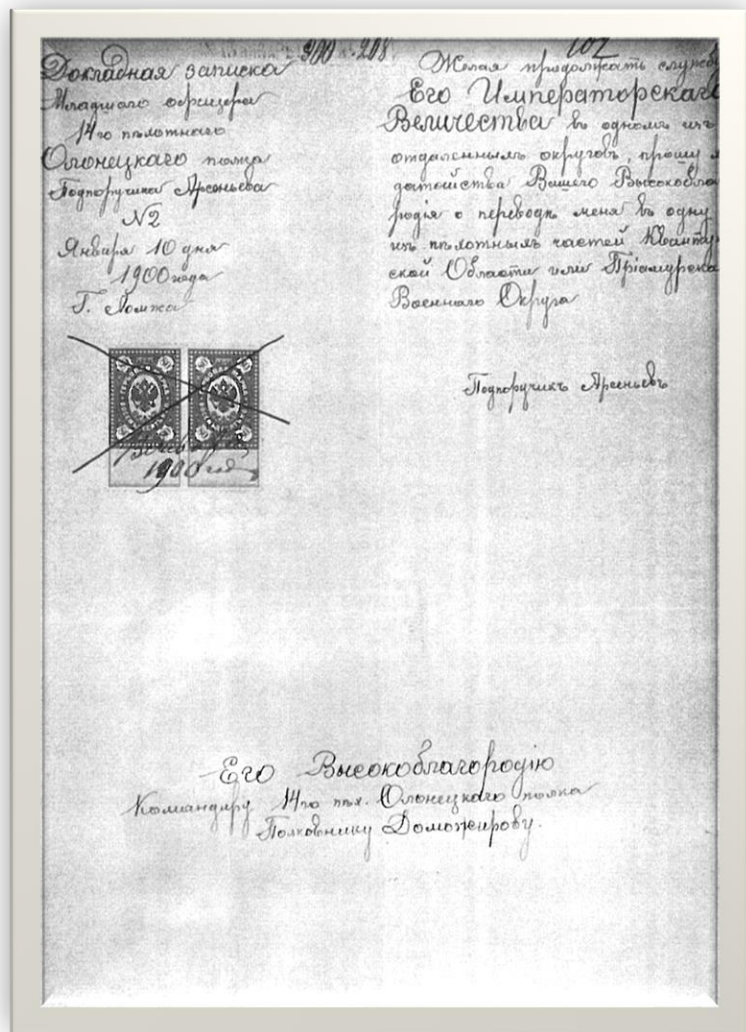
<sup>28</sup> For more in-depth historical background check out Andreas Kappeler, *Rußland als Vielvölkerreich: Entstehung, Geschichte, Zerfall*, Studi di Storia (Rome: Edizioni Lavoro, 2009), 185–191.

<sup>29</sup> «Но если берега Амура еще были как-то изведаны, то Уссурийский край оставался абсолютно неизвестной землей». Igor Sergeevich Kuz'michëv, *Pisatel' Arsenyev*, 38.

<sup>30</sup> Nikolay Mikhaylovich Przheval'sky was born into a Polish family of small landowners in the Smolensk governorate. After the territory that belonged to the Polish-Lithuanian confederation was annexed by the Tsarist Empire under Catherine II, the explorer's ancestors emigrated to Russia. Most famous for his enormous contribution to the exploration of Central Asia under the Russian Geographical Society, Przheval'sky led his first expeditions to recently annexed Russian territories (following the Treaty of Aigun in May 1858) on the Pacific Ocean from June 1867 to spring 1869. As noted in the article by David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye *Nikolai Przheval'ski. Explorador y espía durante el Gran Juego*, Przheval'sky's real interest was not the expedition itself, but curiosity about the unexplored lands that separated Asiatic Russia from the eastern half of the Chinese Empire. These lands, defined as *terra incognita* in European maps until the second half of the nineteenth century, sparked the explorer's interest in the region (specifically for the areas of Sinkiang, Tibet, and Mongolia). David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, "Nikolai Przheval'ski. Explorador y espía durante el Gran Juego,"

territories. Accomplishing here the first expedition that led him to write his renowned *Puteshestviye v Ussuriyskom kraye. 1867–1869 g.* Arsenyev was familiar with Przheval'sky's work, as well as with the writings of David Ilyich Schreider *Nash Dal'niy Vostok. Tri goda v Ussuriyskom kraye*<sup>31</sup>, published as a result of travels to the Ussuri Krai in the years 1891–1893.

Having carefully studied the Russian territories located on the periphery of the Eurasian continent, Vladimir Arsenyev was duly promoted to the rank of lieutenant and subsequently reassigned in May 1900 to the First Vladivostok Fortress Infantry Regiment, which was then stationed in its namesake city. Prior to its annexation by Russia, the city of Vladivostok had been known as Yongmingcheng (永明城), or the “City of Eternal Light,” during the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368), the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), and subsequently, under the 1858 Treaty of Aigun and the Treaty of Peking (1860), it was ceded to Russia by Wenzong, the Eighth Emperor of the Qing Dynasty (1644–1912). As recalled by Vasiliy Avchenko: “There, the Saint Petersburg native became a Far Easterner.”<sup>32</sup>



Report of Lieutenant Arsenyev to Colonel P. P. Domozhirov, commander of the 14th Olonets Infantry Regiment, on his transfer to the Far East dated January 10 (22), 1900: [https://infor24.ru/Арсеньев,\\_Владимир\\_Клавдиевич](https://infor24.ru/Арсеньев,_Владимир_Клавдиевич)

*Desperta Ferro: Historia Moderna*, 2014, 60–63. It is worth noting the great esteem Vladimir Arsenyev had for Przheval'sky, who had managed to fulfill his desire for exploration and discovery.

<sup>31</sup> David Ilyich Schreider, *Nash Dal'niy Vostok. Tri goda v Ussuriyskom kraye* (Saint Petersburg: izdatel'stvo A. F. Derviena, 1897).

<sup>32</sup> «Там уроженец Петербурга стал дальневосточником». Vasiliy Olegovich Avchenko, *Literaturnye Pervoprophodtsy Dal'nego Vostoka*, 91.

## 1.1.2 – *Na Vostok: the year 1900, transfer to the Russian Far East*

One of the defining characteristics of Vladimir Arsenyev, which sets him apart from many other explorers who also moved to the Far Eastern territories of the Empire, is the fact that he spent the remainder of his life in Primorsky Krai. Moreover, it is noteworthy that the motivation that drove the ‘traveler-writer’ to embark on such a significant journey was not rooted in economic interests,<sup>33</sup> but rather an insatiable desire for discovery and a determination to fill the “blank spots” on the map that Przheval’sky had not been able to chart during his expeditions across the Far East.

Work on the Trans-Siberian Railway began only on May 19, 1891, as reported in the manual by Zenone Volpicelli *Russia on the Pacific and the Siberian railway*,<sup>34</sup> when Tsar Alexander II laid down the first stone for the most ambitious engineering project in modern human history. Given the complexities of Arsenyev’s journey, it is unsurprising that also his emotions were similarly intricate. After reaching Vladivostok in August of the same year, his path was long and arduous:

Он признавался, что, когда ехал на Дальний Восток, сердце у него замирало в груди: замирало и от радости, и от сознания значительности момента, и от грандиозности впервые открывавшихся ему сибирских пространств [...]»<sup>35</sup>

The turning point in Arsenyev’s life occurred at this very moment, when he left the capital lifestyle to embrace his dreams and instincts in the exploration of a life in constant motion. Arriving in the city of Vladivostok, which had turned forty that year, Arsenyev felt as if he was “[...] stranded on another planet [...]”.<sup>36</sup> In the Far East commenced the second period of his life, which he spent between the cities of Vladivostok and Khabarovsk, where he was able to finally realize his geographical, naturalistic, and historical interests, that is, the all-round interests for nature that he had been cultivating since childhood.

An indispensable relationship was that with Nikolay Aleksandrovich Pal’chevskiy, Deputy Chairman of the Society for the Study of the Amur Territory (*Obshchestvo izucheniya*

---

<sup>33</sup> Igor Kuz’michëv, in his analysis, highlights the historical trend of workers and scholars migrating to the Far East for better wages and to receive the coveted *Amurskie pensii*, or Amur pensions. Igor Sergeyeovich Kuz’michëv, *Pisatel’ Arsenyev*, 44.

<sup>34</sup> Vladimir, Zenone Volpicelli, *Russia on the Pacific and the Siberian Railway* (Alpha editions, 2019).

<sup>35</sup> He confessed that when he traveled to the Far East, his heart sank in his chest: it sank from joy, and from the consciousness of the significance of the moment, and from the grandiosity of the Siberian spaces that were opening up to him for the first time [...]. Igor Sergeyeovich Kuz’michëv, *Pisatel’ Arsenyev*, 47.

<sup>36</sup> «[...] будто попал на другую планету [...]». Igor Sergeyeovich Kuz’michëv, 49.

*Amurskogo Kraya*),<sup>37</sup> who enabled Arsenyev to be born as a naturalist. Through Pal'chevskiy, who followed Arsenyev in the first expedition of 1906, the writer got to know regional historians, ethnographers, archaeologists, and linguists.

Therefore, in 1903, Arsenyev started working in the Society for the Study of the Amur Region, undertaking several excursions to study the indigenous populations of the Sukhanskaya and Sudzukhinskaya valleys until the outbreak of the conflict with Japan in February 1904. The explorer, despite being a lieutenant, was critical of all wars, even those that had “positive outcomes” like the Russo-Japanese War, which led to increased study of the Russian Far East:

Прошлая несчастная война всколыхнула всю Россию и тем принесла пользу Амурскому краю. Дальним Востоком заинтересовалось русское общество. Взоры всех обратились к берегам Тихого океана. Великая волна русского переселения хлынула на Восток [...]<sup>38</sup>

As the war ended, Vladimir Arsenyev was transferred to the city of Khabarovsk at the headquarters of the Primorye Military District, where he led all the dispatches. Moreover, while in Khabarovsk, Arsenyev issued his first scientific paper *Otchet o deyatel'nosti Vladivostokskogo obshchestva lyubiteley okhoty*<sup>39</sup> (1905), which, as Igor Kuz'michëv recorded, typifies the scientific and creative profile of the young writer. It is noteworthy that, in addition to the analyses of the flora and fauna of the region, this brief report introduces the author's moral stance concerning certain issues that would regularly return in his future writings, as it is explored in more detail in the following chapters of this work, as well as the main question that the author posed to himself throughout most of his life: “Man before the face of nature, what is he: a short-sighted cruel misappropriator or a kind and reasonable lord of it?”<sup>40</sup>. This will also be the main topic of Akira Kurosawa's 1975 film adaptation of *Dersu Uzala* (§ 2.6).

---

<sup>37</sup> As reported in *Tsentr Amursky Tigr*, the Society for the Study of the Amur Territory (OIAK) is the oldest public research and local history organization in the Far East, founded in 1884 by a group of representatives of the *intelligentsia* in Vladivostok with the aim of reaching a “comprehensive study of the basin of the river Amur, the Russian coast of the Eastern Ocean and adjacent areas.” The Society was the Vladivostok branch of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society when Arsenyev joined it at the turn of the 20th century. Later, in 1925, it underwent another change to become the Primorsky branch of the Geographical Society of the USSR. For more information see Andrey Shorshin, “Zdanya Vladivostokskogo filiala,” *Tsentr Amurskiy Tigr*, accessed September 20, 2023, <https://amur-tiger.ru/contacts/history-vladivostok>.

<sup>38</sup> Last year's unfortunate war stirred up the whole of Russia and thus benefited the Amur region. Russian society became interested in the Far East. The eyes of all turned to the shores of the Pacific Ocean. A great wave of Russian resettlement rushed to the East [...]. Vladimir Klavdiyevich Arsenyev, *Kratkiy voyenno-geograficheskiy i voyenno-statisticheskiy ocherk Ussuriyskogo Kraya 1901-1911 gg.* (Khabarovsk: tipografiya Shtaba Priamurskogo voyennogo okruga, 1912), II, <https://www.prlib.ru/item/341357>.

<sup>39</sup> In this work Arsenyev wrote about what he learned in his first five years spent in the Russian Far East.

<sup>40</sup> «Человек перед этим лицом природы – кто он: близорукий жестокий стяжатель или добрый и разумный ее повелитель?». Igor Sergeevich Kuz'michëv, *Pisatel' Arsenyev*, 61.



Thus, on May 16, Arsenyev left with his squadron in Khabarovsk, thereby commencing the first large expedition, the vicissitudes of which were depicted in *Across the Ussuri Krai* (1921). Since a *sine qua non* of the expedition also consisted of keeping diaries, the traveler wrote and described in detail the course of the expedition, what the group encountered along the way, the fauna, and the flora of the region that, until a few years earlier, he could only read about from the stories of the explorers who inspired him. The 1906 expedition resulted in the production of three travel diaries, the so-called *putevye zapisi* (travel records) and *tematicheskie zapisi* (thematic records<sup>41</sup>), which constitute not only sources of valuable scientific information, but also the fruit of the author's deepest spiritual expression and critical considerations of social, cultural, and ecological issues.

After almost two hundred days, the expedition ended with a successful return to Khabarovsk. The following expedition, which lasted even longer, was launched in June of 1907. However, on this occasion, the route of Arsenyev's platoon turned further north, along the coast of the Sea of Japan, and to places where Russian colonizers had not yet settled. Several considerations need to be made about this expedition, the occurrences of which are mainly reported in *Dersu Uzala* (1923) and in the article *Poberezhye Yaponskogo Morya* (1914) by Pëtr Bordakov, who narrated, through different styles and forms, the events of the 1907 expedition, from the encounter with the Goldi to the hardships endured.<sup>42</sup>

However, Arsenyev's most challenging expedition, and the one that earned him the title of 'great traveler' in the Priamurye newspaper, was the 1908-1910 expedition, also referred to as the "Jubilee Expedition":

[...] экспедиция Арсеньева, обогащающая географическую науку оригинальнейшими сведениями, дает ему несомненное право на признание в нем не только "отличного офицера," но и истинного путешественника, которого уже пора оценить, как в свое время оценил Пржевальский Козлова.<sup>43</sup>

Hence, the "Jubilee Expedition", organized for the fiftieth anniversary of the Treaty of Aigun, under which the Primorsky Krai was annexed to the Russian Empire, was the one that

---

<sup>41</sup> The topics of the latter were mainly geology and ethnographic considerations on the peoples of the Far East. Igor Sergeyeovich Kuz'michëv, 65.

<sup>42</sup> Similarities and differences with Arsenyev's work will be discussed in § 2.4.2.

<sup>43</sup> [...] the expedition of Arsenyev enriches geographical science with the most original information gives him the undoubted right to be recognized not only as an "excellent officer" but also as a true traveler, and it is high time to appreciate him as Przheval'sky appreciated Kozlov once. Anna Ivanovna Tarasova, *Vladimir Klavdiyevich Arsenyev* (Moscow: Glavnaya redaktsiya vostochnoy literatury izdatel'stva "Nauka," 1985), 10.

rewarded Arsenyev the rank of a full member of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society (*Russkoye Geograficheskoye Obshchestvo*).<sup>44</sup>

Among the celebrations, the Russian Geographical Society decided to organize an expedition to the north of the Ussuri Territory to the shores of the Pacific Ocean “to find a land route from the city of Khabarovsk to the Imperial Harbor and to collect materials concerning geography, botany, geology, and zoology.”<sup>45</sup> What was peculiar about this expedition was that, due to the lack of state funds, the volunteer company was asked to carry it out without any kind of compensation. It should also be noted that, during the same period, Arsenyev was commissioned also by the Headquarters of the Primorye Society to conduct an expedition to the same areas. Therefore, both expeditions were placed under his command. The mission began on June 24, 1908, although Dersu Uzala did not partake, as he had passed away in the spring of the same year.

As in the case of his past expeditions, Arsenyev contacted local agencies and arranged for the publication of the *putevye pis'ma* (travel letters) in the *Priamurye* newspaper, with the first one published as early as June 1908, only a few days after the departure. His dedication to the task, as is to be seen in Section 2.2, formed the basis for all future literary works. During the expedition, Arsenyev was put to the test by the heavy misfortunes that befell the expedition group. Nevertheless, even at times when all seemed lost, he never stopped pursuing his endeavors. On August 14, 1908, Arsenyev noted the following:

Мы ужасно страдаем от мошкеры. У людей в ушах появились сплошные раны, на лице – экзема [...] Все идут апатично, голодные, усталые и обессиленные. Часа в четыре дня мы попали в чрезвычайно топкое и зыбучее болото: с трудом мы перешли его, более чем по пояс в воде. Перед сумерками еще одна собака (моя любимая Альпа) идти отказалась. [...] Тотчас же Альпа была пристрелена и разделена на части. Тогда ее сварили и ею накормили других собак в целях сохранения их на будущее. Сердце, печень и легкое ели люди. Собачину приказано беречь и есть понемногу, чтобы ее хватило подольше.<sup>46</sup>

---

<sup>44</sup> On the advice of Admiral Fëdor Petrovich Litke, the Russian Geographical Society was established in 1845 by decree of Emperor Nicholas I. According to the society's official website, its mission was “[...] to collect and to guide the best young Russian forces to a comprehensive study of the native land.” As in the case of the Society for the Study of the Amur Territory, over the years, the Russian Geographical Society has continued to operate, however, the group's name has changed numerous times. For more information see Russian Geographical Society, “History,” Russian Geographical Society, accessed September 20, 2023, <https://www.rgo.ru/en/society/history>.

<sup>45</sup> «Для нахождения сухопутного пути из г. Хабаровска в Императорскую гавань и для сбора материалов по географии, ботанике, геологии и зоологии». Igor Sergeyeovich Kuz'michëv, *Pisatel' Arsenyev*, 80.

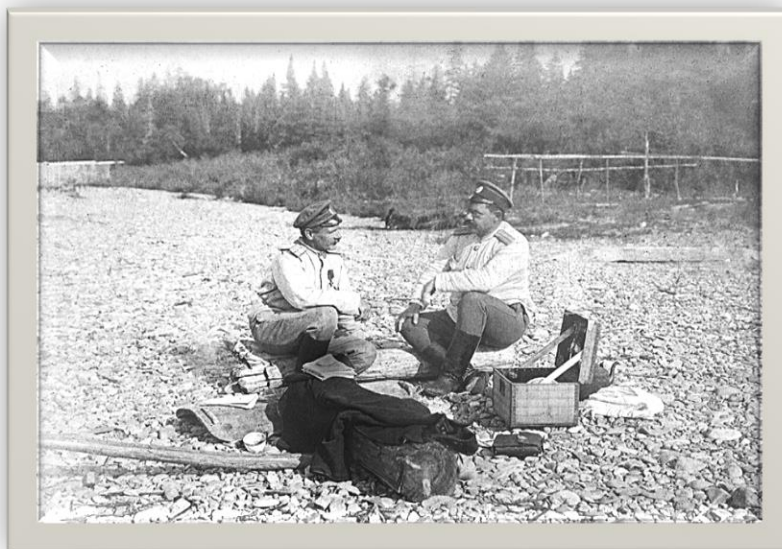
<sup>46</sup> We suffer terribly from the midges. People have wounds in their ears and eczema on their faces [...] Everyone is apathetic, hungry, tired, and exhausted. At four o'clock in the afternoon, we got into an extremely swampy and quicksand swamp: with difficulty we crossed it, more than waist-deep in water. Before dusk, another dog (my dear Al'pa) refused to walk. [...] Immediately Al'pa was shot and cut into



Kuz'michëv described this occurrence as a: “sincere human confession,”<sup>47</sup> which serves as just one example of numerous instances where Arsenyev’s resoluteness overcame his shortcomings and fears. His resolve and the values instilled in him by his father, as well as those acquired through Samuel Smiles’ work, were consistently present in times of adversity. The aforementioned ‘internal energy’ of Arsenyev, characterized by his unwavering resolve, facilitated the completion of all his expeditions. Ultimately, on August 25, 1908, the group was rescued by Staff Captain Nikolayev and a contingent of Russian soldiers and Orochi-Udege who had been dispatched from Imperatorskaya Gavan (now known as Sovetskaya Gavan) to their aid.<sup>48</sup>

Upon receiving silver decorations for his valuable contribution to exploration, Arsenyev devoted himself to rewriting his travel letters,

which he used as the basis for his future novels and short stories. Besides being recognized as a traveler, following the long expedition, he was acclaimed also as an esteemed ethnographer.<sup>49</sup> Subsequently, he received many titles, including those of member of the Society of Devotees of Natural Science, Anthropology, and Ethnography (*Imperatorskoye Obshchestvo Lyubiteley*



Staff Captain V. K. Arsenyev (left) on a picnic. Summer 1910:  
[https://руни.рф/Файл:Arseyev\\_in\\_1913.jpg](https://руни.рф/Файл:Arseyev_in_1913.jpg)

---

pieces. Then it was boiled and fed to the other dogs to preserve them for the future. The heart, liver, and lungs were eaten by the humans. The dog meat was ordered to be kept safe and eaten little by little so that it would last longer. Igor Sergeyeovich Kuz'michëv, 89.

<sup>47</sup> «[...] искреннюю человеческую исповедь». Igor Sergeyeovich Kuz'michëv, 89.

<sup>48</sup> In this regard, it is noteworthy the work of Nikolay Yevgenyevich Kabanov (1905–1992), a famous Far Eastern botanist, who, after graduating from the Far Eastern State University in 1927, worked as a geobotanist in the expedition along the Sovetskaya Gavan – Khabarovsk route headed by Arsenyev, portrayed in the author’s last book *Through the Taiga* (1930). Arsenyev’s biography by Kabanov stands out for the fascinating details about the writer’s private life and habits: Nikolay Yevgenyevich Kabanov, *V. K. Arsenyev. Puteshestvennik i naturalist, 1872-1930*, Istoricheskaya seriya, N. 29 (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Moskovskogo obshchestva ispytateley prirody, 1948).

<sup>49</sup> Vasilij Olegovich Avchenko, *Literaturnye Pervoprokhodtsy Dal'nego Vostoka*, 101.

*Estestvoznaniya, Antropologii i Etnografii*) by Moscow University and the Priamursky branch of the Society of Oriental Studies (1912).<sup>50</sup>

In 1917, during the First World War, Arsenyev was mobilized into the army and subsequently appointed Commissar of the Provisional Government for the *Inorodtsy* Affairs of the Primorsky Region in Khabarovsk. To emphasize his compassion for the fratricidal conflicts that took place in his homeland, Vladimir Yas'kov reported a quote from 1918 in the biographical sketch of *Po Ussuriyskomu Krayu*.

*Dersu Uzala*, which is of relevance:

Первый день нового года. Прошлый год принес много несчастий родине. Что-то даст нам наступивший новый год? Скорее бы закончилась эта солдатская эпоха со всеми ее жестокостями и насилиями.<sup>51</sup>

In the same year, the author officially discharged himself from the army, remaining neutral between the Whites and the Red Army. The following year, in 1919, Klavdiy Arsenyev, along with the writer's family members including his mother, two of his sisters, one brother and his wife, were brutally murdered by an unknown group of bandits in Ukraine.



Lieutenant Colonel Arsenyev in 1917:

<https://scientificrussia.ru/articles/pervoprohodec-dalnego-vostoka>

Additionally, as a former lieutenant, the writer was compelled to participate in military conscription until 1924, despite his refusal to align with communist ideology. After divorcing his first wife, Vladimir Arsenyev married Margarita Nikolayevna Solovyëva, the daughter of

---

<sup>50</sup> It should be noted that in the summer of 1916, Vladimir Arsenyev, who was on a business trip to Manchuria, was also elected an honorary member of the Society of Russian Orientalists (*Obshchestvo Russkikh Orientalistov*) in the city of Harbin.

<sup>51</sup> First day of the new year. Last year brought much misfortune to the motherland. What will the new year bring to us? I wish this soldier's era, with all its cruelties and violence, would end sooner. Vladimir Klavdijevich Arsenyev, *Po Ussurijskomu Krayu, Dersu Uzala.*, Podarochnye izdaniya. Velikie puteshestviya (Moscow: Eksmo, 2022), 22.

the president of the Society for the Study of the Amur Region. Since his skills and competencies were too valuable to be wasted, the explorer was taken for loyal to the new Soviet government and was therefore put in charge of several projects and expeditions.

It is worth noting that, despite being allowed to emigrate to America, the explorer turned the option down, as he preferred to continue researching the Far Eastern territories, having found in the taiga peace and freedom. As Kucheryavenko<sup>52</sup> recounted, the writer notes the following in one of his letters: “I am Russian. I have worked and am working for my people. I have no reason to go abroad.”<sup>53</sup> As a matter of fact, one of the least known aspects of the author’s life is that he was a committed patriot of his motherland, as pointed out in *Dva otveta V. K. Arsenyeva*, published in *Krasnoye Znamya* on September 27, 1947:

Арсеньева мы знаем как выдающегося исследователя нашего края и замечательного писателя, книги которого высоко оценил А. М. Горький. Но не известны широко некоторые факты, характеризующие его как горячего патриота нашей родины, которой он посвятил все свои труды.<sup>54</sup>

During his last years, he conducted a series of expeditions, and in 1925, he collaborated with the Commission for the Study of the Tribal Composition of the Population of the Borderlands of Russia (*Komissiya po izuchenyu plemennogo sostava naseleniya Rossii i sopredel'nykh stran*)<sup>55</sup> to create an ethnographic map of the peoples of Siberia.<sup>56</sup>

---

<sup>52</sup> Vasilii Trofimovich Kucheryavenko (21 April 1910, Yekaterinoslav – 3 December 1982, Vladivostok) was a Soviet writer from Primorsky Krai.

<sup>53</sup> «Я русский. Работал и работаю для своего народа. Незачем мне ехать за границу». Vasilii Trofimovich Kucheryavenko, “Dva otveta V.K. Arsenyeva,” pgsb.ru, accessed September 15, 2023, <https://pgsb.ru/digitization/document/3117/>.

<sup>54</sup> We know Arsenyev as an outstanding explorer of our region and a remarkable writer, whose books were highly appreciated by A. M. Gorky. But some facts that characterize him as an ardent patriot of our homeland, to which he devoted all his works, are not widely known. Vasilii Trofimovich Kucheryavenko.

<sup>55</sup> At the beginning of the twentieth century, the debate on national identities shook the whole of Europe and Russia. Hence, in 1917, a group of ethnographers studied the ethnographic composition of the Russian Empire, resulting in the creation in the same year of the Commission for the Study of the Tribal Composition of the Population of Russia [KIPS]. As noted in the work by Francine Hirsch: “the KIPS ethnographers would play a far greater role in the work of government than most European or American anthropologists had ever done.” The committee’s tasks included not only the study of people as a ‘productive force’ but also the organization of civic education courses about ‘The Peoples of the USSR’. The vast experience of Vladimir Arsenyev played a major role in this context since the main aim of the regime was to predict “which clans and tribes would eventually come together and form new nationalities.” Moreover, in a second moment, the ethnographers helped the Soviet regime in the creation of national languages and cultures. Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 2005), 7–8.

<sup>56</sup> In this regard, Arsenyev’s work was crucial, in order to implement substantial revisions regarding the ethnological classification of the populations in the Ussuri region, as reported in the biography written by Tarasova, *Vladimir Klavdijevich Arsenyev*, 229.

Despite his declared patriotism, the writer was criticized for spreading “hostile propaganda.”<sup>57</sup> Therefore, he decided to spend his last days in Vladivostok working on the materials collected during the last expeditions: “I am 54 years old, the years are passing, and my strength is waning. I may only have a few years left to live.”<sup>58</sup>

The writer developed expedition itineraries for a census of the aborigines (1926–1928) of the Far Eastern region and began some correspondence with his first biographer Fëdor Fëdorovich Aristov<sup>59</sup> (1888–1932) because of the review in the journal *Izvestiya* of the book *V Debryakh Ussuriyskogo Kraya* (1926).<sup>60</sup> Noteworthy is also the correspondence with the popular Soviet writer Maxim Gorky, who officially stated Arsenyev as a true writer of odeporic and ethnographic literature after having read and highly appreciated the shortened version of *Dersu Uzala* and *Across the Ussuri Krai*, sent to him by the Soviet novelist Mikhail Prishvin.

Around the same time, Vladimir Arsenyev headed the Bureau of Economic Surveys for new railway lines. Not coincidentally, in *Skvoz' Taygu* (1930) the writer recalls that the 1927 expedition along the Khabarovsk – Sovetskaya Gavan route served the purpose of finding out “[...] the situation regarding the colonization of the areas surrounding the planned railway.”<sup>61</sup>

In his final months, despite enjoying a close relationship with Prishvin and maintaining correspondence with Gorky, Arsenyev endured feelings of abandonment and depression. He perceived his life to be drawing to a close, prompting him to reflect on the passing of his Oroch and Nanai friends who had predeceased him in the taiga many years prior. In a poignant letter penned to his dear friend and biographer Fëdor Aristov, the writer emotionally expressed his feelings of isolation and loneliness.

---

<sup>57</sup> «враждебную пропаганду». Vasilij Olegovich Avchenko, *Literaturnye Pervoprokhodtsy Dal'nego Vostoka*, 132.

<sup>58</sup> «Мне 54 года, годы уходят и силы слабеют. Быть может, и жить-то мне осталось только несколько лет». Vasilij Olegovich Avchenko, 132.

<sup>59</sup> Vladimir Klavdiyevich Arsenyev, *Po Ussuriyskomu Krayu, Dersu Uzala*, 23.

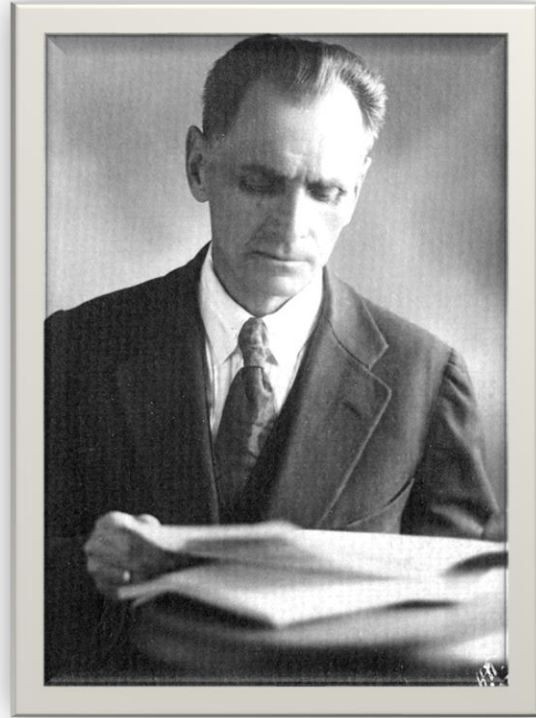
<sup>60</sup> Vladimir Klavdiyevich Arsenyev, *V Debryakh Ussuriyskogo Kraya* (Vladivostok: акс. о-во Knizhnoye delo, 1926).

<sup>61</sup> «[...] что представляют собой в колониционном отношении местности, тяготеющие к проектируемой железной дороге». Vladimir Klavdiyevich Arsenyev, *Skvoz' Taygu*, 5.

Я все больше и больше чувствую свое одиночество [...] Я стал уставать от людей и многого не понимаю, чего они хотят и почему так озлоблены друг на друга [...] Мое желание – закончить обработку своих научных трудов и уйти, уйти подальше, уйти совсем – к Дерсу!<sup>62</sup>

Interestingly, Arsenyev stated that he did not understand much about people, which reminds of the main features of Dersu Uzala. Perhaps, after spending an extended period interacting with the indigenous peoples of the Far East, the author not only grasped their way of life but also embraced their values and beliefs, leading to the adoption of traits commonly associated with the Goldi, such as resistance to the constraints of the “civilized system,” which Arsenyev felt was stifling his creativity.<sup>63</sup>

In 1929, the writer declined a proposal to celebrate his thirty-year activity in the Far East, as he was then engaged in preparing the materials for his final expedition. Despite his failing health, Vladimir Arsenyev remained committed to his duties as a researcher until his death on September 4, 1930.



*One of the last photographs taken of Vladimir Arsenyev (1930):*  
<https://georgievsk.ru/about/info/news/148/19427/>

---

<sup>62</sup> I feel my loneliness more and more [...] I have grown tired of people and do not understand much about them, what they want, and why they are so embittered against each other [...] My desire is to finish processing my scientific treatises and escape, escape far away, escape completely - to Dersu! Vasily Olegovich Avchenko, *Literaturnye Pervoprophodtsy Dal'nego Vostoka*, 134.

<sup>63</sup> The relationship between the colonizer and the colonized and how the two influence each other will be discussed in § 3.3. It is noteworthy the letter that Arsenyev addressed to the ethnographer Lev Yakovlevich Shternberg (1861-1927), in which the author expresses his relief at having ‘woken up’ and fled the capital of the Russian Empire. Vasily Olegovich Avchenko, “Bratya po Krayu. Zhiznennyye i tvorcheskie svyazi Vladimira Arsenyeva i Aleksandra Fadeyeva” 36 (2022): 178, <https://doi.org/10.24412/2658-5960-2022-36-167-180>.

## 1.2 – Soviet power and the confiscation of the author’s papers

The fact that, in 1929, the writer was accused by the OGPU of spreading “hostile propaganda” was merely a prelude to the fate that befell the entire Arsenyev family in the following years. On July 16, 1931, *Krasnoye Znamya* published an article by sinologist Gerontiy Valentinovich Yefimov (1906–1980) entitled *V. K. Arsenyev as an exponent of great powerful chauvinism*, in which the explorer was labeled as an enemy of the Soviet government and a true supporter of Russian imperialism and the interests of the bourgeoisie:

Арсеньев предан интересам враждебного пролетариату класса, у него нет ни малейшей попытки овладеть методом диалектического материализма, лицо Арсеньева – это лицо верного сторонника российского империализма, его взгляды по национальному вопросу – откровенно шовинистические, идеалистические, уходящие корнями в пропаганду империалистических идей и защиту интересов русской буржуазии.<sup>64</sup>

As a result of the kidnapping and repression policies carried out by the Soviet regime through the NKVD in the 1930s, several scholars were shot simply because they knew Arsenyev, who had served as an officer before the Revolution, although the writer later adjusted to regime change and continued serving under the established socialist system. Both Arsenyev’s older brother Anatoliy and his wife were arrested in 1938, while the writer’s daughter, Natalya Vladimirovna Arsenyeva, was arrested and sentenced to ten years in the Gulag, accused of conspiring with the Japanese.

In addition to family tragedies, the greatest loss from a scientific, historical, and cultural perspective was the confiscation of Arsenyev’s archive and the disappearance of what should have been his *magnum opus*, *The Land of the Udege (Strana Udekhe)*, on which the author had been working for over twenty-five years. Analyzing the history of the monograph from a biographical point of view, as well as its mysterious disappearance, is another way to understand Arsenyev’s attitude toward a variety of social and moral issues, which are explored in greater depth in the following chapters of this thesis. Moreover, research on the lost monograph is still ongoing; consequently, this section aims to explore a lesser-known work of the author, which is, nonetheless, of extreme relevance due to its ethnographic-cultural-social significance.

---

<sup>64</sup> Arsenyev is devoted to the interests of a class hostile to the proletariat, he has not made the slightest attempt to master the method of dialectical materialism, Arsenyev’s face is that of a staunch supporter of Russian imperialism, his views on the national question are openly chauvinistic, idealistic, rooted in the propaganda of imperialist ideas and the defense of the interests of the Russian bourgeoisie. Gerontiy Valentinovich Yefimov, “V.K. Arsenyev kak vyrazitel’ velikoderzhavnogo shovinizma,” June 16, 1931.

### 1.2.1 – The case of *The Land of the Udege: the writer’s magnum opus*

In more than twenty years in the Far East, Vladimir Arsenyev established a bond not only with Russians, who settled in recently colonized territories but also with aborigines. However, the explorer did not have the same attitude toward all the populations he met during his expeditions across the taiga (§ 3.2.1). As recounted by Kabanov,<sup>65</sup> Arsenyev used to be critical at the Chinese, Koreans, and Japanese, since he considered them “exploiters” of the natural resources of the region, whereas the small peoples of Siberia (e.g., Orochi, Udege, Taz, and Nanai) were kept in high regard.

Regarding the Udege, the explorer developed such a deep interest in 1906, as recalled in the letter of February 12, 1914, addressed to the governor-general of Primorye: “Since 1906 I have been working on the ethnography of the Orochi-udege.”<sup>66</sup> Additionally, the writer was fascinated by the social structure of the indigenous society in the Far East: “They do not have the word ‘Tsar’, nor do they have this concept [...] In every business the leaders are themselves.”<sup>67</sup>

However, regardless of the numerous scientific and artistic works that the explorer published, he was unable to conclude what was supposed to be his

richest and most substantial work, *Strana Udekhe*, which was perceived as the purpose of his life, as asserted in the December 8, 1928 letter to the ethnographer and orientalist Nikolay Kyuner (1877–1955):



V. K. Arsenyev in Udege costume (center) and Udege from the Anyuy River (1909): <https://gorenka.org/14539-tropoj-arseneva/>

<sup>65</sup> Kabanov, V. K. *Arsenyev. Puteshestvennik i naturalist, 1872-1930*, 45–50.

<sup>66</sup> «С 1906 г. я работаю по этнографии над орочами-удэхе». Tarasova, *Vladimir Klavdiyevich Arsenyev*, 225.

<sup>67</sup> «У них нет слова «царь», нет этого и понятия [...] Во всяком деле руководители являются сами». Kuz'michëv, *Pisatel' Arsenyev*, 121.

Все мои предшествовавшие работы и статьи являются не более как подготовительными материалами для основной моей работы “Страна Удэхе.” Эта монография — цель моей жизни. Если бы мне не удалось ее издать, я счел бы это большой личной катастрофой.<sup>68</sup>

According to biographical notes, the drafting of the monograph, which initially went by the name *Orochi-Udekhe*, began in 1910, along with other works including *Po Ussuriyskomu Krayu* (§ 2.3), *Kitaytsy v Ussuriyskom Kraye*, and *Vymiranie inorodtsey Amurskogo Kraya*. While these works were all eventually published, *The Land of Udege* was the only one that remained unfinished, although part of the monography was printed in a brochure entitled *Lesnye Lyudi Udekheytsy* (1926), where the author briefly reported some features of the Tungus-Manchurian people<sup>69</sup> native of the Primorsky and Khabarovsk territories, their social structures, and worldviews: “the present brochure is a brief and divulgative summary of a large work *The Land of Ude(he)*, on which the author has been working for more than twenty five years and which he intends to publish in the near future.”<sup>70</sup>

While some data from the monograph are available (such as the sections concerning the dictionary of the Udege language), as they are contained in Arsenyev’s diaries, which constitute the author’s greatest legacy and represent mostly unstudied material, all other traces of the manuscript have been lost to this day. In a communication to Lev Yakovlevich Shternberg, in 1913, the author indicated that he was nearing the completion of his monograph, with a targeted publication date of 1914. Regarding the rest of the investigation of the Udege people, Shternberg also gave a personal appreciation for the research that the explorer was conducting:

Наиболее обстоятельно обследовал это племя известный путешественник по Амурскому краю и исследователь В. Арсеньев, работающий над своим трудом около 25 лет, труд этот скоро будет опубликован. Много интересного об этом племени он

---

<sup>68</sup> All my previous writings and articles are nothing more than preparatory materials for my main work, “The Land of Udekhe.” This monograph is the purpose of my life. If I were to fail to publish it, I would consider it a great personal catastrophe. Kuz’michëv, 218.

<sup>69</sup> According to Tarasova’s work, the Udege people, previously known as ‘Orochi’, was considered a nationality *sui generis* only upon investigation by the Russian ethnographers, Arsenyev in particular, who, in his report *Etnologicheskiye problemy na vostoке Sibiri*, formulated the thesis regarding their ethnographic independence. For further information, of valuable reference is the brochure *Lesnye Lyudi Udekheytsy* by Vladimir Arsenyev and the study *Narody Sibiri* by Maxim Levin and Leonid Potapov. Vladimir Klavdiyevich Arsenyev, *Lesnye Lyudi Udekheytsy* (Vladivostok: Knizhnoye delo, 1926), <https://www.rulit.me/books/lesnye-lyudi-udehejcy-read-342391-1.html>. Maxim Grigoryevich Potapov and Leonid Pavlovich Levin, *Narody Sibiri*, *Narody mira. Etnograficheskiye ocherki* (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1956).

<sup>70</sup> «Настоящая брошюра есть краткое и популярное изложение большого труда *Страна удэ(хе)*, над которым автор работает более 25 лет и к изданию которого он намерен приступить в ближайшем будущем». Arsenyev, *Lesnye Lyudi Udekheytsy*, 1.



сообщает в своих известных и переведенных на европейски языки описаниях путешествий по Уссурийскому краю.<sup>71</sup>

In the view of Tarasova, the reason for the repeated delay in the publication of his work can be attributed to the author's habit of taking on too many tasks, which deprived him of time to refine the data collected during the expeditions. As seen in the previous sections of this thesis, Arsenyev held several positions, serving not only as a lieutenant but also in the Russian Geographical Society in collaboration with the Society of Russian Orientalists in Harbin.<sup>72</sup> It can be assumed that his call for duty was simply driven by his love for the Ussuri region. However, it is undeniable that the exorbitant workload was driven first and foremost by the values with which Arsenyev was raised. In this sense, through the work of Samuel Smiles (§ 1.1.1) and the strict upbringing imparted by his father, one can better understand the reasons why the publication was repeatedly postponed:

[...] истинная причина его непомерной занятости коренилась вовсе не в характере его должности и не в местожительстве, а в нем самом, в его натуре. Неумная энергия, глубокая заинтересованность делом и людьми, стремление во что бы то ни стало вложить во всякую работу максимум сил и знаний, сознание своей гражданской ответственности, неподдельный энтузиазм и широкий круг интересов — эти прекрасные качества натуры Арсеньева неминуемо влекли за собой отчаянную нехватку времени.<sup>73</sup>



Vladimir Arsenyev in Udege costume at the exhibits of the Grodekovskiy Museum of the Priamursky Department of the IRGO. Khabarovsk, 1910:

<https://pasha-popolam.livejournal.com/710054.html>

<sup>71</sup> This tribe was most thoroughly investigated by the famous traveler and researcher V. Arsenyev, who has been working on his work for about 25 years; this work will be published soon. He reports a lot of interesting things about this tribe in his well-known descriptions of the travels in the Ussuri region translated into European languages. Lev Yakovlevich Shternberg, *Etnografiya. Sbornik "Tikhii okean." Russkie nauchnye issledovaniya* (Saint Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1926), 159.

<sup>72</sup> Moreover, according to Tarasova's study, on a working trip to Harbin (June 6–15, 1916), Arsenyev presented 5 reports concerning the Udege, whose data were supposed to be implemented in his never-published monograph. Tarasova, *Vladimir Klavdiyevich Arsenyev*, 225.

<sup>73</sup> [...] the real reason for his exorbitant workload was rooted not in the nature of his position or residence, but in himself, in his nature. Irrepressible energy, deep interest in business and people, the desire to put maximum effort and knowledge into any work, consciousness of his civic responsibility, genuine

Not only was the author taking too many assignments, but he also found it necessary to respond to every letter he received.<sup>74</sup> Moreover, Arsenyev felt that the monograph on the Udege was incomplete and that more expeditions were needed to delve into further aspects of the community. The writer valued the “ethnographic mission” greatly, as indicated in the preface of *Kitaytsy v Ussuriyskom Kraye*: “While on business trips from 1906 to 1912 [...] I set myself the task of studying the Orochi-Udege.”<sup>75</sup>

In summary, there were no limits to the writer’s curiosity, which led to the mispublication of his *magnum opus*. It is noteworthy that Arsenyev applied to the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography in Leningrad on September 30, 1925, during his visit to the city for the two-hundredth anniversary of the Academy of Sciences. He requested to be employed, as he intended to dedicate his time to writing the monograph on the Udege. During this period, partly because of the positive reviews of his literary works, the writer decided to set aside scientific accounts to focus on the artistic aspect. His request was positively welcomed; however, Arsenyev undertook other duties first in Khabarovsk, then in Vladivostok (where his family was living), thus permanently dismissing the possibility of relocation to Leningrad: “It is too early for me to settle in the museum. As long as I have strength, I want to work in the field.”<sup>76</sup>

Lastly, the death of his friend and editor of the upcoming monograph, Lev Yakovlevich Shternberg, occurred in August 1927; therefore, the work was further delayed. His death tremendously shook the explorer: “[...] for me personally; the death of Lev Yakovlevich is especially touching. I intend to dedicate my work *The Land of Udekhe* to the memory of L. Y. Shternberg.”<sup>77</sup> Therefore, even in the final correspondence with Fëdor Aristov dated June 27, 1930 (§ 1.1.2), the writer expressed his unwavering commitment to complete the monograph:

---

enthusiasm, and a wide range of interests - these fine qualities of Arsenyev’s nature inevitably entailed a desperate lack of time. Anna Ivanovna Tarasova, *Vladimir Klavdiyevich Arsenyev*, 194–195.

<sup>74</sup> Both Tarasova and Kabanov mentioned the fact that even students and people from all over the globe (especially after Maxim Gorky’s review, § 1.3.1) used to write to Arsenyev, expressing admiration or requesting to join his expeditions. Such was the case of the graduate student Nikolay Yevgenyevich Kabanov, who took part in both the 1907 and 1927 expeditions (§ 1.1.2).

<sup>75</sup> «Находясь с 1906 по 1912 год в командировках [...] я впереди поставил себе задачей изучение орочей-удэхе». Vladimir Klavdiyevich Arsenyev, *Kitaytsy v Ussuriyskom Kraye* (Khabarovsk: Типография kantselyarii priamurskogo general-gubernatora, 1914), I.

<sup>76</sup> «Мне еще рано садиться в музей. Пока есть силы, хочу поработать в поле». Tarasova, *Vladimir Klavdiyevich Arsenyev*, 197.

<sup>77</sup> «[...] для меня лично смерть Льва Яковлевича особенно чувствительна. Свою работу *Страна Удэхе* я намерен посвятить памяти Л. Я. Штернберга». Tarasova, 237.

Если я проживу еще несколько лет и если я закончу три научных труда: 1) Страна Удэхе 2) Древности Уссурийского края и 3) Теория и практика путешественника, я не буду жалеть жизнь, не буду цепляться за нее.<sup>78</sup>

Arsenyev passed away a few months later, leaving the work unfinished. Following the accusations of serving the interests of the bourgeoisie and being a defender of the Empire, his entire family and acquaintances were subjected to persecution by the NKVD, and the archives at the Khabarovsk estate were confiscated. Nevertheless, Kuz'michëv reported that the inventory of the Primorye section recorded the presence of a file, labeled as “folder No. 64,” which bore the name of *Udekheytsy. Zametki. Mashinopisnaya rukopis'. 194 lista (Udege. Notes. Typewritten manuscript. 194 pages)*. However, the document was reported to have disappeared from the list of archives since 1946.<sup>79</sup>

The manuscript, on which Arsenyev worked for more than twenty-five years, has raised several questions among the so-called “*arsenyevedy*” (researchers of V. K. Arsenyev’s life), partly due to the fact that, as a result of ongoing research, some taken for lost details of *The Land of the Udege* were lately found. In this regard, there has been much discussion in 2017 on the case of Primorsky historian and Arsenyev’s researcher Ivan Nikolaevich Yegorchev,<sup>80</sup> who retrieved from the archives of the Society for the Study of the Amur Region a collection of negatives that portrayed customs and traditions of the Udege people as well as shamanic cult. On the back of the photographs found by Yegorchev was a caption in the Russian and Udege languages, the handwriting of which matched that of Vladimir Arsenyev. Therefore, some biographers suggested that the negatives had been prepared by the explorer to be used as illustrations for the lost monograph, which implied that the work was in its final stage.<sup>81</sup> Moreover, as reported in Avchenko’s study, some of the photographs were marked with the corresponding page numbers of the manuscript (e.g., 1179, 1183), suggesting that the work was ready for its layout. As previously mentioned, the publication of the *Lesnye Lyudi Udekheytsy* brochure was supposed to serve as a summary of his ultimate manuscript; therefore, it is not a stretch to assume that the work was approaching its finalization.

---

<sup>78</sup> If I live a few more years, and if I finish three scientific works: 1) The Land of the Udekhe, 2) Antiquities of the Ussurisky Krai and 3) Theory and Practice of the Traveler, I will not regret life, I will not cling to it. Anzhelika Vitalyevna Petruk, *Strana Udekhe. Istoriya utrachennoy rukopisi* (Vladivostok: izdatel'stvo PSP, 2018), 41.

<sup>79</sup> Kuz'michëv, *Pisatel' Arsenyev*, 219.

<sup>80</sup> Ivan Nikolaevich Yegorchev (1951–2017) was a prominent historian, researcher (*arsenyeved*), journalist, and full member of the Russian Geographical Society. He was the author of important works investigating Arsenyev’s life and literary works, such as *Zagadki Dersu Uzala* (2014) and *Neizvestnyy Arsenyev* (2016).

<sup>81</sup> Vasilij Olegovič Avchenko, *Literaturnye Pervoprophodtsy Dal'nego Vostoka*, 102-103.

The reasons for the loss of the manuscript are several: both Tarasova and Avchenko suggest that they may have been taken from Arsenyev's house after the arrest of Margarita Nikolayevna Solovyëva by the NKVD, as the Arsenyevs' neighbor also recalled: "[...] NKVD officers confiscated 19 bags of documents from the apartment during the raid."<sup>82</sup>

Another fascinating hypothesis is that of the literary scholar Aleksandr Lobychev,<sup>83</sup> according to whom the monograph was deliberately confiscated because the fight against shamanic cults was rampant in the 1930s, especially affecting Siberia and the Far East. The writings faced accusations of promoting outdated and antiquated ideas that were at odds with the contemporary Soviet worldview, which echoed the censorship policies of the Stalinist era. Consequently, it is plausible that the manuscript was destroyed by fire. Despite his belief that it may be difficult to locate, Avchenko remains hopeful that a duplicate of the monograph could still be discovered: "There are examples of manuscripts that were thought to be lost. Maybe 'The Land of the Udege' is still gathering dust in some archives?"<sup>84</sup>

Yet another lead concerning the disappearance of the monograph was found in Darmstadt, in the Federated State of Hessen, southwest Germany, where Friedrich Albert's paper *Die Waldmenschen Udehe. Forschungsreisen im Amur-und Ussurigebiet* (1956) was published. This scenario is particularly noteworthy because Friedrich Albert was a pseudonym used by the German-born Russian writer Fëdor Al'bertovich Derbek, who was educated in Petersburg and moved to Vladivostok in the early twentieth century. In the Far East, he studied the Udege, customs, and traditions, and joined the Society for the Study of the Amur Region. In addition, of greater interest is the fact that he met Vladimir Arsenyev at his Vladivostok residence shortly before the explorer's death. Therefore, Derbek's work may have used unpublished materials from *The Land of Udege* as the basis for his own publication, *Die Waldmenschen Udehe*.

According to this story, Arsenyev allegedly gave him a copy of the monograph for review or publication abroad. Derbek later emigrated to Germany, where he died a decade later, and his writing was published posthumously. However, it was not possible to determine who predisposed Friedrich Albert's text to publication, or what the arrangements between him and Arsenyev were. This theory is also supported by the fact that, despite the work being the result

---

<sup>82</sup> «[...] сотрудники НКВД при обыске вывезли из квартиры 19 мешков с документами». Avchenko, 103.

<sup>83</sup> Aleksandr Mikhailovich Lobychev (1958–2018) was a Russian art historian, philologist, literary critic, and winner of the Matveyev Prize of the Far East for best author in 2015.

<sup>84</sup> «[...] есть примеры находок манускриптов, считавшихся утраченными. Может, и "Страна Удэхе" до сих пор пылится в каком-нибудь архиве?» Vasilij Olegovich Avchenko, *Literaturnye Pervoprokhodtsy Dal'nego Vostoka*, 104.

of Derbek's efforts, in many instances the author refers to Arsenyev, sometimes giving unseen quotes of the explorer.

Relevant in this regard is the preface to Derbek's work, in which he stated that: "[...] to gather together the oral and written information of a friend who died in my arms and let it see the light of day."<sup>85</sup> It was observed that by "*na rukakh*" (in my arms) Derbek could be using a rhetorical figure to refer to the manuscript. Moreover, according to Avchenko, Derbek did not have much experience from an ethnographic point of view to produce such work of over three hundred pages in length without any external support. This suggestion is validated by the fact that, in the preface of *Die Waldmenschen Udehe*, the author himself declared: "I have visited these natives very rarely and only for a short stay and have an interest in them thanks to V. K. Arsenyev."<sup>86</sup>

Consequently, one copy of the manuscript was likely stolen from the NKVD and subsequently destroyed by fire, whereas the other copy made its way to Germany, thus providing the basis for Derbek's study. The significance of the work has led researchers to continue investigating it to this day.

In the second half of the 1980s, Anna Tarasova dismissed the possibility of finding Arsenyev's manuscript; however, Ivan Yegorchev's recent discovery in 2017 suggested that the explorer *magnum opus* should not be written off as lost. This view is also shared by Vasiliy Avchenko, who raised questions about the disappearance of the work, implying that it may one day be found in either a Russian or German archive.

---

<sup>85</sup> «собрать воедино устные и письменные сведения друга, который умер у меня на руках, и дать им возможность увидеть свет». Avchenko, 105.

<sup>86</sup> «Я посещал этих аборигенов очень редко и лишь на короткое время и интересуюсь ими благодаря В. К. Арсеньеву». Avchenko, 105.

Despite the explorer's worldwide popularity, only in recent years the complete collection of his works has begun to be published in Russia, with only a few of Arsenyev's writings translated into European languages. Most of his works remain untranslated to this day, limiting access for non-Russian readers to his richly descriptive accounts of the Russian taiga, its inhabitants, culture, traditions, and customs, which fascinated Gorky, Prishvin, Fadeyev, and many others, as discussed in the next section of this thesis. The analysis of the literature surrounding the author's lost monograph has served to deepen the understanding of the writer's background, areas of interest, and personal philosophy.



*V. K. Arsenyev's wife Anna Konstantinovna and his son Vladimir with the Udege. Khabarovsk (1913):  
[https://руни.рф/Файл:Анна\\_Константиновна,\\_жена\\_В.К.\\_Арсеньева,\\_и\\_его\\_сын\\_Владимир\\_\(Воля\)\\_и\\_проводники\\_В.К.\\_Арсеньева..jpg](https://руни.рф/Файл:Анна_Константиновна,_жена_В.К._Арсеньева,_и_его_сын_Владимир_(Воля)_и_проводники_В.К._Арсеньева..jpg)*

### 1.3 – Establishment as a writer

Vladimir Arsenyev has been analyzed with a particular focus on his career as an ethnographer, a geographer, and a military man. However, it is important to note that his contributions as a writer also warrant recognition and further examination. During his expeditions, Arsenyev accurately recorded his observations in diaries, the notes of which were later refined and published in various forms, such as travel letters (*putevye pis'ma*) or literary works that featured less scientific detail than the original journal entries (§ 2.2). Through his writing, Arsenyev not only chronicled the events of the expedition but also shared his thoughts on social and moral issues. In short, Arsenyev's approach to writing travelogues allowed him to convey his deep appreciation and love of nature, resulting in descriptions that possessed both scientific value and artistic flair: “[...] writing diaries was a spiritual, creative act for him, although he may not have realized it at first.”<sup>87</sup> Therefore, the act of maintaining a diary served as an exemplary source of literary inspiration for the explorer.

Despite the success of books, children's stories, and films based on his travel diaries, as in the case of the documentary *Lesnye Lyudi* (1928) by director Aleksandr Litvinov, Vladimir Arsenyev remained a humble and unassuming individual, considering himself a traveler and explorer rather than a writer, in contrast to what Maxim Gorky and many other Soviet writers thought of him. According to the literary critic Igor' Kuz'michëv, Vladimir Arsenyev “never would have dared to rank his book with the outstanding works of Russian literature.”<sup>88</sup> Nevertheless, in the Soviet Union, Arsenyev was primarily recognized for his literary contributions.

Additionally, he maintained close contacts with several prominent writers, including Mikhail Prishvin, and Aleksandr Fadeyev. These bonds likely played a significant role in Arsenyev's decision to continue his work despite the existential crisis of the 1920s and his eventual unfulfilled resolution to run away from civilization (§ 3.3), as he expressed a deep discontent with the society that oppressed him.

---

<sup>87</sup> «[...] писание дневников было для него актом духовным, творческим, хотя, может быть, он не сразу и это осознал». Kuz'michëv, *Pisatel' Arsenyev*, 99.

<sup>88</sup> «никогда бы не осмелился поставить свою книгу в ряд с выдающимися произведениями русской литературы». Kuz'michëv, 235.

### 1.3.1 – A traveler among writers

Книгу Вашу я читал с великим наслаждением. Не говоря о ее научной ценности, — конечно несомненной и крупной, — я увлечен и очарован был ее изобразительной силой, Вам удалось объединить в себе Брема и Фенимора Купера — это, поверьте, неплохая похвала. Гольд написан Вами отлично, для меня он более живая фигура, чем «Следопыт», более «художественная». Искренне поздравляю Вас.<sup>89</sup>

This letter, dated January 4, 1928, was the beginning of the correspondence between the famous writer Maxim Gorky and Vladimir Arsenyev. Following his positive comments on the shortened version of *Po Ussuriyskomu Krayu* and *Dersu Uzala*, which came out in 1926 by the name *V Debryakh Ussuriyskogo Kraya*, the explorer became a nationally recognized writer. Arsenyev was impressed by the review, which allowed his *Dersu Uzala* to take a leap in popularity.<sup>90</sup>

The correspondence spanned over two years, until Arsenyev's death in September 1930. As mentioned above, the 1920s was a psychologically complex period for the author since he was overwhelmed by a significant emotional and spiritual breakdown. Nevertheless, Arsenyev never ceased his epistolary exchange with Gorky, who commissioned him to write articles on the East, short stories, and invited him to get *Dersu Uzala* published by Gosizdat.<sup>91</sup> In return, Arsenyev proposed the writer to visit the Far East, thus offering to serve as his personal “Cicerone.”

In 1929, Gorky called the explorer to engage in a significant project aimed at familiarizing the general public of the USSR with the Far Eastern regions. The initiative involved writing a series of articles in a straightforward and clear style (“the language of the essays should be simple and clear”<sup>92</sup>) for publication in a literary journal titled *Library of “Our Achievements”* (*Biblioteka “Nashikh Dostizheniy”*), in which Arsenyev was slated to serve as the main editor. This project is worth mentioning because other Far Eastern writers, deliberately selected by

---

<sup>89</sup> I read your book with great pleasure. Not to speak of its scientific value, which is of course undoubtedly great, but I was fascinated and enchanted by its visual force; you have succeeded in combining Brehm and Fenimore Cooper, which, believe me, is not small praise. The Goldi you have depicted is superb, for me, he is a more lively figure than a “Pathfinder”, more “artistic”. I congratulate you sincerely. Kuz'michëv, 199.

<sup>90</sup> Subsequent editions of *Dersu Uzala* from 1928 onward were published in the USSR with the review by Maxim Gorky on the book's cover.

<sup>91</sup> The State Publishing House of the RSFSR (*Gosudarstvennoye izdatel'stvo RSFSR*) was a publishing house founded on 21 May 1919 on the initiative of Anatoliy Lunacharskiy, the first Bolshevik Soviet People's Commissar. In the 1920s Gosizdat was one of the principal publishing houses in the USSR.

<sup>92</sup> «[...] язык очерков должен быть прост и ясен». From the 1929 letter of Maxim Gorky to Vladimir Arsenyev: Kuz'michëv, *Pisatel' Arsenyev*, 212.



Arsenyev, were supposed to partake in it, as reported by Gorky in one of the letters addressed to the explorer. Arsenyev expressed his willingness to consult with specialists from Blagoveshchensk, Khabarovsk, Chita, Okhotsk, and Petropavlovsk, however, his demise caused the project to be interrupted and ultimately canceled.<sup>93</sup>

In the last years of his life, Arsenyev was accused of being a defender of the bourgeoisie and Imperial interests, therefore, he was not highly regarded among Far Eastern scholars. In this context, it is clear why Maxim Gorky's praise of *V Debryakh Ussuriyskogo Kraya* and his friendship with Arsenyev was at odds with the prevailing opinion on the explorer, who was viewed as a controversial figure rather than a renowned expert in multiple fields. Arsenyev was not typically regarded as a competent ethnographer, geographer, orientalist, or writer, but rather as a questionable individual lacking in overall ability (despite his evident literary skills):

Дальневосточные рапповцы<sup>94</sup>, например, считали точку зрения Горького попросту "апологетической". И тем знаменательные сам факт горьковской оценки, сам факт его письма из Сорренто во Владивосток, с одного конца света на другой, письма, во многом определившего дальнейшую литературную судьбу Арсеньева.<sup>95</sup>

The meeting of 1927 between the President of the Art Academy Pavel Kogan and Maxim Gorky in Capri, Italy, is of utmost importance for further explaining the writer's interest in Vladimir Arsenyev. As reported by biographers, Maxim Gorky praised Vladimir Arsenyev's literary form, comparing his style to the union of Alfred Brehm<sup>96</sup> and James Fenimore Cooper,<sup>97</sup> during a speech about the significance of contemporary Russian literature for Soviet society. Ultimately, the edition that combined *Dersu Uzala* and *Po Ussuriyskomu Krayu*, which the explorer deemed to be insufficient in content, afforded him a position of prominence in the literary scene of the second half of the 1920s:

[...] необходимо ее переиздать, что она изображает природу и жизнь изумительную и малоизвестную. От нее перешел к работам по краеведению, к народам Союза,

---

<sup>93</sup> Kuz'michëv, 213.

<sup>94</sup> 'Rappists' were informally called the members of the Union of Soviet Writers (*Rossiyskaya assotsiatsiya proletarskikh pisateley*).

<sup>95</sup> The Far Eastern Rappists, for instance, considered Gorky's point of view simply "apologetic". And the very fact of Gorky's assessment, the very fact of his letter from Sorrento to Vladivostok, from one end of the world to the other, the letter that largely determined Arsenyev's further literary fate, are even more significant. Kuz'michëv, *Pisatel' Arsenyev*, 200.

<sup>96</sup> Alfred Brehm (1829–1884) was a zoologist and German writer.

<sup>97</sup> James Fenimore Cooper (1789–1851) was an American writer known for historical novels, in particular, his depictions of the relationship between colonizers and aboriginals. Among his best-known works: *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), *The Pathfinder, or The Inland Sea* (1840), and *The Deerslayer* (1841).

которые только теперь начали проявлять свое лицо и которые внесут великие богатства в сокровищницу литературы.<sup>98</sup>

As forecasted by Gorky, it was not until years later that many publications concerning the peoples of the Far East, their narratives, worldview, and imagery, began to be released in the Soviet Union.<sup>99</sup> Therefore, it is not an exaggeration to assert that a significant impetus in the revival of interest in this remote region of the Empire was primarily driven by Arsenyev, who, with the support of one of the most prominent Soviet writers on the literary and cultural scene of the new regime, popularized a world that was far away yet close at the same time.

It is particularly noteworthy to observe the epistolary correspondence between Arsenyev and Gorky, several months prior to the former's demise. In January of 1930, Arsenyev communicated to the writer his apprehensions regarding the scarcity of time that had become a pressing concern during the second phase of his life: "This new and large endeavor is going to suck all my time. I am just afraid I will not have the nerves for it."<sup>100</sup> In a letter marked by warmth and affection, Maxim Gorky, from the city of Sorrento, responded with admiration and conviction that Arsenyev would produce "another masterpiece of literature." Kuz'michëv reports in his study that "Gorky's human presence for Arsenyev in the last years of his life was inestimable."<sup>101</sup> As a matter of fact, the connections the explorer cultivated with writers and scholars from various regions of the Soviet Empire served as a constant source of inspiration and energy for his creative and scholarly pursuits.

Moreover, the bond that existed between Arsenyev and the esteemed author and literary critic Aleksandr Fadeyev (1901–1956) was exceptionally long and of an equally profound nature. Fadeyev, alongside Gorky, was one of the pioneers who co-founded the Union of Soviet Writers and served as its president from 1946 to 1954. In this regard, it is worth mentioning the

---

<sup>98</sup> [...] it is necessary to republish it because it depicts nature and life that is marvelous and little known. From there, I have switched to the local history works, to the peoples of the Union, who are only now starting to show their faces and who will greatly contribute to the treasury of literature. Igor' Sergeevich Kuz'michëv, *Pisatel' Arsenyev*, 201–202.

<sup>99</sup> Deserving of notice are the works of Nikolay Apollonovich Baykov (1872–1958), naturalist and writer of the Far Eastern Russian emigration, who is still widely published today, especially in Japan, China, and other countries of the East and Asia. See also the less-known work by Valentina Tunsyanovna Kyalundzyuga *Dva Solnca. Udegeyskiye Skazki*, which was published in 1974 and had a print run of up to 150,000 copies, and the one by Boris Andreyevich Mozhaev (1923–1996) *Zheleznyy klyuv: udegeyskiye narodnye skazki* (1959). Other collections of folktales of the small peoples in the Soviet Union were later collected in the 1970s by ethnographer Vladimir Podmaskin and then revised by philologist Irina Kireyeva. Following the publication of Arsenyev's works the literary prominence of the region soared significantly.

<sup>100</sup> «Это новое большое дело поглотит все мое время. Я только боюсь, что нервов моих не хватит». Kuz'michëv, *Pisatel' Arsenyev*, 225.

<sup>101</sup> «Человеческое участие Горького для Арсеньева в последние годы его жизни было неопределимо». Kuz'michëv, 225.

study by Avchenko *Literaturnye Pervoprophodtsy Dal'nego Vostoka (Literary Pioneers of the Far East)*. Specifically, the chapter that goes by the name *Bratya po Krayu (Brothers by Krai)*<sup>102</sup> is dedicated to the relationship between Arsenyev and Fadeyev. Studying their relationship may provide valuable insights into certain aspects of the writer's prose.<sup>103</sup>

While Arsenyev was viewed with skepticism in the Far East, Aleksandr Fadeyev recognized the literary merit of his works and published several assessments that deserve further examination. As Avchenko recalled, the works of Fadeyev were inspired by Arsenyev, while, at the same time, "Fadeyev helped Arsenyev by pulling his themes and plots into the field of mass literature." The scholar maintains that Aleksandr Fadeyev's literary style bears the imprint of both Gorky and Tolstoy, albeit with variations in content: "[...] there are undeniable Arsenyev motifs in it."<sup>104</sup> Moreover, as will be mentioned in the third chapter, there exist some similarities between Arsenyev and Fadeyev's works in the portrayals of the Far Eastern environment and the people who inhabit it. Arsenyev's *Dersu Uzala* (1923) and Fadeyev's *The Last of the Udege* (1930), for instance, showcase the authors' deep connection to the region, and their commitment to documenting its history and culture, although from different perspectives (of scientific research in Arsenyev's case and purely literary and artistic in Fadeyev's). *The Last of the Udege* shares a similar focus on the natural world with Arsenyev's literary works and shows the same appreciation for the unique flora and fauna of the region. Furthermore, both authors' works are infused with a sense of the heroic and the tragic, as they portray the struggles of the people who live in such a remote environment.

No less significant was Fadeyev's contemplation of the Udege people, with whom he felt a particular affinity, partially thanks to Vladimir Arsenyev's anthropological investigations of the natives. As reported in the first part of *The Last of the Udege (Posledniy iz Udekhe)*, Aleksandr Fadeyev asserted that: "There are excellent studies on this people by V. K. Arsenyev [...] I felt entitled to use these writings in my novel."<sup>105</sup> Other points of contact between the

---

<sup>102</sup> Vasiliy Olegovich Avchenko, *Literaturnye Pervoprophodtsy Dal'nego Vostoka*, 124. Vasiliy Avchenko, in his book, writes about some of the most important writers who, through their literary works, were able to open the Far East to the public, like, for instance, Ivan Goncharov and Mikhail Prishvin.

<sup>103</sup> Cf. Anna Ivanovna Tarasova, *Vladimir Klavdijevich Arsenyev*; Avchenko, "Bratya po krayu. Zhiznennye i tvorcheskie svyazi Vladimira Arsenyeva i Aleksandra Fadeyeva."

<sup>104</sup> «и Фадеев – Арсеньеву, вытаскивая его темы и сюжеты в поле массовой литературы [...] есть в ней несомненные арсеньевские мотивы». Vasiliy Olegovich Avchenko, *Literaturnye Pervoprophodtsy Dal'nego Vostoka*, 126.

<sup>105</sup> «Об этом народе имеются прекрасные исследования В. К. Арсеньева [...] Я считал себя вправе использовать эти труды в своем романе». Avchenko, 126.

writers are particularly evident in the depiction of the social structure of the Udege, as it is discussed in Section 3.2.1.

In general, Arsenyev's impressive skills in various fields of knowledge, including geography, natural science, anthropology, and literature, were not only appreciated by experts in these disciplines, but also by writers who helped him gain recognition both nationally and internationally. Specifically, *Across the Ussuri Krai* and *Dersu Uzala* proved to be successful in Europe thanks to the German version by Yevgeniy Ivanovich Peppel' (1877–1937), between 1924 and 1925. Peppel' recognized their intrinsic value, thus having them published in Germany:

Могу вам с гордостью сообщить, что первые изданные мною за границей труды В. К. Арсеньева были чрезвычайно тепло приняты немецкими читателями, а также и в ученых кругах [...] Я считаю, что приняв на себя издательство бессмертного труда В. К. Арсеньева за границей, мог приложить хоть долю своего труда к тому, чтобы показать свету великого русского исследователя, чьи труды уже теперь приобрели для русского народа много новых заграничных друзей и безусловно имеют великую будущность.<sup>106</sup>

Arsenyev's literary and scientific accomplishments were recognized and celebrated to a much greater extent following his passing in 1930, a pattern commonly observed with prominent individuals (§ 2.6).

One more example of Arsenyev's enduring influence comes from his association with Mikhail Prishvin (1873–1954), a renowned Soviet novelist known for his great love of nature. In 1928, Prishvin wrote a letter to Maxim Gorky on January 27, expressing his enthusiasm after reading *V Debryakh Ussuriyskogo Kraya*. Additionally, he sent a copy of the book to Gorky in Sorrento, allowing him to become familiar with Arsenyev's work:

[...] Пользуюсь случаем выразить Вам мое удивление и восхищение Вашим трудом. Имейте в виду, что в свое время, когда книга только вышла, я послал Горькому с просьбой, если она ему понравится, помочь с распространением. Горький что-то сделал, а у меня хранится его восторженное письмо о книге.<sup>107</sup>

---

<sup>106</sup> I can proudly inform you that the first works of V. K. Arsenyev published by me abroad were exceptionally warmly received by German readers, as well as in scientific circles [...] I believe that by taking upon myself the publishing of the immortal work of V. K. Arsenyev abroad, I was able to put in at least a part of my labor to show to the world the great Russian explorer, whose works have already acquired for the Russian people many new friends abroad and certainly have a great future. Tarasova, *Vladimir Klavdiyevich Arsenyev*, 196. For more information on Arsenyev's popularity abroad see the article by Yevgeniy Novomodnyy, "O roli E. I. Peppelya v populyarizatsii proizvedeniy V. K. Arsenyeva za rubezhom," *Zapiski Grodekovskogo Muzeya*, Vypusk 36, 2018, 75–84.

<sup>107</sup> [...] I take this opportunity to express to you my surprise and admiration for your work. Keep in mind that at the time, when the book was first published, I sent it to Gorky with a request, if he liked it, to help with its distribution. Gorky did something about it, and I have his enthusiastic letter about the book. Kabanov, *V. K. Arsenyev. Puteshestvennik i naturalist, 1872–1930*, 62.

Consequently, Arsenyev's work resonated with Prishvin in the same way it had with Fadeyev, and later with Maxim Gorky. Prishvin, when referring to Arsenyev, opined that "poetry is born in the rhythmic movement of nature,"<sup>108</sup> hence Arsenyev's works were considered by the writer as the epitome of 'Literature.'

Both Prishvin and Fadeyev were aware that Arsenyev was not the writer for the average Soviet reader. The latter, especially, described him as a writer "*ne dlya vsekh*"<sup>109</sup> ("not for everyone"), but precisely because of this, they agreed that the reader should be educated and led to the rediscovery of this remote region of the Empire, which is why they helped him with the distribution of his works and commissioned him to write several articles on the East.

Despite the fact that Arsenyev had achieved success in both the Soviet Union and Europe, he was met with contempt in the Far East, as previously mentioned. This resulted in the author experiencing even greater feelings of loneliness and desolation. In Arsenyev's letter to Maxim Gorky dated May 1930, he expressed a sense of complete and utter despair: "Aleksey Maksimovich! Perhaps you have already forgotten me by now."<sup>110</sup> The response letter to the explorer demonstrated a more profound sense of affection than what was previously conveyed in their correspondence:

Дорогой В. К. – с удивлением прочитал первую фразу Вашего письма: "Вы, наверное, уже забыли меня". Но – разве Вами не получен ответ мой на Ваше письмо, в котором Вы перечислили авторов статей для сборника о Дал. Востоку?<sup>111</sup> [...] Очень прошу Вас прислать Вашу новую книгу [...] Крепко жму руку. А. Пешков.<sup>112</sup>

Arsenyev passed away four months later, resulting in several unfinished projects. However, it can be stated that during his thirty-year research endeavor into the Far East, he made significant contributions to the field. The author, through his profound affinity for the taiga, the *inorodtsy*, and the natural world at large, instilled passion in people from around the globe for the Russian region, which was previously known primarily by specialists in the field.

---

<sup>108</sup> «Поэзия рождается в ритмическом движении природы». Kuz'michëv, *Pisatel' Arsenyev*, 103.

<sup>109</sup> Avchenko, "Bratya po krayu. Zhiznennye i tvorcheskie svyazi Vladimira Arsenyeva i Aleksandra Fadeyeva," 177.

<sup>110</sup> «Алексей Максимович! Вы, наверное, уже забыли меня». Igor Sergeevich Kuz'michëv, *Pisatel' Arsen'ev*, 227.

<sup>111</sup> Gorky refers to the collection of articles that should have been published in the aforementioned journal *Biblioteka "Nashikh Dostizheniy"*.

<sup>112</sup> Dear V. K. - I was surprised to read the first sentence of your letter: "Perhaps you have already forgotten me". But - did you not receive my reply to your letter, in which you listed the authors of the articles for the collection on the Far East? [...] I kindly ask you to send me your new book [...] I shake your hand firmly. A. Peshkov. Kuz'michëv, *Pisatel' Arsenyev*, 228.

## CHAPTER II – The literary framework of Vladimir Arsenyev

### 2.1 – Unveiling the Far East to the world

Throughout the centuries, many writers have depicted the mesmerizing nature of the Far East in their works, increasing the literary relevance of the so-called *Dal'niy Vostok*. The Russian Far East has been widely mentioned in literature since the seventeenth century, as reported by Yekaterina Davydova in her article *Dal'niy Vostok kak Literaturnyy Geroy*.<sup>113</sup>

The development of a trade route from Moscow to China facilitated the popularization of the commercial path through Siberia, resulting in a rise in the representation of the Far Eastern territories in multiple languages. This tendency increased more and more during the eighteenth century when the work *Opisanie zemli Kamchatki* (1755) of Stepan Krasheninnikov<sup>114</sup> was first published and translated into French. Even internationally renowned authors mentioned the *Dal'niy Vostok* in their works, such as the aforementioned Daniel Defoe with *The Further Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1719), the sequel to the first chapter of *Robinson Crusoe*, which narrates the main character's return to the island of the first book through Siberia and the Far East.

Moreover, in the nineteenth century, as in the case of Nikolay Przheval'sky and other Russian explorers, ethnographical reports about the Eastern borders of the Empire became more common. Similarly, writers from Europe began to depict the Far East in their works, such as *A Voyage Around the World with the Romanzov* by the German poet Adelbert von Chamisso (1781–1838), first published in 1836.

With the signing of the Treaty of Aigun in May 1858 by Nikolay Muravyëv-Amursky (1809–1881) and Yishan (1790–1878), an official of the Qing Dynasty, the number of literary mentions increased. Not coincidentally, during the same period, the writer Ivan Goncharov (1812–1891) wrote his *Frigate "Pallada,"* published in the same year as the treaty and based on the diary that he kept while serving Admiral Putyatin during the 1852–1854 expedition

---

<sup>113</sup> Yekaterina Sergeevna Davydova, "Dal'niy Vostok kak Literaturnyy Geroy," *Kul'tura i nauka Dal'nego Vostoka* № 1 (21) (2017): 141–142.

<sup>114</sup> Stepan Petrovich Krasheninnikov (1711-1755) was one of the first to give a complete representation of Kamchatka as early as the 18th century. See more on: Frank N. Egerton, "A History of the Ecological Sciences, Part 27: Naturalists Explore Russia and the North Pacific During the 1700s," *Bulletin of the Ecological Society of America* Volume 89 (2008): 39–60, [https://doi.org/doi:10.1890/0012-9623\(2008\)89\[39:AHOTES\]2.0.CO;2](https://doi.org/doi:10.1890/0012-9623(2008)89[39:AHOTES]2.0.CO;2).

around the world. Goncharov's work received popular and critical acclaim<sup>115</sup> and vastly contributed to increasing the knowledge about the Far East, as recounted by Vasily Avchenko, who dedicated one chapter of his study *Literaturnye Pervoprokhodtsy Dal'nego Vostoka* to the writer's cultural attention for the region.<sup>116</sup>

The Treaty of Aigun and the Beijing Convention, signed two years apart, granted Russia control over the land north of the Amur River and the eastern banks of the Ussuri River, as well as greater influence over regional trade. This resolution settled the longstanding question of the Sino-Russian border. As a result, the Russian Empire gained a vast new territory to explore culturally in the upcoming twentieth century.

Interestingly, at this very time Jack London (1876–1916), one of the most prolific American novelists, started to write about the Far East, leaving many footprints in the region that are still visible to this day.<sup>117</sup> Jack London was the most renowned journalist covering the Russo-Japanese War at the beginning of the century (1904–1905), moreover, his descriptions of the unfortunate ones and their struggle for survival<sup>118</sup> brought him close to the likes of Maxim Gorky, with whom the American writer formed a strong bond.<sup>119</sup> Curiously enough, *Typhoon off the Coast of Japan* (1893), London's first short story, takes place in this region, which led to the argument that the American writer could be one of the originators of the "Far Eastern literary text":

Уже тот факт, что первый рассказ Джека Лондона назывался «Тайфун у берегов Японии», позволяет считать его автора одним из основоположников «дальневосточного текста».<sup>120</sup>

---

<sup>115</sup> As a matter of fact, Goncharov's book was re-published five times. See more on Edyta Bojanowska, *A World of Empires: The Russian Voyage of the Frigate Pallada* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, imprint of Harvard University Press, 2018).

<sup>116</sup> Avchenko, *Literaturnye Pervoprokhodtsy Dal'nego Vostoka*.

<sup>117</sup> The Jack London Lake in Magadan is a clear example of the writer's influence in the region. Alexandra Guzeva, «How Come There's a Jack London Lake in Russia?», *Russia Beyond*, January 9, 2022, <https://www.rbth.com/travel/334587-jack-london-lake-russia>.

<sup>118</sup> As Métraux points out: "Until his death in 1916, London's writings show increasing concern and admiration for the people of Asia and the South Pacific"; Métraux, "Jack London and The Yellow Peril," 30. Such feelings for the primitive natives of the Far East were to be shared by Vladimir Arsenyev in his works (§ 3.2.1).

<sup>119</sup> In addition, it is well-known that the American writer was a sympathizer of communism and the works of Karl Marx, therefore, his books in the USSR were not only translated but also circulated widely.

<sup>120</sup> The very fact that Jack London's first story was called *Typhoon off the Coast of Japan* allows us to consider its author one of the founders of the "Far Eastern text". Avchenko, *Literaturnye Pervoprokhodtsy Dal'nego Vostoka*, 139–40.

To this day, Jack London is one of Russia's most celebrated American writers and an example of a person who "connected – and still connects – the American and Russian people."<sup>121</sup> Therefore, it is no stretch to assume that his popularity is also due to his bond with the Country of the Soviets and his tribute to the Far Eastern territories of the Russian Empire.<sup>122</sup>

On the one hand, Goncharov's *Frigate "Pallada"* and London's *Typhoon off the Coast of Japan* are believed to have opened the Far East to the world from a literary standpoint.<sup>123</sup> On the other hand, it is undeniable that Vladimir Arsenyev and the cinematic portrayal of his *Dersu Uzala* (1975) by Akira Kurosawa made a significant contribution to the knowledge of the Far East on the international scene (§ 2.6).

The Far East explorer received widespread admiration for his writings, which are the result of a soul highly attuned to social and ecological issues related to the Primorsky Krai:

Было тогда в обществе утверждение, что Дальний Восток узнаем мы по Арсеньеву, но Дальний Восток теперь стал иным, новым, измененным и быстро развивающимся краем.<sup>124</sup>

The "transformations" Kabanov alluded to were dictated by the rapid upheavals involving the Far East after the October Revolution. In fact, the region the explorer portrayed in his expeditions at the turn of the century was no longer that of the 1920s.<sup>125</sup> The same relevance is attributed to the writer by Avchenko, who pointed out that: "both Arsenyev and Fadeyev opened Primorye to the greater Russia."<sup>126</sup> Overall, the Russian Far East began to be known outside its borders, especially in the late nineteenth century:

Крестьяне-переселенцы, казаки и солдаты, отправлявшиеся в путь поисках богатых земель, мечтали найти обетованный край, в котором была бы устроена жизнь свободная и справедливая. Свои мечты они выражали в фольклоре – песнях, сказках [...] В сущности, Дальний Восток стал для многих не только источником вдохновения, но и второй родиной.<sup>127</sup>

---

<sup>121</sup> U. S. Mission Russia, «Vladivostok CG Honors Jack London Anniversary by Op-Ed in Novaya Gazeta», U.S. Embassy & Consulates in Russia, November 28, 2016, <https://ru.usembassy.gov/vladivostok-cg-honors-jack-london-anniversary-op-ed-novaya-gazeta/>.

<sup>122</sup> An additional rich and fascinating literature that developed with the opening of the newly annexed territories of the Empire is that of the Far Eastern peoples, which, however, is not covered in this work.

<sup>123</sup> Lidiya Yevgenyevna Fetisova, "Dal'nevostochnaya Tema v russkoy Literature XVII-XIX vv.," *Rossiya i ATR* № 1 (2006): 175.

<sup>124</sup> There was a public statement then saying that we know the Far East because of Arsenyev, but the Far East is now a different, new, changed and rapidly developing land. Kabanov, V. K. *Arsenyev. Puteshestvennik i naturalist, 1872-1930*, 62.

<sup>125</sup> It should be noted, indeed, that *Across the Ussuri Krai* was not published until 1921, while *Dersu Uzala* was first issued in 1923.

<sup>126</sup> «И Арсеньев, и Фадеев открывали Приморье большой России». Avchenko, *Literaturnye Pervoprokhodtsy Dal'nego Vostoka*, 128.

<sup>127</sup> Peasant settlers, Cossacks, and soldiers, who set out in search of rich territories, dreamed of finding the promised land, where a free and fair life would be organized. They expressed their dreams in folklore



Likewise, the poet Aleksandr Tvardovskiy (1910–1971)<sup>128</sup> emphasized Arsenyev’s extreme relevance to the opening of the Far East through a long poem that was awarded the Lenin Prize in 1961, *Za Dal’yu - Dal’* (*Beyond the Far – the Far*), published in the *Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo khudozhestvennoy literatury* (1960). The poem takes place during the journey along the Tran-Siberian Railway and is particularly relevant for its final section, *K kontsu dorogi*, which is dedicated to the Russian port in the Pacific and the last stop of the *Transsib*: the city of Vladivostok.

Сто раз тебе мое спасибо,  
Судьба, что изо всех дорог  
Мне подсказала верный выбор  
Дороги этой на восток.

Thank you a hundred times,  
Fate, that of all the roads  
You suggested me the right choice  
Of this road to the east.

[...]

[...]

Как этот, в пору новоселья,  
Нам край открыли золотой  
Ученый друг его Арсеньев  
И наш Фадеев молодой.

Like at the time of the resettlement,  
They opened the golden region to us  
His scholar friend Arsenyev  
And our young Fadeyev.

[...]

[...]

Владивосток!  
Наверх, на выход.  
И - берег! Шляпу с головы  
У океана.  
- Здравствуй, Тихий,  
Поклон от матушки-Москвы.<sup>129</sup>

Vladivostok!  
Up, to the exit  
And shore! My hat is off  
By the ocean.  
Hello, Pacific,  
A bow from Mother-Moscow.

### 2.1.1 – Between Fiction and Scientific literature: defining the author’s prose

*Belletrizatsiya* or ‘fictionalizing’ is a trait that ethnographers, researchers, and explorers share when writing about the Far East. According to Lidiya Fetisova, the act of fictionalizing is a common feature of twentieth-century memoirist writing.<sup>130</sup>

The case of Vladimir Arsenyev deserves a specific analysis, as the activity of keeping diaries was part of his expeditionary work. Therefore, as both a scientist and documentarian, he ought to have provided a style devoid of stylistic embellishments. As a matter of fact, Vladimir

---

- songs, tales [...] As a matter of fact, the Far East has become for many not only a source of inspiration but also a second homeland. Davydova, “Dal’niy Vostok kak Literaturnyy Geroy,” 142.

<sup>128</sup> Aleksandr Trifonovich Tvardovskiy (1910–1971) was a Soviet poet and writer as well as editor of the literary magazine *Novyy Mir*. Under his direction was first published in the USSR the work *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (1962) by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn.

<sup>129</sup> Aleksandr Tvardovskiy, “Aleksandr Tvardovskiy, Poema ‘Za Dal’yu - Dal’,” November 23, 2023, <https://pitzmann.ru/tvardovsky-dal.htm#bottom>.

<sup>130</sup> Fetisova, “Dal’nevostochnaya Tema v russkoy Literature XVII-XIX vv.,” 176.

Arsenyev's work contains valuable scientific materials, as acknowledged by Soviet literary critic Mark Azadovskiy, who placed Arsenyevist literature in a partition of its own, defining the authors' depictive means "as those of an ethnographic writer as opposed to novelist writers"<sup>131</sup> and labeling his books as "monuments of scientific literature" (§ 1.1). Nevertheless, Arsenyev's prose was admired and criticized for the subjectivity and belletrism of his scientifically intended reports. Initially, the writer's focus was on providing ethnographic and geographical insights. However, as he set out on his journey through the Ussuri Krai, he began to adopt a more creative tone and also address the social issues present in the region, alongside his scientific observations:

Его дневники стали первоначальной формой его духовно самовыражения, причем самовыражения непосредственного, нескорректированного дистанцией времени.<sup>132</sup>

The explorer's strong inclination toward naturalism prompted him to delve into and contemplate a range of subjects that were unrelated to his primary objective as a documentarian. Therefore, when discussing Arsenyev's literary legacy, his belletrist style led to the establishment of certain terms, such as "*tayezhnyy pafos*"<sup>133</sup> ("pathos of the taiga") to describe the sentiment that brought the author to consider the taiga as his way out of the oppressive European society (§ 3.2.2). At the turn of the century, the author was already contemplating the relationship between loneliness, the natural world, and happiness, seemingly with an awareness of the "social solitude" he would experience fifteen years later in Khabarovsk, as documented in the travel diaries taken during his first major expeditions:

В тайге грубеешь, но та же тайга облагораживает душу. В такие минуты одиночества чувствуешь себя счастливым. Одиночества родит мышление, которое анализирует твои же жизненные поступки. Вот покаяние, вот исповедь.<sup>134</sup>

Arsenyev's considerations, both in the form of travel diaries and literary works, extended beyond the purely geographical and anthropological documentary work commissioned by the Russian Geographical Society. Furthermore, his steadfast commitment to both exploration and the pursuit of literature allowed him to turn his travel notes into artistically enriched literary

---

<sup>131</sup> «как средства писателя-этнографа в отличие от писателей-романистов». Kuz'michëv, *Pisatel' Arsenyev*, 8.

<sup>132</sup> His diaries became the original form of his spiritual expression, an immediate expression unaltered by the passage of time. Kuz'michëv, 66.

<sup>133</sup> Kuz'michëv, 76. "Pathos of the taiga" seems to be, according to the literary critic, the writer's desire to get rid of "unnecessary conventions" that limit the freedom of human personality, i.e., social customs. The relationship with Dersu Uzala in 1906–1908 especially contributed to triggering such considerations as the nature-civilization opposition (§ 3.2.2).

<sup>134</sup> In the taiga you become tougher, but that same taiga ennobles the soul. In such moments of solitude, you feel happy. Loneliness gives birth to a mentality that urges you to analyze your own life deeds. Here is repentance, here is confession. Kuz'michëv, 77–78.

pieces. He regarded his creative endeavors as an “additional life goal”<sup>135</sup> (“*dopolnitel'naya zhiznennaya tsel'*”) while considering writing as a “spiritual, creative act”<sup>136</sup>:

Он не просто исследовал явления природы, он приобщался к ее тайнам и обостренно чувствовал все, что составляет поэзию таежного мира, недоступную равнодушному глазу.<sup>137</sup>

According to the *Dictionary-Reference Guide to the Press and Literature of the 70s*,<sup>138</sup> *belletrizatsiya* is defined as the artistic and literary processing of biographical materials and real memories. In this regard, when examining Arsenyev's style, it appears to be more akin to the emotionality of a poet than the accuracy and sharpness typically associated with a scientist. This is reinforced by the remarks of the Russian emigre poet Arseniy Nesmelov (1889–1945), who asserted that “everything V. K. Arsenyev has written is a poem.”<sup>139</sup>

Furthermore, in his examination, Igor Kuz'michëv delves into the distinctive features of the writer's prose. The writer-ethnographer offers more than just scientific observations, as he also captures the emotions stirred by the scenes he witnesses and depicts them in vivid color, thus reviving them:

Арсеньев не просто делает географическое описание реки, он моментально, на ходу схватывает ее повадки, ее нрав и, не замечая словесных «заторов», самим строем фразы, как бы «вживаясь» в увиденное, создает изображение, которое, кажется, помимо его воли приобретает поэтический оттенок, оставаясь при этом совершенно подлинным.<sup>140</sup>

In seeking to define Arsenyev's prose as multifaceted as his persona, it is necessary to locate the truth midway in his dual nature as both a writer and a scientist-explorer. This unique combination enabled him to incorporate precise scientific details and poetic elements of exceptional literary merit into his style. In his last work, *Through the Taiga* (1930), the writer demonstrates a unique fusion of scientific expertise and artistic flair. An instance of his hybrid style is evident in the depiction of a thunderstorm that occurs during the protagonist's journey.

---

<sup>135</sup> Kuz'michëv, 92.

<sup>136</sup> Kuz'michëv, 99.

<sup>137</sup> He did not just study the phenomena of nature, he embraced its mysteries and keenly felt everything that makes up the poetry of the taiga world, invisible to the indifferent eye. Igor Sergeevich Kuz'michëv, 102–103.

<sup>138</sup> *Slovar'-spravochnik po materialam pressy i literatury 70-kh godov* (Moscow: Russkiy yazyk, 1984), 74.

<sup>139</sup> «Всё, что написал В. К. Арсеньев, — это поэма». Vasilii Olegovich Avchenko, “Avtor Total'nogo diktanta-2023 Vasily Avchenko rasskazal, pochemu yego geroyem stal issledovatel' Dal'nego Vostoka Vladimir Arsenyev,” *Rossiyskaya gazeta*, December 12, 2023, <https://rg.ru/2023/03/29/kosmos-arseneva.html>.

<sup>140</sup> Arsenyev does not just make a geographical description of the river, he instantly, on the move grasps its habits, its temperament and, without noticing the verbal “congestion,” through the very structure of the phrase, as if “absorbing” what he has seen, produces an image that seems to acquire a poetic connotation against his will, while remaining completely authentic. Kuz'michëv, *Pisatel' Arsenyev*, 105.

The author personifies the atmospheric phenomenon that occurs over the valley, thereby adding a sense of drama to the scene. The blending of scientific accuracy and artistic embellishments is a hallmark of the author's style:

В виде страшного лохматого чудовища летела туча над землей, протянув вперед свои лапы и стараясь как бы охватить весь небосклон. От рева его содрогалась земля, и из пасти вылетали длинные языки пламени. Вдруг на земле сразу сделалось сумрачно — чудовище поглотило солнце. Несколько крупных капель упало на землю, деревья сердито зашумели и все разом качнулись в одну сторону. Вслед за тем хлынул ливень вместе с градом. Молнии прорезывали темные тучи огненными стрелами, сильные удары грома сотрясали воздух, отчего дождь шел еще сильнее.<sup>141</sup>

Other highly poetic sections of this short story warrant further analysis. Therefore, section 2.5 of this thesis aims to delve deeper into Arsenyev's last literary work. According to Mikhail Prishvin's assertion that poetry arises from the rhythmic movement of nature (§ 1.3.1), the author's vivid use of epithets, comparisons, and personifications brings to light the poetic and hidden aspects of the Far East's natural landscapes while also maintaining scientific accuracy:

Душевные откровения Арсеньева нисколько не компрометируют его естественно-научных изысканий, и нет ничего удивительного в том, что уже в дневниках возникает та лирическая интонация, которая свойственна арсеньевской прозе.<sup>142</sup>

Prishvin regarded Arsenyev's extraordinary visual acuity as a "*reliktovyy* talent," a kind of raw talent that allowed the author to incorporate *belletrizatsiya* into his works and considering the act of writing as: "utterly naked in its origins, semi-conscious and primordial in its own way."<sup>143</sup>

The analysis conducted by the constructivist writer Sergey Tretyakov (1892–1937) on Dersu Uzala in 1928 is of great significance in drawing conclusions about the collocation of Arsenyev's prose. In the journal *Novyy LEF*, Tretyakov described *Dersu Uzala* as one of the best books in the field of "*fakticheskaya proza*"<sup>144</sup> ("factual prose"). While labeling the writer as a great scientist, whose analysis of facts is extremely faithful, he affirmed that Arsenyev left only sporadic space for his gaze as a belletrist, which is seen by the writer as a co-creator of beauty ("*sotserzatel' krasot*").<sup>145</sup> Tretyakov further elaborates on this by giving Arsenyev the

---

<sup>141</sup> In the form of a terrible furry monster, the cloud flew over the earth, stretching forward its paws and attempting to engulf the entire firmament. Its roar shook the earth, and long tongues of flame flew out of its mouth. Suddenly the earth became gloomy at once - the monster had devoured the sun. Several large drops fell to the ground, the trees rumbled angrily and all at once swayed to one side. A torrential downpour followed, along with hail. Lightning cut through the dark clouds with flaming arrows, and violent thunderclaps shook the air, causing the rain to fall even harder. Arsenyev, *Skvoz' Taygu*, 40.

<sup>142</sup> Arsenyev's spiritual revelations in no way compromise his natural-scientific research, and there is nothing surprising in the fact that already in the diaries arises that lyrical tone, which is characteristic of Arsenyev's prose. Kuz'michëv, *Pisatel' Arsenyev*, 103.

<sup>143</sup> «Предельно обнажено в своих истоках, полуосознанно и по-своему первозданно». Kuz'michëv, 108.

<sup>144</sup> Kuz'michëv, 198.

<sup>145</sup> Kuz'michëv, 198.

merit to notice details in nature that others are unable to witness: “The value of Arsenyev’s account is precisely in the fact that he does not put aesthetic pressure on the facts.”<sup>146</sup>

Yet another worth-mentioning judgment on the author’s prose came from Maxim Gorky, who, as previously mentioned, compared the explorer’s style to the fusion of Cooper and Brehm (§ 1.3.1). Therefore, Arsenyev’s exceptional talent can be attributed to his ability to strike a balance between science and literature, without favoring one over the other.<sup>147</sup>

### 2.1.2 – The lyric self and the author: similarities and discrepancies

Upon examining the written works of the writer and the records of his fellow explorers, inconsistencies have been discovered in certain aspects of their accounts. One noteworthy finding was the discrepancies between the author’s portrayal in the scientific and precise “*putevye pis'ma*” and his depiction in books like *Dersu Uzala* and *Across the Ussuri Krai*, both of which were influenced by the aforementioned source material. While in the travel letters the author, narrator, and lyrical “I” coincide, in *Dersu Uzala* and *Po Ussuriyskomu Krayu*: “There is every reason to perceive him as an image, as a lyrical “I” not entirely adequate to the author.”<sup>148</sup>

As a result of the biographical analysis presented in the first chapter of this thesis, it is possible to corroborate Kuz'michëv’s thesis that the explorer in life was a quite different, more complex, and even “contradictory” figure than his literary version. In the books, he appears to be unfailingly resolute, confident, and capable of making firm decisions on the spur of the moment. The “polishing of personality,” which makes the character utterly unadulterated, and without any hesitation whatsoever, occurs for the goldi as well, as it is discussed (§ 2.4) by considering P. P. Bordakov’s depiction of Dersu, in the expedition of 1907:

Не нужно только при этом забывать, что путешественник здесь - образ не вымышленный, не придуманный, а так же, как и образ Дерсу, воссоздан, “достроен” на реальной основе и наделен правами и героя, и автора.<sup>149</sup>

---

<sup>146</sup> «Ценность арсеньевского изложения именно в том, что он на эти факты не делает эстетического нажима». Kuz'michëv, 198.

<sup>147</sup> Kuz'michëv refers, in this sense, to Arsenyev’s three talents: human, writing, and of research that allowed him to combine science, aesthetics, and ethics together. Kuz'michëv, 233.

<sup>148</sup> «Есть все основания воспринимать его как образ, как лирическое «я», отнюдь не полностью адекватное автору». Kuz'michëv, 174.

<sup>149</sup> It should not be forgotten that the traveler here is not a fictional image, not invented, but, like the image of Dersu, is recreated, “completed” on a real basis, and endowed with the rights of both the hero and the author. Kuz'michëv, 175.

Another member of Arsenyev's expeditionary company, Vladimir Gregorevich Puzyrev, observed that: "traveler-Arsenyev is largely autobiographical, but his image conveys the best features of many explorers of the Far East."<sup>150</sup>

Arsenyev's attractive personality might be attributed to his embodiment of exemplary traits exhibited by explorers such as Przhevalsky and Nevelskoy. Additionally, it cannot be conclusively ruled out that he was influenced by the heroes of his childhood, including the stories of Jules Verne and the *Arabian Nights*, since Klavdiy Arsenyev raised his children with an appreciation for both Russian literature and these fictional narratives (§ 1.1.1). Unlike Mark Azadovskiy, who regarded Arsenyev's works as monuments of scientific literature, Puzyrev believed that such a categorization was too restrictive. In his opinion, Arsenyev's books, particularly *Dersu Uzala*, did not fit neatly into either the fiction or scientific genre.<sup>151</sup> The aforementioned perspective bolsters the claim that Arsenyev effectively struck a harmonious equilibrium between scientific and literary aspects.

### **2.1.3 – Union of poetic and scientific traits: examples of "Arsenyevskaya proza"**

Arsenyev's method of storytelling distinguishes him from the style of a scientist, and one such difference is his requirement to connect with the reader directly in his narration. In the literary works, including his earliest books such as *Across the Ussuri Krai* and *Dersu Uzala*, as well as *Through the Taiga*, he addresses the reader in a manner that seeks dialogue or interaction:

1. Читатель ошибется, если подумает, что нартовая дорога действительно дорога, хорошо наезженная и с колеями.<sup>152</sup>
2. Пусть читатель представит себе седой хвойный лес, в котором полузасохшие деревья с отмершими вершинами стоят прямо и в наклонном положении.<sup>153</sup>
3. Пусть читатель представит себе заболоченную тайгу, заваленную буреломом, и банную атмосферу, и он поймет, что значит идти в гору с тяжелыми котомками за плечами.<sup>154</sup>

---

<sup>150</sup> «Путешественник Арсеньева во многом автобиографичен, но в его образе переданы лучшие черты многих исследователей Дальнего Востока». Kuz'michëv, 175.

<sup>151</sup> «Не принадлежат ни к художественной литературе, ни к жанру целиком научному». Kuz'michëv, 176.

<sup>152</sup> The reader would be mistaken if he thought that the sled road is indeed a road, well-traveled and with ruts. Arsenyev, *Skvoz' Taygu*, 33.

<sup>153</sup> Let the reader imagine a gray coniferous forest in which half-withered trees with dead tops stand upright and in a slanting position. Arsenyev, 34.

<sup>154</sup> Let the reader imagine a swampy taiga littered with driftwood and a banya atmosphere, and he will understand what it means to walk uphill with heavy bags over one's shoulders. Arsenyev, 63.

In his latest publication, the author reflects on the final significant expedition along the Sovetskaya Gavan – Khabarovsk route in 1927. He not only engages in extensive interactions with the reader, surpassing in quantity his previous works, but also expresses deep nostalgia for his native friends, several of whom have since passed away. Igor Kuz'michëv asserted that Arsenyev's travel diaries reveal that he had already envisioned the idea of addressing his readers, even before he began writing his books, with the intention of presenting his experiences in a literary format from the outset:

Писатель иногда прямо обращался к нему за моральной поддержкой. Духовное самочувствие Арсеньева, его настроения в тот момент — это в известной мере “состояние” гипотетического рассказчика так и ненаписанных книг на материале той поры, книг, о которых Арсеньев так или иначе помышлял.<sup>155</sup>

Although the *putevye pis'ma* constitute the prelude to Arsenyev's literary works (§ 2.2), his scientific reports already possessed extreme literariness that enabled him to successively write his literary works almost off-the-cuff. In this regard, the Soviet writer Vladimir Lidin<sup>156</sup> pointed out that Arsenyev became a writer “organically” (“*organichno*”).<sup>157</sup> Writing was an integral part of his identity, and this is supported by Prishvin's conviction that poetry arises from the harmony of nature's rhythms (§ 1.3.1).

Accordingly, in the next section, which constitutes the prelude to the analysis of the writer's major works, the importance of travel letters for the later composition of the works is analyzed. Following a brief introduction, a comparison between books and travel letters is explored by drawing on the research of Arsenyev's leading scholars and acquaintances. The letters are regarded as the author's starting point in literature, serving as a basis for his future literary pursuits.

The distinction highlighted by Igor Kuz'michëv between Arsenyev's literary portrayals and the scientific details in his correspondence is noteworthy, as the former resembles a painter's artistic interpretation, while the latter serves as factual documentary footage. According to Kuz'michëv, while the process of creating a painting usually involves proceeding from an idea to a sketch and ultimately to the final work, the documentary director, as in

---

<sup>155</sup> The writer sometimes turned to him directly for moral support. Arsenyev's spiritual well-being, his moods at that moment are to a certain extent the "state" of the hypothetical narrator of the unwritten books based on the material of that time, books that Arsenyev thought about in one way or another. Kuz'michëv, *Pisatel' Arsenyev*, 182.

<sup>156</sup> Vladimir Germanovich Lidin (1894-1979) was a Soviet fiction writer of Jewish-Russian origin.

<sup>157</sup> Kuz'michëv, *Pisatel' Arsenyev*, 229.

Arsenyev's case, captures moments of beauty in nature instantaneously through an act of "peeking" (*podsmatrivanie*): "as a fact that is real and poetic at the same time."<sup>158</sup>

Arsenyev sought to fulfill his responsibilities as a geographer and ethnographer by composing travel letters that encompassed both the scientific aspects of his role and the entirety of his experiences and observations during the journey. Therefore, the letters conveyed the rich details of his expeditions, while including anecdotes and sensory perceptions.

---

<sup>158</sup> «как факт реальный и поэтический одновременно». Kuz'michëv, 106.



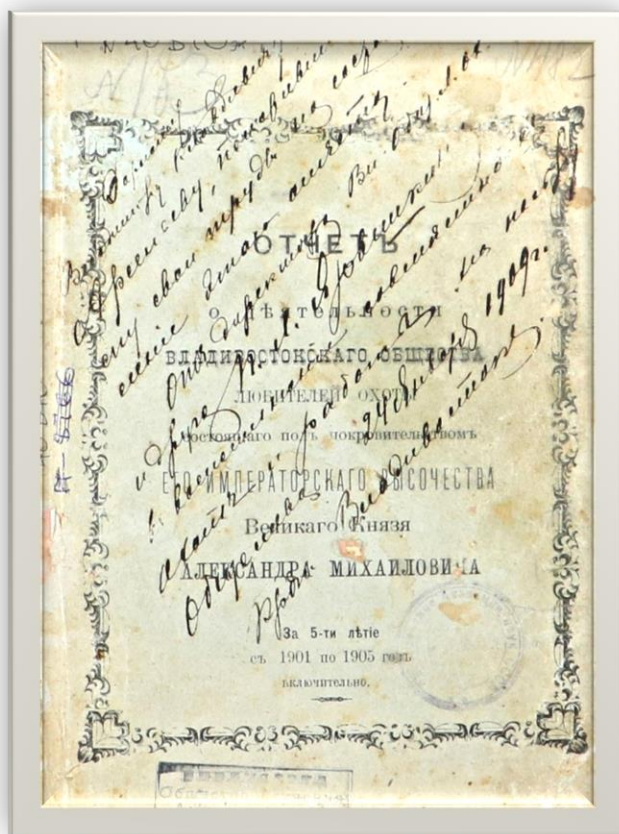
## 2.2 – *Putevye pis'ma*, travel reports as drafts for literary works

To gain a deeper understanding of the significance of Vladimir Arsenyev's literary works, it is crucial to examine his relocation to the Far East in 1900 (§ 1.1.2). By the time he joined the Society for the Study of the Amur Region in 1903, Arsenyev had already begun his initial explorations, though they were brief, of the indigenous communities in the Sukhanskaya and Sudzukhinskaya valleys. These early experiences laid the foundation for his later, more extensive expeditions and greatly influenced his literary work. Moreover, he had become a full member of the Vladivostok Society of Hunting Amateurs (*Vladivostokskoe obshchestvo lyubiteley okhoty*).

Therefore, following the end of the Russo-Japanese War in 1905, the explorer published his first scientific paper, *Otchet o deyatel'nosti Vladivostokskogo obshchestva lyubiteley okhoty* (1905), where he wrote about his initial five years spent in the Far East. While purely scientific, the brief report outlines the creative profile of the writer.

Furthermore, in addition to the analysis of the flora and fauna of the region, it introduces the author's moral stance in relation to certain themes that will return regularly in his later works (§ 3.2). The author's profound ecological stance, for instance, can be traced back to this first scientific publication, as observed by Mark Azadovskiy in the introduction of *Zhizn' i priklyucheniya v tayge*:

Но наиболее интересен этот «Отчет», как яркое свидетельство о научном-творческом облике молодого Арсеньева. [...] Ярко обнаруживается здесь и поразительное



First publication of V. K. Arsenyev: *Report on the activities of the Vladivostok Society of Hunting Amateurs under the protection of His Imperial Highness Grand Duke Aleksandr Mikhaylovich for 5 years from 1901 to 1905*. Library of the Primorsky Krai Branch of the Russian Geographical Society.

арсеньевское чутье к природе: художественное эмоциональное ее восприятие и страстная влюбленность в нее.<sup>159</sup>

Kuz'michëv asserted that the explorer endeavored to address the theme of natural exploitation from the outset of his first publication, intending to elevate the environmental issue to a national concern.<sup>160</sup>

Despite being a scientific text, *Otchet o deyatel'nosti Vladivostokskogo obshchestva lyubiteley okhoty* marks the inception of Arsenyev's writing career, which would find its niche in travel literature a few years later. A passage from the 1905 report, presented below, serves as a vivid illustration of the explorer's artistic prowess as a writer:

...В это время тайга живет и дышит. Рев изюбрей, крепкие удары из рогов, фырканные рыси, лай красных волков, крик кабарги и рев тигра – все это стоит несмолкаемым гомоном в лесу от заката до утреннего рассвета. Целую ночь этот стон тайги не дает сомкнуть глаза охотнику. Для охотника-любителя это самое интересное время воспоминания и впечатление которого останутся в памяти на всю жизнь.<sup>161</sup>

The task of keeping travel diaries was first entrusted to Arsenyev during the Jubilee Expedition of 1908 (§ 1.1.2) when he began publishing daily travel reports in the Priamurye newspaper at the request of the then editor-in-chief Anton Petrovich Sil'nitskiy. Although the reports were merely fragmented notes without a clear narrative structure, the explorer approached this task with the utmost dedication and sense of responsibility that defined him. He subsequently documented the events of his expeditions in over seventy travel letters that were periodically published in the Priamurye newspaper from 1908 to 1912 under the title *Iz putevogo dnevnika* (*From the Travel Diary*). However, only half of them managed to make it to Khabarovsk and get printed.<sup>162</sup>

Mark Azadovskiy took Arsenyev's travel letters into particular consideration because of their dramatic nature and narrative tension.<sup>163</sup> *Otchet o deyatel'nosti Vladivostokskogo obshchestva lyubiteley okhoty* is deemed to be the explorer's inaugural scientific endeavor,

---

<sup>159</sup> But the most interesting is this "Report" as a vivid testimony to the scientific and creative image of young Arsenyev. [...] Arsenyev's striking flair for nature is clearly revealed here: artistic emotional perception of it and passionate love for it. Vladimir Klavdiyevich Arsenyev, *Zhizn' i Priklyucheniya v Tayge* (Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo geograficheskoy literatury, 1957).

<sup>160</sup> Kuz'michëv, *Pisatel' Arsenyev*, 60.

<sup>161</sup> ...At this time the taiga lives and breathes. The roar of the Manchurian deer, the blows of horns, the snorting of lynxes, the barking of red wolves, the cry of musk deer and the roar of the tiger - all this is an unceasing hum in the forest from dusk until morning dawn. All night long this moaning of the taiga does not let the hunter sleep a wink. This is the most interesting time for an amateur hunter, the memories and impressions of which will remain in his memory for a lifetime. Arsenyev, *Zhizn' i Priklyucheniya v Tayge*.

<sup>162</sup> "Yubileynaya ekspeditsiya Vladimira Arsenyeva," pgsb.ru, January 27, 2020, <https://pgsb.ru/news/detail/862/>.

<sup>163</sup> Kuz'michëv, *Pisatel' Arsenyev*, 112.

whereas the *putevye pis'ma* from the 1908 expedition are widely regarded as Arsenyev's initial literary compositions. Over two decades after the passing of the author, the content of the travel letters was published in a collection titled *Zhizn' i priklyucheniya v tayge (Life and Adventures in the Taiga, 1957)* by the Geografgiz Publishing House.

Azadovskiy identified a scarcity of information regarding both the experiences narrated in *Dersu Uzala* and *V Gorakh Sikhote-Alinya*,<sup>164</sup> while, on the contrary, the letters featured in the Priamurye newspaper provide a wealth of details. As a matter of fact, the compilation of books has been described as a process that involves the “separation of poetic and descriptive elements” (“*razdelenie chastey liricheskoy i opisatel'noy*”):

Азадовский показал, что описательная часть путевых писем: флора, фауна, [...] некоторые замечания о взаимоотношениях различных групп населения [...] «В горах Сихотэ-Алиня» этот материал либо не представлен вовсе, либо сильно сокращен, там приводятся лишь эпизоды встреч с местным населением [...] и впечатления от природы – то, что можно назвать лирикой путевых очерков.<sup>165</sup>

Additionally, a notable distinction is evident in the rhythm and flow of events between the later published books and the more impromptu and less refined *putevye pis'ma*. The natural rhythm of the narrative, which is present in both the letters and the books, is particularly apparent in the descriptions of the wilderness in the travel letters: “Even more clearly than in Arsenyev's books, one can hear the pulse of the Ussuri wilderness, and this is the uniqueness of the diaries.”<sup>166</sup> The spontaneous tone of the letters, which warrants extensive analysis in further studies, appears to be more consistent with Arsenyev's storytelling gift. In this regard, it is worth noting that, at the Arsenyev estate in Khabarovsk, the writer used to gather all the guests together and then read aloud to them his new writings, with the intonation and pathos of an “excellent teller” (“*prevoskhodnyy rasskazchik*”).<sup>167</sup>

Consequently, Azadovskiy asserted that in Arsenyev's oral accounts, many scientific details were not included in the printed versions of his works.

---

<sup>164</sup> *In the Sikhote-Alin Mountains* is a work published in 1937 by Arsenyev's wife, subsequently the author's death in 1930. It engaged in the “Jubilee” expedition of 1908 and provided several examples of “*Arsenyevskaya proza*”. As it is one of Arsenyev's less-known works, a further examination could provide valuable insights in the field of Russian Far Eastern literature.

<sup>165</sup> Azadovskiy showed that the descriptive part of the travel letters: flora, fauna, [...] some remarks on the relationship between different groups of people [...] “In the mountains of Sikhote-Alin” this material is either not presented at all, or is greatly reduced, there are only episodes of meetings with the local population [...] and impressions of nature - something that can be called the lyricism of travel sketches. Kuz'michëv, *Pisatel' Arsenyev*, 117.

<sup>166</sup> «еще отчетливее, чем в арсеньевских книгах, слышен пульс уссурийских дебрей, и в этом уникальность дневников». Kuz'michëv, 103.

<sup>167</sup> Kuz'michëv, 132.

The transition from writing travel letters to becoming a professional writer is a topic that has been speculated upon. Some believe that Arsenyev aimed to preserve the spontaneous and conversational tone of his letters<sup>168</sup> while relating anecdotes to his acquaintances. However, this hypothesis remains a matter of conjecture. Nevertheless, Arsenyev acknowledged the influence of the letters on his professional writing, as mentioned in correspondence with Vladimir Lidin:

[...] по обязанности должен был вести дневник экспедиции [...] писательство сложилось как бы само собой.<sup>169</sup>

As Arsenyev's books were primarily based on travel letters, the process of editing them and making them accessible to the public was relatively straightforward and required minimal elaboration. However, Kuz'michëv cautions that it is inaccurate to assert that the letters served as the sole source of inspiration for Arsenyev's works, as his diaries, prior to any editing, possess undeniable value both in terms of human interest and literary merit.<sup>170</sup>

Therefore, the *putevye pis'ma* are of extreme interest in Arsenyev's literature, as they are not only distinguished by their own specific rhythm but also contribute to providing a less embellished version of the expeditions, without, however, being absent of the inherent poetic traits typical of Arsenyev's literature, as they constitute: "one of his first literary experiences, directly addressed to the reader."<sup>171</sup>

Having explored the background of both the scientific and literary Arsenyev and situated his prose within the realm of travel literature, it becomes possible to appreciate the ensuing discussions in this chapter with greater clarity. This is particularly relevant when considering the Orientalist and Postcolonialist methodological considerations presented in the third chapter. Moreover, references to travel letters will be made in subsequent sections as part of the analysis of works such as *Across the Ussuri Krai*, *Dersu Uzala*, and *Through the Taiga*.

---

<sup>168</sup> *Through the Taiga* (Section 2.5) warrants special attention, as it differs from the previous works by adopting a style akin to the travel letters, rather than adhering to the conventional narrative approach of *Dersu Uzala* and *Across the Ussuri Krai*.

<sup>169</sup> "[...] I had to keep a diary of the expedition [...] the writing developed as if by itself." Kuz'michëv, *Pisatel' Arsenyev*, 99.

<sup>170</sup> Kuz'michëv, 99.

<sup>171</sup> «один из первых его литературных опытов, прямо адресованных читателю». Kuz'michëv, 84.

### 2.3 – Across the Ussuri Krai (1921)

During a 1906 journey down the Tadushi River, which is now known as the Zerkal'naya<sup>172</sup> River, Vladimir Arsenyev had his legendary encounter with the hunter from the Goldi tribe (now referred to as Nanai), Dersu Uzala, who served as his guide and loyal companion. The friendship that emerged between the explorer and the native became particularly noteworthy, especially after the dramatic incident at the Khanka River where Dersu rescued Arsenyev from the brink of death due to exhaustion and frostbite. This event has become the most popular episode of all of the explorer's adventures due to its narrative tension. In addition, in 1907, Arsenyev embarked on a second significant expedition. Therefore, the events of 1906 and 1907 gave rise to the books: *Across the Ussuri Krai* (1921) and *Dersu Uzala* (1923).



*Dersu Uzala. Photo by V.K. Arsenyev August 12, 1906:*  
<https://lhistory.ru/index.php/statyi/tot-samyj-arsenev>

*Across the Ussuri Krai* portrays the first part of the friendship between ‘the colonizer’ and ‘the colonized’ while introducing Arsenyev’s legendary expedition of 1906, which acquired colossal success following Akira Kurosawa’s film adaptation in 1975. This first book consists of twenty-nine chapters and right from its preface, Arsenyev introduces some key themes of his philosophy: the contrast between nature and civilization (3.2.2) that he often brings into question in his books, the coexistence between Russians and the aboriginal peoples of the Far East (3.3.2), and the amazement for the Primorsky natural landscapes:

---

<sup>172</sup> Many place names, rivers, lakes, and mountains were changed after the breakup of Sino-Soviet relations in the 1960s and 1970s. Hostilities came about, especially in the Far Eastern regions between the People’s Republic of China of Mao Tse-tung and the Soviet Union, causing an extensive renaming process of geographical objects in the Far East in 1972. See more on: Mikhail Solomentsev, “Postanovlenie Sovmina RSFSR Ot 29.12.1972 N. 753. O Pereimenovanii Nekotorykh Fiziko-Geograficheskikh Ob”ektov, Raspolozhennykh Na Territorii Amurskoy Oblasti, Primorskogo i Khabarovskogo Krajev,” accessed December 27, 2023, [https://www.libussr.ru/doc\\_ussr/usr\\_7958.htm](https://www.libussr.ru/doc_ussr/usr_7958.htm).

1. Первобытные девственные леса в большей части страны выгорели, и на смену им появились леса, состоящие из лиственницы, березы и осины. Там, где раньше ревел тигр, ныне свистит паровоз, где были редкие жилища одиноких звероловов, появились большие русские селения, туземцы отошли на север, и количество зверя в тайге сильно уменьшилось.<sup>173</sup>
2. Чем дальше, тем интереснее становилась долина. С каждым поворотом открывались все новые и новые виды. Художники нашли бы здесь неистощимый материал для своих этюдов. Некоторые виды были так красивы, что даже казаки не могли оторвать от них глаз и смотрели как зачарованные.<sup>174</sup>

Providing a summary of the origins of Dersu Uzala before delving into an analysis of Arsenyev's work is essential, as the Nanai hunter holds significant importance in the colonial discourse (§ 3.3).

The true source of inspiration for Dersu Uzala was a person named Derchu Odzhal or Derchu Ochzhal, who crossed paths with Arsenyev during the 1906 expedition. Nevertheless, the details regarding their interaction as recounted in travel letters and the book *Po Ussuriyskomu Krayu* are contradictory. The book begins as follows:

В 1902 году, во время одной из командировок, с охотничьей командой я пробирался вверх по реке Цимухе, впадающей в Уссурийский залив около села Шкотова. Мой отряд состоял из шести человек сибирских стрелков и четырех лошадей с вьюками.<sup>175</sup>

It is important to note that the year Vladimir Arsenyev referred to is not a typographical error, since even in the preface of *Across the Ussuri Krai*, the author explicitly stated:

Ввиду той выдающейся роли, которую играл Дерсу в моих путешествиях, я опишу сначала маршрут 1902 года... когда произошла моя первая с ним встреча, а затем уже перейду к экспедиции 1906 года.<sup>176</sup>

Although there is debate over the exact timing of Arsenyev's first encounter with the Nanai hunter, scholars believe that the author intentionally added episodes to the plot to better suit the

---

<sup>173</sup> The primeval virgin forests in most parts of the country have burned out, to be replaced by larch, birch, and aspen forests. Where once a tiger roared, now a steam locomotive whistles, where there used to be rare dwellings of lonely fur trappers, large Russian settlements have appeared, the natives have moved northward, and the number of animals in the taiga has greatly decreased. Vladimir Klavdiyevich Arsenyev, *Po Ussuriyskomu Krayu, Dersu Uzala*, Podarochnye izdaniya. Velikie puteshestviya (Moscow: Eksmo, 2022), 27.

<sup>174</sup> The farther away, the more interesting the valley became. At every turn, new views opened up. Artists would have found here inexhaustible material for their sketches. Some views were so beautiful that even the Cossacks could not take their eyes off them and looked at them as if mesmerized. Yevgeniy Sazonov, *Pervoprophodtsy Dal'nego Vostoka. Nastoyashchie russkie geroi: ot Yerofeya Khabarova do Vladimira Arsenyeva, Ivana Yefremova i Grigoriya Fedoseyeva* (Moscow: KP-Izdatel'stvo, 2022), 315.

<sup>175</sup> In 1902, during one of my business trips, I traveled with a hunting squad up the Tsimukha River, which flows into the Ussuri Bay near the village of Shkotova. My detachment consisted of six Siberian riflemen and four horses with packs. Vladimir Klavdiyevich Arsenyev, *Po Ussuriyskomu Krayu, Dersu Uzala*, 29.

<sup>176</sup> In view of the prominent role that Dersu played in my travels, I will first describe the 1902 route ... when I first met him, and then move on to the 1906 expedition. Arsenyev, 28.

literary adaptation of his adventures across the taiga. Specifically, the writer chose to describe his earlier visit to Lake Khanka on the Sino-Russian border, foreshadowing an accident that occurred later in the story. Moreover, prior to meeting Dersu, Arsenyev accompanied his expeditions with other indigenous guides who may have influenced his perception. Therefore, meeting with the Nanai hunter likely had a positive impact on Arsenyev's view of the indigenous people:

Это – уже литературные персонажи, и вторая встреча с Дерсу – плод творческого воображения. Герои книги начали жить и действовать в рамках литературной конструкции, и дальнейшее развитие внутреннего сюжета, основанного на действительных отношениях Арсеньева с Дерсу, скорректировано общим замыслом произведения.<sup>177</sup>

The lyrical element completely permeates both Arsenyev's first and second books and determines a substantial difference from the travel letters: On the one hand, the *putevye pis'ma* are notable for their extensive use of belletrism, while still maintaining a scientific perspective (§ 2.1.1). On the other hand, the writer's literary works are highly imaginative and distinct from the letters, particularly in the relationship between Dersu and Arsenyev, which differs from their first encounter:

1. Продолжение 3-го августа. «Здравствуйте», – сказал кто-то сзади. Я обернулся. У нашего огня стоял пожилой человек невысокого роста, приземистый, с выпуклой грудью, несколько кривоногий. [...] Мы спросили, кто он, и он с оттенком гордости ответил, что он не китаец, а гольд. [...] Имя его Дерсу, а фамилия Узала [...] На это он сам ответил, что это ничего не значит, а просто имя и фамилия.<sup>178</sup>
2. Мы оба стали прислушиваться, но кругом было тихо – так тихо, как только бывает в лесу в холодную осеннюю ночь. Вдруг сверху посыпались мелкие камни. – Это, вероятно, медведь, – сказал Олентьев и стал заряжать винтовку. – Стреляй не надо! Моя люди!.. – послышался из темноты голос, и через несколько минут к нашему огню подошел человек. [...] – Здравствуй, капитан! – сказал пришедший, обратясь ко мне. [...] – Ты кто будешь? – Моя гольд, – ответил он коротко [...] Меня заинтересовал этот человек. Что-то в нем было особенное, оригинальное. Говорил он просто, тихо держал себя скромно, не заискивающе [...] Я видел перед собой первобытного охотника,

---

<sup>177</sup> These are already literary characters, and the second meeting with Dersu is a product of creative imagination. The characters of the book began to live and act within the framework of the literary construction, and the further development of the internal plot, based on Arsenyev's actual relationship with Dersu, is adjusted by the general intent of the work. Kuz'michëv, *Pisatel' Arsenyev*, 147.

<sup>178</sup> 1. Continuation of August 3rd. "Hello," someone said from behind me. I turned around. Standing by our fire was an elderly man of short stature, stocky, with a prominent chest, somewhat crooked-legged. [...] We asked him who he was, and he replied with a touch of pride that he was not a Chinese, but a Gold. [...] His name was Dersu, and his surname was Uzala [...] To this, he replied that it meant nothing, but was just a name and surname. Sazonov, *Pervoprophodtsy Dal'nego Vostoka. Nastoyashchie russkie geroi: ot Yerofeya Khabarova do Vladimira Arsenyeva, Ivana Yefremova i Grigoriya Fedoseyeva*, 301.

который всю свою жизнь прожил в тайге и чужд был тех пороков, которые вместе с собой несет городская цивилизация.<sup>179</sup>

The passages provided were taken from two distinct sources and represent the first encounter with the Nanai hunter in different ways. While the first passage is derived from the travel letters of August 1906, the second is an excerpt from *Across the Ussuri Krai*. The literary, fictionalized version portrays the encounter with Dersu as more dramatic (“around us was still, as still as it is in the forest on a cold fall night”). Furthermore, Arsenyev uses the encounter with the hunter to initiate a reflection on the juxtaposition between nature and civilization (§ 3.2.2), highlighting the contrast between the European and Asian worlds.

Another detail that Kuz'michëv pays special attention to in the analysis of Arsenyev's descriptions is the portrayal of the hunter's eyes, which allows the reader to grasp the whole personality of the Nanai: “but most remarkable of all were his eyes. Dark gray, not brown; they looked calm and slightly naive. They were resolute, straightforward, and good-natured.”<sup>180</sup> The reason why the author decided to represent Dersu Uzala in this way shall be investigated along with their third encounter, narrated in Vladimir Arsenyev's masterpiece: *Dersu Uzala* (§ 2.4).

### 2.3.1 – Pondering the volume: the unintentional birth of Dersu Uzala

The plan for the author's first literary works dates back to his return from the Jubilee Expedition (1908–1910) when Arsenyev expressed his intention to devote himself to revising the data collected during the previous five years. Dersu Uzala had passed away in the spring of 1908, and the author did not have time to mourn his death since he had to leave for a new expedition as early as August of that year.

Therefore, in 1910, Arsenyev began working on various projects, both scientific, such as *Kratkiy voyenno-geograficheskiy i voyenno-statisticheskiy ocherk Ussuriyskogo kraya* (1912)

---

<sup>179</sup> 2. We both began to listen, but all around us was still, as still as it is in the forest on a cold fall night. Suddenly, small stones fell from above. - It is probably a bear, said Olentyev, and began to load his rifle. - Don't shoot! Me people!... - a voice was heard from the darkness, and in a few minutes a man approached our fire. [...] - Hello, captain! - said the man, turning to me. [...] - Who are you? - Me gol'd, - he answered briefly [...] I was interested in this man. Something about him was special, original. He spoke simply, quietly, kept himself modestly, not ingratiatingly [...] I saw before me a primal hunter, who had lived all his life in the taiga and was alien to those vices that urban civilization brings along with it. Vladimir Klavdiyevich Arsenyev, *Po Ussuriyskomu Krayu, Dersu Uzala*, 38–39.

<sup>180</sup> «но всего замечательнее были его глаза. Темно-серые, а не карие, они смотрели спокойно и немного наивно. В них сквозили решительность, прямота характера и добродушие.» Kuz'michëv, *Pisatel' Arsenyev*, 148.

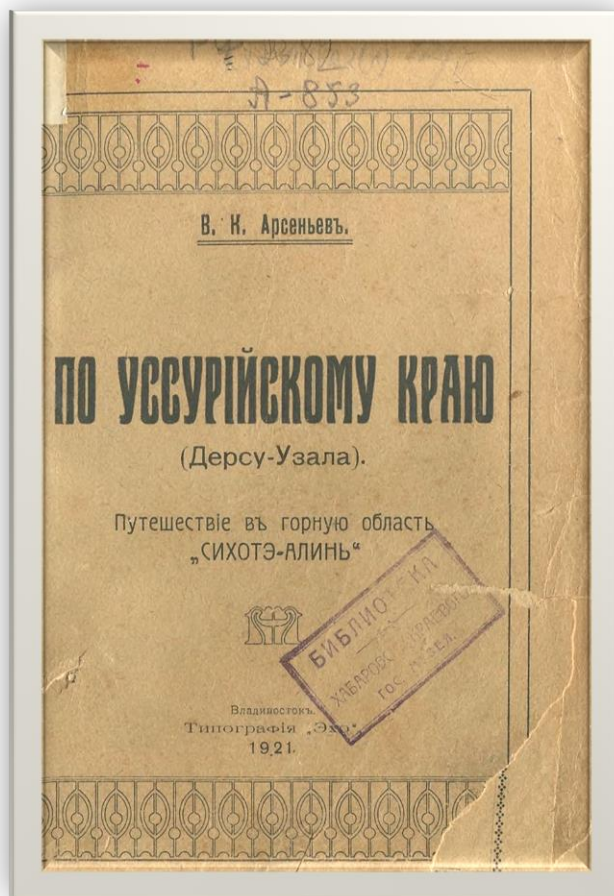


and *Kitaytsy v Ussuriyskom krae*<sup>181</sup> (1914), and of literature. These include *Across the Ussuri Krai*, *Dersu Uzala*, but also the monograph *The Land of the Udege* (§ 1.2.1).

In the extensive correspondence between 1910 and 1914 with Lev Yakovlevich Shternberg, Vladimir Arsenyev expressed his desire to “*vlozhit’ vsyu svoyu dushu*”<sup>182</sup> (“put his whole soul”), into a project dedicated to the ‘*inorodtsy*’, with particular regard to the Orochi-Udege. Nevertheless, the project was postponed for many years, as Arsenyev felt that he did not have sufficient knowledge of the people under investigation:

Торопиться с этой работой я не буду. Мне надо съездить к ним еще раз. Мы сговорились поехать вместе к инородцам в 1915 г., когда кончится война.<sup>183</sup>

Hence, the author focused on the work of *Po Ussuriyskomu Kraju*, diving into a field he had never dealt with before, that of Odeporic literature.<sup>184</sup> However, Arsenyev was able to finish both projects within a relatively short amount of time. According to the author’s preface in *Across the Ussuri Krai*, the manuscripts for both volumes were already prepared for printing as early as 1917. Issues dictated by the October Revolution and regime change in Russia, however, greatly postponed their publication.



Cover of the first edition of Vladimir Klavdiyevich Arsenyev's *Across the Ussuri Krai* (1921): <https://lhistory.ru/index.php/statyi/tot-samyj-arsenev>

<sup>181</sup> It is especially noteworthy that this work was the one that, following the explorer’s death, led to Gerontiy Yefimov’s criticism on *Krasnoye Znamya* in July 1931 (§ 1.2). In his work, Arsenyev harshly criticized the Chinese settlers in the Far East for irresponsible exploitation of nature and indiscriminate killing of local wildlife (§ 3.2.1). Therefore, Arsenyev was posthumously charged with undermining relations with China. See more in Sazonov, *Pervoprophodtsy Dal’nego Vostoka. Nastoyashchie russkie geroi: ot Yerofeya Khabarova do Vladimira Arsenyeva, Ivana Yefremova i Grigoriya Fedoseyeva*.

<sup>182</sup> “I will put my whole soul into this work. I think to finish it in the winter of 1914.” Kuz’michëv, *Pisatel’ Arsenyev*, 130.

<sup>183</sup> I’m not going to rush this job. I must go to them again. We agreed to go together to the natives in 1915 when the war is over. Kuz’michëv, 132.

<sup>184</sup> From “*Odoiporikós*,” of travel; the Greek word refers to anything related to travel. Therefore, by odeporic literature, we are referring to travel literature, although the term “travelogue” has supplanted the variant of Greek origin.

Еще в черновом виде они ходили по рукам моих друзей и знакомых, в числе которых было немало педагогов. Их отзывы утвердили меня в той мысли, что появление такого научно-популярного описания края, из которого учащаяся молодежь почерпнула бы немало интересных сведений, было бы полезным делом.

В. Арсеньев, Владивосток, 1930 г.<sup>185</sup>

According to Kuz'michëv, the author's enthusiasm for the Orochi-udege monograph, which was not yet prepared for release, was redirected toward *Across the Ussuri Krai* and its sequel, leading to the creation of the pristine literary figure of Dersu Uzala who is well-known today (§ 2.4.2).<sup>186</sup> Consequently, Arsenyev did not set out to compose literary works with the intention of becoming a writer. Instead, his writing was largely spontaneous, as he had previously only written scientific notes and had not attempted any other form of writing. There were two motivations behind the creation of these books, as Mark Azadovskiy believed. Firstly, Arsenyev sought to narrate the experiences of his journeys between 1906 and 1908, as the second volume ends with the death of Dersu. Secondly, he aimed to record all the geographical, ethnographic, and folklore information that he had gathered throughout his time in the Far East.<sup>187</sup> It can be inferred that certain events of *Across the Ussuri Krai*, which commences in 1902 rather than in 1906, were initially intended for inclusion in *The Land of the Udege*, which, however, never got to publication. Furthermore, it is worth noting that Mark Azadovskiy highlighted significant disparities between the writings and the explorer's spoken accounts (§ 2.2).

Therefore, based on what has been observed from the research conducted on the explorer's life and works, it is possible to argue that many of the additions found in the books, but absent in the diary pages, can be traced back to the author's attempt to channel as much information as possible within a single work.

### 2.3.2 – Amba! Shamanism and beliefs of the Nanai people

The founder of the naturalist<sup>188</sup> movement, Émile Zola (1840–1902), affirmed in his work *Aventures du grand Sidoine et du petit Médéric* that “nothing develops intelligence like travel.”

---

<sup>185</sup> Even in draft form, they circulated among my friends and acquaintances, including many educators. Their reviews confirmed that the publication of such a popular-scientific description of the region, from which the young students would draw a lot of interesting information, would be useful. В. Арсеньев, Владивосток, 1930. Arsenyev, *Po Ussuriyskomu Krayu, Dersu Uzala*, 28.

<sup>186</sup> Kuz'michëv, *Pisatel' Arsenyev*, 131.

<sup>187</sup> Kuz'michëv, 130.

<sup>188</sup> During the late 1800s, the literary movement of naturalism emerged as a counterpoint to romanticism. Advocating for the philosophical principle of determinism, naturalism posited that history is governed by

While it cannot be asserted that Vladimir Arsenyev lacked intelligence prior to his relocation to the Far East, it is essential to remember that he did not complete his gymnasium education and that most of his knowledge was acquired through self-directed learning. For this reason, Arsenyev's scientific and ethnographic discoveries, investigations into the language, culture, and customs of the Far Eastern peoples, and all other university-level knowledge were the result of his inquisitive nature and intellectual exertion. In this regard, expeditions served as a means for the author to satisfy his thirst for knowledge as he steadily refused any form of office or administrative work. The statement by Zola is particularly applicable to the explorer, who, preferring a more pragmatic approach to learning, discovered an inexhaustible source of knowledge in travel.

Among the several leitmotifs that are present in Arsenyev's works, the one concerning the beliefs and traditions of the peoples of the Far East demands special attention in this work, to attain a deeper comprehension of the contrast between the 'civilized' and 'savage' thought. When writing about Siberian peoples, Animism is a metaphysical belief that a lot of them have in common. Tungusic peoples such as Evenks, Orochi-Udege, and Nanai, believe that the world is populated by spirits that reside within both living beings (humans, animals, plants) and inanimate objects such as the weather and natural phenomena,<sup>189</sup> which are often personified. Generally, Siberians refer to a figure, the shaman, to expel negative spirits through tribute, sacrifice, or prayer. In fact, the role of the shaman is to



*Evenki shaman. Photo by I. M. Suslov, 1926.*

---

cause-and-effect relationships, and emphasized scientific observation as opposed to the subjective and emotional tendencies prevalent in the early 1800s.

<sup>189</sup> For instance, according to Siberian peoples, the fire is represented by an old lady who goes by the name of *Fadzya Mama*. See more in Carsten Sander Christensen, "The Beginning of the 1900s, Russian Civilization of the Outer Manchuria Seen from the Artistic World: Akira Kurosawa's 'Dersu Uzala', Vladimir Arsenyev's Book, the Russian Far Wild East, American Wild West and Greenland," *Studia Humanitatis* № 4 (2019): 22.

act as an intermediary between the world of humans and the spirits, while also having some basic knowledge of medicine.<sup>190</sup>

The explorer interacted frequently with members of the Tungus people, either to find shelter for himself and his fellow soldiers during expeditions or to study the local communities adjacent to Russian resettlement sites in the Far East. From these encounters, the author depicted episodes of cultural, religious, and philosophical significance that led to ontological assumptions about the nature of human existence and concepts of happiness and freedom.

Despite collecting data on the Udege people for thirty years, the encounter that undoubtedly led the most to the moral considerations that reshaped the author's views of the civilized world is that with Dersu Uzala.

The spiritual practices of the Nanai people include great reverence for certain animals, first and foremost the bear (*Doonta*) and the tiger (*Amba*<sup>191</sup>), which inspired the title of this section and is the title of the eighteenth chapter of *Across the Ussuri Krai*.

Arsenyev and Dersu explore the bank of the Li-Fudzin River when suddenly the hunter notices that a tiger is following them. However, to Arsenyev's surprise, Dersu, instead of aiming at the wild animal with his rifle, starts talking to the tiger, addressing it as "amba":

– Что ходишь сзади? Что нужно тебе, амба? Что ты хочешь? Наша дорога ходи, тебе мешай нету. Как твоя сзади ходи? Неужели в тайге места мало? [...] В глазах Дерсу была видна глубокая вера в то, что тигр, амба, слышит и понимает его слова.<sup>192</sup>

The conversation between the savage and the tiger proceeds later in the narrative, once Dersu Uzala reaches the bivouac, where the expeditionary company begins to witness disturbing images and hear unpleasant noises, first because of the shadows emanating from the tongues of the campfire flame and later because of the tiger's roaring in the bushes.

– Prrrrrr! – снова раздалось в ночной тишине.

Вдруг Дерсу быстро поднялся с места. Я думал, он хочет стрелять. Но велико было изумление, когда я увидел, что в руках у него не было винтовки, и когда я услышал речь, с которой он обратился к тигру:

– Хорошо, хорошо, амба! Не надо сердиться, не надо!. Это твое место. Наша это не знал. Наша сейчас другое место ходи. В тайге места много. Сердиться не надо!...

---

<sup>190</sup> See more in Andrei Znamenski, *Shamanism in Siberia. Russian Records of Indigenous Spirituality* (Berlin: Springer Science+Business Media Dordrecht, 2003), 52.

<sup>191</sup> Christensen, "The Beginning of the 1900s, Russian Civilization of the Outer Manchuria Seen from the Artistic World: Akira Kurosawa's 'Dersu Uzala', Vladimir Arsenyev's Book, the Russian Far Wild East, American Wild West and Greenland."

<sup>192</sup> - What are you doing walking behind us? What do you want, Amba? What do you want? Our way we walk, we do not disturb you. How can you walk behind us? Is there not enough space in the taiga? [...] In Dersu's eyes, there was a deep belief that the tiger, amba, heard and understood his words. Arsenyev, *Po Ussuriyskomu Krayu, Dersu Uzala*, 168.

Гольд стоял, протянув руки к зверю. Вдруг он опустился на колени, дважды поклонился в землю и вполголоса что-то стал говорить на своем наречии.<sup>193</sup>

In this episode of extreme narrative tension, the reader gains a better understanding of the attitude of the Goldi tribe toward tigers, and it opens up a series of considerations on their animist beliefs, such as the respect for wildlife that makes the native appear more civilized than the European colonizers, as investigated in the third chapter of this thesis (§ 3.2.2). Siberian peoples are fearful and powerless against the uncontrollable nature, unlike colonizers who seek to bring nature under their control (§ 3.3). In the animist Goldi beliefs, the amba is also regarded as an evil demon,<sup>194</sup> which is why killing it needlessly leads to no good for the hunter:

– Нет, – сказал Дерсу, – моя не могу. Моя тебе вперед говори, в компании стрелять амба никогда не буду! Твоя хорошо это слушай. Амба стреляй – моя товарищ нету...<sup>195</sup>

Dersu is terrified by the idea of even looking at the tiger and expresses disappointment in response to the explorer's curiosity to see it. Having spent his entire life in the deep taiga, Dersu has had the opportunity to observe numerous tigers and even kill one himself, therefore, the hunter informs Arsenyev that, according to the beliefs of his people, such a deplorable action brings about extremely bad luck and punishments (such as nightmares) that torments the hunter for a long time: «Такой люди, который никогда амба посмотри нету, – счастливый» (“Those kinds of people, who have never seen an amba before, are happy”).<sup>196</sup>

Therefore, according to Dersu, nature should not be disturbed by humans; otherwise, it would have ominous consequences. Hence, the ability to live in harmony with the natural world is the main trait that distinguishes the aborigines of Eastern Siberia from the European colonizers. In this context, the moral code of Dersu has been referred to as “*tayezhnaya etika*”<sup>197</sup>

---

<sup>193</sup> - Rrrrrrr! - was heard again in the silence of the night.

Suddenly Dersu stood up quickly from his seat. I thought he wanted to shoot. But great was my astonishment when I saw that he had no rifle in his hands, and when I heard the speech with which he addressed the tiger:

- All right, all right, amba! No need to be angry, no need to be angry! This is your place. We did not know that. We go to another place now. There's plenty of space in the taiga. No need to be angry!...

The Gol'd stood with his hands outstretched toward the beast. Suddenly he knelt, bowed twice to the ground, and began to say something in his dialect. Arsenyev, 170.

<sup>194</sup> Pëtr Pëtrovich Bordakov, *Dersu Uzala. Rozhdestvenskiy rasskaz* (Khabarovsk: Tipografiya T-va “Obshchiy trud”, 1909), 4.

<sup>195</sup> - No, - said Dersu, - my cannot. My say you this, to shoot amba in company never I will! Listen you well to this. You Amba shoot - my companion you will not be... Arsenyev, *Po Ussuriyskomu Krayu, Dersu Uzala*, 171.

<sup>196</sup> Arsenyev, 171.

<sup>197</sup> Kuz'michëv, *Pisatel' Arsenyev*, 158.

(“taiga ethics”): “At the same time, I was struck by Dersu’s words. It is a sin to shoot in vain! What a correct and simple thought.”<sup>198</sup>

Initially, Arsenyev was an outsider to this morality, however, through the course of expeditions and interactions with other individuals from the Far Eastern region, he acquired an understanding of a different worldview and partially adopted the moral principles, and ethical values of the indigenous people (§ 3.3): “Why is it that Europeans often misuse guns and kill animals so, for the sake of a shot for fun.”<sup>199</sup>

Of major significance in the book is the chapter *Okhota na Kabanov (Wild Boar Hunting)*, in which Dersu gives proof of his great skills as a pathfinder; moreover, the author learns for the first time what the Goldi means by the term “*lyudi*” (“people”):

Меня поразило, что Дерсу кабанов называет «людьми». Я спросил ему об этом.

– Его все равно люди, – подтвердил он, – только рубашка другой. Обмани понимай, сердись понимай, кругом понимай! Все равно люди...

Для меня стало ясно. Воззрение на природу этого первобытного человека было анимистическое, и потому все окружающее он очеловечивал.<sup>200</sup>

Dersu thrives in coexistence with the animist world, esteeming both its captivating beauty and the imminent threats stemming from the spirits present in it. At the same time, the Nanai is sensitive to the indissoluble connection between humanity and the animal kingdom, which contrasts with the “heedless and matter-of-fact behavior of the Russian crew of military topographers penetrating into the vastness of Siberia for the first time.”<sup>201</sup> In this juxtaposition, Arsenyev’s works were inscribed by Tessa Morris-Suzuki in the genre of “Imperial nostalgia,”<sup>202</sup> referring to the approach that makes colonization processes appear pure and

---

<sup>198</sup> «Вместе с тем меня поразил Дерсу своими словами. Напрасно стрелять грех! Какая правильная и простая мысль». Arsenyev, *Po Ussuriyskomu Krayu, Dersu Uzala*, 217.

<sup>199</sup> «Почему же европейцы часто злоупотребляют оружием и сплошь и рядом убивают животных так, ради выстрела ради забавы». Arsenyev, 217.

<sup>200</sup> It struck me that Dersu calls wild boars "people". I asked him about it.

- His are still people, - he confirmed, - only the shirt is different. Deceive you understand, get angry you understand, all around you understand! People are all the same...

It became clear to me. This primitive man’s view of nature was animistic, and that is why he humanized everything around him Arsenyev, 46.

<sup>201</sup> Nur Yalman, review of *Shamans and Elders: Experience, Knowledge and Power among the Daur Mongols.*, by Urgunge Onon and Caroline Humphrey, *The Journal of Asian Studies* 58, no. 3 (1999): 827. The contrast of colonizer and colonized and urbanization and nature will be explored later in this study (§ 3.2-3.3).

<sup>202</sup> Renato Rosaldo, *Culture & Truth : The Remaking of Social Analysis* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989).

untarnished in comparison to their reality (Arsenyev's criticisms of the Tsarist and Soviet policies are explored in Section 3.3.2).<sup>203</sup>

The first book ends the 1906 expedition with a highly poetic passage that solidifies the relationship between the two protagonists of the story:

– Прощай, Дерсу, – сказал я, крепко пожимая ему руку. – Спасибо за то, что ты помогал мне. Прощай! Я никогда не забуду то многое, что ты для меня сделал!. Большое красное солнце только что зашло, оставив за собой на горизонте тусклое сияние. Первая, как всегда, зажглась Венера, за ней – Юпитер и другие крупные звезды.<sup>204</sup>

*Across the Ussuri Krai* delves mainly into the explorer's early experiences with animist beliefs and encounters with wild animals. In contrast, the second book grapples with profound existential questions, setting the stage for the final chapter of this thesis. Moreover, the next section examines the depiction of Dersu Uzala as portrayed by Arsenyev's companion, who participated in the 1907 expedition. P. P. Bordakov, a student at Kyiv Gymnasium, had the opportunity to know personally the Nanai hunter, therefore publishing an article about him in 1914, nearly ten years prior to the publication of Arsenyev's well-known work (§ 2.4.2).



Vladimir Arsenyev, *Dersu Uzala*, soldier Fokin and Chzhan-Bao (from left to right) on a trek along the Takema River basin, 1907: [www.gazetaeao.ru](http://www.gazetaeao.ru)

---

<sup>203</sup> Tessa Morris-Suzuki, "Lines in the Snow: Imagining the Russo-Japanese Frontier," *Pacific Affairs* 72, no. 1 (1999): 71, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2672336>.

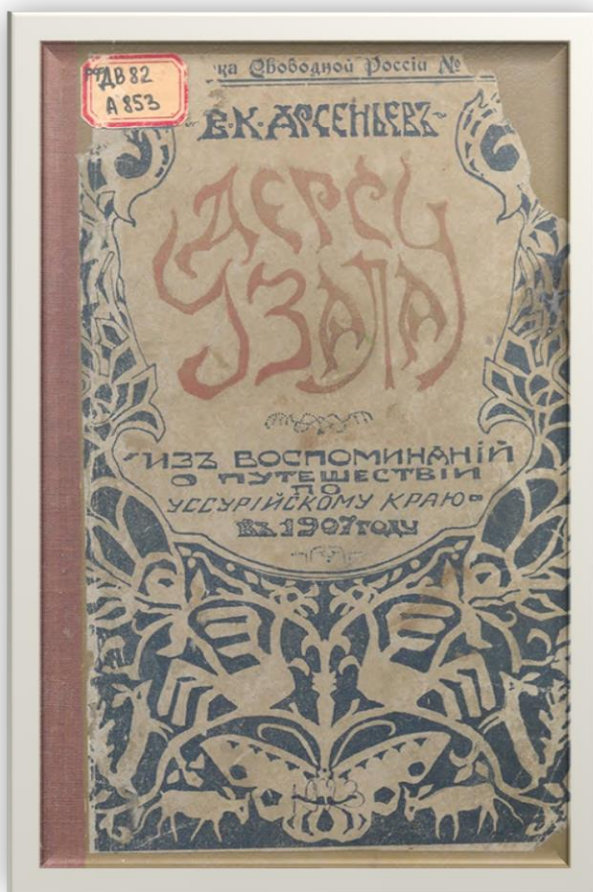
<sup>204</sup> - Goodbye, Dersu, - I said, shaking his hand firmly. - Thank you for helping me. Farewell! I will never forget the many things you have done for me! The big red sun had just set, leaving behind a dim glow on the horizon. Venus was first, as always, followed by Jupiter and the other big stars. Arsenyev, *Po Ussuriyskomu Krayu, Dersu Uzala*, 268.

## 2.4 – *Dersu Uzala* (1923)

Consisting of twenty-four chapters, *Dersu Uzala* deals with the travel account of the 1907 expedition and concludes with the death of Dersu Uzala (1849–1908) in the spring of the following year, a few months before the Jubilee Expedition took place (§ 1.1.2).

While Arsenyev’s second book offers a more in-depth portrayal of the Goldi, it also raises more complex issues than in his previous work, when his connection with the native was not as strong. Notably, Arsenyev poses a question to Dersu about the sun and the stars expecting an elaborate response from the Goldi, given his intricate Animist worldview. However, the explorer is taken aback by a surprisingly straightforward answer: “A star is a star; the moon – everyone has seen it, so there is nothing to explain; the sky is blue in the daytime, dark at night, and gloomy during inclement weather.”<sup>205</sup>

Kuz’michëv posits that Dersu’s apparent disinterest in the planets and stars, in addition to the straightforward nature of his responses, stands in stark contrast to his intricate animist perception of the natural world and religious beliefs.<sup>206</sup> As a result, Dersu would be grappling with an existential conundrum, attempting to achieve a harmonious balance between the realms of the material and the spiritual, although, from an ecologist’s point of view, Dersu’s view on Nature provides to



Cover of the first edition of Vladimir Klavdiyevich Arsenyev's novel *Dersu Uzala*, 1923: <https://muzlitpenza.ru/news/novosti-ot-hranitelej-ne-nado-ubivat-zhivotnyh-eto-tozhe-chelovek-tolko-rubashka-drugaya/>

<sup>205</sup> «звезда – звезда и есть; луна – каждый ее видел, значит и описывать нечего; небо – синее днем, темное ночью и пасмурное во время ненастья». Kuz’michëv, *Pisatel’ Arsenyev*, 159.

<sup>206</sup> Kuz’michëv, 159.



“prevent the wanton misuse of natural resources.”<sup>207</sup> Furthermore, the spirit world-based religiosity of the savage does not prohibit him from making observations on “concrete physical phenomena,”<sup>208</sup> as in the case of his simplistic view of the moon and stars. The question posed by Jussi aimed to differentiate between the material and spiritual components of Dersu’s perception of nature. This is demonstrated by the tiger, or Amba, which holds religious implications (§ 2.3.2), while the sun and stars are depicted more empirically.

When examining *Dersu Uzala*, it is crucial to consider the different versions of the work, particularly for the foreign audience. In fact, a revised edition was released in 1935, aimed at the younger generation and serving an educational purpose. It did not feature the original division wanted by the author into *Po Ussuriyskomu Krayu* and *Dersu Uzala*, rather it was a condensed version of certain events from both volumes, which went by the title *Dersu Uzala*. The 1935 re-edition<sup>209</sup> was particularly welcomed abroad because of its simplicity, therefore constituting the basis for the 1975 film by Japanese director Akira Kurosawa (§ 2.6). Considering that in the 1920s *V Debryakh Ussuriyskogo Kraya* was appreciated by Maxim Gorky, it is curious that the same kind of popular success was obtained by the 1935 abridged re-edition of Arsenyev’s main work.

Nevertheless, in conducting an analysis of the original 1923 edition, it is important to mention a theme that pervades both volumes: the idea of death within the context of the Nanai tribe. In *Across the Ussuri Krai*, the reader is introduced to the tragic circumstances surrounding the death of Dersu’s family members to smallpox, as well as the traditional practices and customs<sup>210</sup> around burial mounds.

Потом он стал говорить, что по их обычаю на могилы покойников нельзя ходить, нельзя вблизи стрелять, рубить лес, собирать ягоды и мять траву – нельзя нарушать покой усопших.<sup>211</sup>

---

<sup>207</sup> Jussi Raumolin, “Dersu Uzala, Colonialism and Romance: Some Antropological Reflections on a Kurosawa’s Film,” *L’Uomo Società Tradizione Sviluppo* 2, no. 2 (2019): 118.

<sup>208</sup> Raumolin, 118.

<sup>209</sup> The only version of *Dersu Uzala* translated into Italian, for example, is based on the shortened 1935 edition, as well as the French, Finnish and German editions: Raumolin, 116.

<sup>210</sup> For more information on the funeral practices and customs of the Amur peoples see Ivan Lopatin, *The Cult of the Dead Among the Natives of the Amur Basin* (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1960) and Denis Sinor, “Ivan A. Lopatin: The Cult of the Dead among the Natives of the Amur Basin. (Central Asiatic Studies, VI.) 211 Pp., Map. ‘s-Gravenhage: Mouton & Co., 1960. Guilders 28.,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 26, no. 2 (1963): 452–53, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0041977X00065022>.

<sup>211</sup> Then he began to say that according to their custom one must not walk on the graves of the dead, one must not shoot near them, one must not cut wood, gather berries and crush grass - one must not disturb the peace of the departed. Arsenyev, *Po Ussuriyskomu Krayu, Dersu Uzala*, 175.

Additionally, in the second volume, Dersu has nightmares of his restless wife asking him for help. Therefore, the hunter proceeds to chant prayers and perform rituals to calm his loved ones, convinced that one day he will be able to reunite with them:

После этого Дерсу стал бросать в костер листья табака, сухую рыбу, мясо, соль, чумизу, рис, муку, кусок синей дабы, новые китайские улы, коробок спичек и наконец пустую бутылку. Дерсу перестал петь. Он сел на землю, опустил голову на грудь и глубоко о чем-то задумался.<sup>212</sup>

In the Nanai's worldview, death is a complementary part of life that should be respected and protected ("*Naprasno strelyat' grekh!*", § 2.3.2) as much as the deceased in their burial mounds. Upon completing the ritual, Dersu perceives the haunting call of a nocturnal bird, which he believes to be the *khanyala*, the spirit of his deceased wife, having achieved serenity within the mortal realm. The somber and reverential ambiance that characterizes both volumes' portrayals of the deceased is starkly juxtaposed with Dersu's demise in the final chapter of the second volume:

В 1910 году, зимой, я вернулся в Хабаровск и тотчас поехал на станцию Корфовская, чтобы навестить дорогую могилку. Я не узнал места – все изменилось: около станции возник целый поселок, в пригорьях Хехцира отрыли ломки гранита, начались порубки леса, заготовка шпал. Мы с А. И. Дзюлем несколько раз принимались искать могилу Дерсу, но напрасно. Приметные кедры исчезли, появились новые дороги, насыпи, выемки, бугры, рывины и ямы...<sup>213</sup>

Ramoulin Jussi believes that the passing of Dersu signifies the demise of the Goldi culture, which is being overshadowed by the progress of civilization (§ 3.2.2). Tragically, Dersu's life is cut short in a violent manner as he is murdered while asleep. His death is neither natural nor accompanied by the traditional rituals that are customary in the Heje culture: "By tradition the Heje burial rites were very elaborate and precise, for it was believed that without them the soul of the deceased would be doomed to wander through the taiga forever."<sup>214</sup> Arsenyev's literary work offers sufficient hints to comprehend the fate of Dersu's soul following his "blasphemous" demise. Specifically, in *Across the Ussuri Krai*, Arsenyev and the expeditionary detachment encounter the "specters of the taiga":

---

<sup>212</sup> After that Dersu began to throw tobacco leaves, dry fish, meat, salt, black rice (chumiza), rice, flour, a piece of blue Chinese cloth, new Chinese shoes, a box of matches and finally an empty bottle into the fire. Dersu stopped singing. He sat down on the ground, put his head on his chest and thought deeply about something. Arsenyev, 291.

<sup>213</sup> In 1910, in winter, I returned to Khabarovsk and immediately went to Korfovskaya station to visit my dear grave. I did not recognize the place - everything had changed: a whole village appeared near the station, granite breaks were dug in the foothills of the Khekhtsir, logging and harvesting of sleepers began. A. I. Dzyul' and I started to look for Dersu's grave several times, but in vain. The conspicuous cedars disappeared, new roads, embankments, excavations, hillocks, potholes, and pits appeared... Arsenyev, 439.

<sup>214</sup> Raumolin, "L'Uomo Società Tradizione Sviluppo," 121.

– Худо здесь наша спи, – сказал он как бы про себя.

– Почему? – спросил я его.

Он указал рукой на клочья тумана, – продолжал он. – Его тоже все равно люди.

Дальше из его слов я понял, что раньше это были люди, но они заблудились в горах, погибли от голода, и вот теперь души их бродят по тайге в таких местах, куда редко заходят живые.<sup>215</sup>

As Dersu was not interred with either the funeral rites of his tribe or those of the Western world, his death is believed to have left him in a state of “existential vacuum,”<sup>216</sup> which has led anthropologists and scholars to define his deplorable demise as an “unanthropological death.”<sup>217</sup> The passing of the hunter had a profound effect on Arsenyev, as evidenced by a letter written in 1927, in which he pays tribute to Dersu as follows: “My desire is to finish processing my scientific treatises and escape, escape far away, escape completely - to Dersu!”<sup>218</sup>

However, it may also represent the author’s disillusionment with technological advancements, viewing Dersu as a symbol of liberation from the constraints of society (§ 3.2.2).



Vladimir Arsenyev's farewell at a Nanai camp: <https://primgorod.ru/stati/1346-arsenevcam-o-v-k-arseneve-ekspedicii.html>

<sup>215</sup> - It's bad for us to sleep here, - he said as if to himself. - Why? - I asked him. He pointed with his hand at the wispy fog, - he continued. - his is also people. Further from his words I understood that once they were people, but they got lost in the mountains, died of hunger, and now their souls wander through the taiga in such places where the living rarely go. Arsenyev, *Po Ussuriyskomu Krayu, Dersu Uzala*, 182.

<sup>216</sup> Raumolin, “L’Uomo Società Tradizione Sviluppo,” 120.

<sup>217</sup> Raumolin, 121.

<sup>218</sup> «Моё желание – закончить обработку своих научных трудов и уйти, уйти подальше, уйти совсем – к Дерсу!» Avchenko, *Literaturnye Pervoprokhodtsy Dal'nego Vostoka*, 134.

## 2.4.1 – The Literary Dersu. Mirroring the author’s personality

In the previous sections, some differences in the portrayal of the author compared to its literary version were observed (§ 2.1.2), while, from a content perspective, it was noticed that the data of the travel letters did not always match those in the literary works (§ 2.2). An additional figure that shows several differences from its literary portrayal is Dersu Uzala. Recent contributions in this regard were made by Avchenko,<sup>219</sup> Korovashko,<sup>220</sup> and Yegorchev.<sup>221</sup> The latter, in his *Zagadki Dersu Uzala*, recently published by the Far Eastern Federal University in Vladivostok, thoroughly investigated the figure of the hunter, distinguishing its archetype from the unblemished literary hero depicted:

Литературоведы, этнографы и краеведы долгое время ведут горячие споры о том, какова степень реальности образа Дерсу. Должный накал этой затянувшейся дискуссии обеспечивают две противоположные точки зрения. Согласно первой, Дерсу Узала — это исключительно плод писательского воображения В. К. Арсеньева. Приверженцы иного выдвигают тезис об абсолютной документальности образа Дерсу, в котором, по их мнению, нет ни капли выдумки или художественной деформации действительности.<sup>222</sup>

The most widespread views see the character of Dersu Uzala in two opposite manners, which, to be understood, must be inscribed in the peculiar nature of Arsenyev’s prose between scientificity and his poetic nature (§ 2.1.1). Unlike the travel letters, in which the author’s belletrism does not alter the scientific nature of what is reported, in the books, the philanthropic character of Dersu is believed to act as a representative of the aboriginals at large («Образ Дерсу Узала вобрал в себя многолетние наблюдения Арсеньева над таежными аборигенами»<sup>223</sup>). In addition, the literary figure of Dersu reflects the author’s own virtuous nature, which was evident throughout his life (§ 1.1). Both the character of Arsenyev and the literary Dersu are defined by their immense kindness, a key characteristic of their being:

---

<sup>219</sup> Vasiliy Olegovich Avchenko, “Gol’d Star, ili Dersu Uzala v debryakh taygi i slovesnosti,” *God literatury*, July 31, 2023, <https://godliteratury.ru/articles/2023/07/31/gold-star-ili-dersu-uzala-v-debriah-tajgi-i-slovesnosti>.

<sup>220</sup> Aleksey Valeryevich Korovashko, *Po sledam Dersu Uzala. Tropami Ussuriyskogo Kraya* (Moscow: Veche, 2016) and Yevgeniy Rezepov, “Zdravstvuy, Dersu!,” *RusskiyMir.ru*, *Russkiy mir*, August 3, 2023, <https://rusmir.media/2023/08/03/korovachko>.

<sup>221</sup> Ivan Yegorchev, *Zagadki Dersu Uzala* (Vladivostok: Dal’nevostochniy Federal’niy universitet, 2014).

<sup>222</sup> Literature scholars, ethnographers, and local historians have long been engaged in heated debates about the degree of reality of Dersu’s portrayal. Two opposing points of view provide the necessary heat for this protracted discussion. According to the first, Dersu Uzala is exclusively a product of V.K. Arsenyev’s creative imagination. The supporters of the other put forward the thesis about the absolute documentary nature of Dersu’s image, in which, in their opinion, there is not a single drop of fiction or artistic deformation of reality. Korovashko, *Po sledam Dersu Uzala. Tropami Ussuriyskogo Kraya*, 2.

<sup>223</sup> “The image of Dersu Uzala absorbed Arsenyev’s long-term observations of taiga natives.” Kuz’michëv, *Pisatel’ Arsenyev*, 150.

– Вероятно, ты думаешь вернуться сюда? – спросил я гольда.

Он отрицательно покачал головой. Тогда я спросил его, для кого он оставил рис, соль и спички.

– Какой-нибудь другой люди ходи, – отвечал Дерсу, – балаган найди, сухие дрова найди, спички найди, кушай найди – пропади нету!

Помню, меня глубоко поразило это. Я задумался... Гольд заботился о неизвестном ему человеке, которого он никогда не увидит и который тоже не узнает, кто приготовил ему дрова и продовольствие.<sup>224</sup>

Another trait shared by the two characters is a deep-seated hatred for poachers, especially Chinese and Honghuzi,<sup>225</sup> as well as a strong distaste for taiga pollution. In one instance, Dersu picks up a discarded bottle from the ground, illustrating that even seemingly worthless objects can possess value in the natural world. Therefore, the author describes how the hunter disposed of a large quantity of refuse collected from the taiga and stored it in his bag. Similarly, Arsenyev criticized humanity's role as a usurper of nature, often referring to them as a "scourge of the Earth" ("*bich zemli*").<sup>226</sup>

The Russian novelist Mikhail Prishvin, who had personally known Arsenyev (§ 1.3.1), believed that the figure of Dersu Uzala in the books seemed to be far too idealized, therefore, his quote: "There was more Dersu in Arsenyev himself than there was in the wild Gold,"<sup>227</sup> gave the Arsenyevists much to ponder in this regard. The lyrical process in the portrayal of the hunter is no doubt and that is why Vasilij Avchenko labeled the character of Dersu as an "*obraz sobiratel'nyy*"<sup>228</sup> ("collective image"), made of all the Arsenyev's experiences and traits of the author himself.

The motivation behind Arsenyev's portrayal of Dersu, as suggested by Prishvin, can be attributed to Arsenyev viewing Dersu as an ethical benchmark ("*nekiy npravstvenniyy etalon*")<sup>229</sup>

---

<sup>224</sup> - Probably considering coming back here? - I asked the Gold. He shook his head negatively. Then I asked him for whom he had left rice, salt, and matches. - Some other people coming, - answered Dersu, - find a balagan, find dry wood, find matches, find some food - no dying! I remember I was deeply struck by this. I reflected... The Gol'd was taking care of a man unknown to him, whom he would never see and who also would not know who had prepared firewood and food for him.

Arsenyev, *Po Ussuriyskomu Krayu, Dersu Uzala*, 42.

<sup>225</sup> Vladimir Arsenyev was sent on several missions to liberate the Russian Chinese border territories from the invasion of the Honghuzi, bandits who committed theft and poaching. Clashes with the Honghuzi are reported as much in the books as in the film of Akira Kurosawa's *Dersu Uzala*.

<sup>226</sup> Vasilij Olegovich Avchenko, "Ekologiya Po Arsenyevu," Total'nyy diktant, accessed January 7, 2024, <https://totaldict.ru/dictants/ekologiya-po-arsenevu/>.

<sup>227</sup> «В самом Арсеньев было больше Дерсу, чем в диком гольде». Yegorchev, *Zagadki Dersu Uzala*, 123.

<sup>228</sup> Avchenko, "Gol'd Star, ili Dersu Uzala v debryakh taygi i slovesnosti."

<sup>229</sup> Kuz'michëv, *Pisatel' Arsenyev*, 173.

that served as a means for the author to make a spiritual disclosure.<sup>230</sup> Therefore, through the persona of Dersu Uzala, Arsenyev sought to pass on morally elevated teachings, bringing up several issues present in the Primorye region (§ 3.2). The author portrayed Dersu as a “noble savage” by imbuing him with the characteristics of a “primal hunter” (“*pervobytnyy okhotnik*”)<sup>231</sup> and stripping away his civilized traits. This allowed the author to depict the socio-cultural conflicts that he had deeply internalized. Additionally, Dersu’s character had already proven to be highly effective in the articles published in the Priamurye newspaper and could have garnered an even broader readership.

In this sense, an observation was made by Kuz’michëv, who noted that Vladimir Arsenyev, from his earliest scientific writings, aimed to elevate the issue of ecology “to the rank of a national problem”<sup>232</sup> (§ 2.2). Korovashko posited that the Goldi, as a frontier people, were accustomed to regular contact with European civilization, as the Russians had already migrated to the Far East for more than fifty years. From a realistic perspective, therefore, Dersu’s ‘wild’ demeanor seems inappropriate.<sup>233</sup>

In its dramatic nature, the work’s ending leads to interesting reflections on the relationship between Arsenyev and Dersu:

Я чувствовал, что потерял близкого человека. Как много мы с ними пережили. Сколько раз он выручал меня в то время, когда сам находился на краю гибели! Чтобы рассеяться, я принимался читать книгу, но это не помогало. Глаза механически перебирали буквы, а в мозгу в это время рисовался образ Дерсу...<sup>234</sup>

The explorer’s inability to focus on anything other than Dersu underscores the shock his demise caused in Arsenyev, who perceives as if he had lost a part of himself. In this sense, Dersu’s death represents the apotheosis of a dynamic of splitting and, at the same time, of deep, psychological, and existential dialogue between the two. Even though they serve as different characters in the book, from an authorial point of view, the savage and the explorer embody two parts of the same person: the author Vladimir Arsenyev.

---

<sup>230</sup> Kuz’michëv, 173.

<sup>231</sup> Vladimir Klavdiyevich Arsenyev, *Po Ussuriyskomu Krayu, Dersu Uzala*, 39.

<sup>232</sup> «до ранга общегосударственной проблемы». Kuz’michëv, *Pisatel’ Arsenyev*, 60.

<sup>233</sup> Rezerov, “Zdravstvuy, Dersu!”

<sup>234</sup> I felt like I had lost a loved one. So much we had been through together. So many times he had helped me when I was on the brink of death! To clear my head, I began to read a book, but it didn’t help. My eyes were mechanically going over the letters, and at the same time in my brain, I pictured the image of Dersu... Arsenyev, *Po Ussuriyskomu Krayu, Dersu Uzala*, 438.

## 2.4.2 – The unembellished Dersu: P. P. Bordakov’s travel writings

In the opening chapter of *Dersu Uzala*, the reader is introduced to Pëtr Pëtrovich Bordakov (1882–1945), a student from Kyiv University who is part of the expeditionary company. However, he departs from the group in the fourth chapter, just prior to Arsenyev’s encounter with the Chinese General Chzhan Bao:

Здесь мы расстались с П. П. Бордаковым. Он тоже решил возвратиться в Джигит с намерением догнать Н. А. Десулави и с ним доехать до Владивостока.<sup>235</sup>

Bordakov, who spent only two months on the expeditionary squad, managed to become well-acquainted with Dersu. This familiarity led to the publication of a short story in 1909 called *Dersu Uzala, rozhdestvenskiy razskaz*, which described a conversation between God and the Nanai hunter after his death. Although the story is intriguing, it does not provide an accurate portrayal of the Nanai when compared to the travelogues of Arsenyev.

However, his article published in the journal *Yuzhnaya Rossiya* in 1914, described some episodes from the 1907 expedition on the Sikhote-Alin mountain range and was considered by Vladimir Arsenyev itself to be “*ves’ma zhivo i pravdivo*” (“pretty vivid and trustworthy”).<sup>236</sup> Moreover, Anna Tarasova recounted that Bordakov gave space to some events that were not reported even by Vladimir Arsenyev, therefore, the travel account is of utmost importance for a complete examination of the 1907 expedition.<sup>237</sup>

What many scholars agree on, is that in all the analyses done to draw a comparative analysis of the two Dersu, the article *Poberezhye Yaponskogo Morya* of Bordakov is crucial because it outlines some differences in the attitude of Dersu compared to the character depicted by Arsenyev. Overall, the main differences between the savage and the ‘noble savage’ idealized by Arsenyev lie in his behavior, beliefs, and even addictions.

In Bordakov’s *Poberezhye Yaponskogo Morya*,<sup>238</sup> Dersu is not the most active member of the company; rather, he is sometimes filmed in moments of idleness, while in others of total drunkenness, because of his heavy addiction to alcohol:

Ничего не делал только Дерсу. На правах проводника он сидел в стороне и хладнокровно покуривал трубку в ожидании, пока все будет готово и можно будет пуститься в путь... «Ты бы, Дерсу, помог», – тоном упрека сказал В. К. Арсеньев. Дерсу сделал недовольное лицо, но встал и несколько раз обошел вокруг уже

---

<sup>235</sup> Here we separated from P. P. Bordakov. He too decided to return to Dzhigit with the intention to catch up with N. A. Desulavi and with him to reach Vladivostok. Arsenyev, 294.

<sup>236</sup> Arsenyev, 274.

<sup>237</sup> Tarasova, *Vladimir Klavdiyevich Arsenyev*, 11.

<sup>238</sup> Please note: It was not possible to consult Bordakov’s article directly, as the manuscript is very rare. A copy can be consulted at the Biblioteka Imeni Lenina in Moscow but in an undigitized format.

навьюченного мула. После этого, прищурившись, посмотрел на небо, снова набил трубку табаком и, постояв немножко, уселся на обрубок дерева.<sup>239</sup>

In this portrayal of Dersu, another addiction that he struggles with is opium, which is also mentioned in Arsenyev's books, as the savage is often depicted with a pipe in his mouth. When Dersu misplaces it during the eighteenth chapter of *Across the Ussuri Krai*, he forces the explorer to halt their journey and backtrack to find the lost pipe, ultimately resulting in a dangerous encounter with the tiger (§ 2.3.2).

Additionally, Bordakov's article calls into question Dersu's supposed infallible path-finding abilities by demonstrating his fallibility. The student vividly remembers an instance in the taiga when Dersu got lost and remained annoyed for a considerable period, expressing his frustration through his uncharacteristic silence.

Beyond the temperamental flaws, the most significant difference between Arsenyev's depiction and Bordakov's account lies in Dersu's animist beliefs. The savage boasts of having killed "seven or eight tigers" and refers to the 'amba' as a "coward, filthy beast" («трус, поганый зверь»),<sup>240</sup> in contrast to the sacredness of the animal in the explorer's text. In this instance, Dersu gets embittered after receiving a sarcastic response from Arsenyev:

Хитришь, Дерсу, не всегда тигр на тебя «прыгай и хвостом верти». Бывало, что и ты на него прыгал и вертел хвостом.<sup>241</sup>

Consequently, the idea that a savage does not kill for fun, but only out of necessity, is the result of the myth of the "Noble Savage,"<sup>242</sup> which showcases Arsenyev's high consideration for the character.

Furthermore, in Arsenyev's book, Dersu is said to despise the Honghuzi, whereas, in Bordakov's article, he is depicted as having mercilessly killed over ten of them, viewing them as nothing more than savage animals. Therefore, the text implies that the portrayal of the indigenous individual in literature was shaped by the explorer's positive outlook, who recognized Dersu's animism as a "strong love for human beings and all living things."<sup>243</sup>

---

<sup>239</sup> Only Dersu was not doing anything. Being a guide, he sat aside and calmly smoked a pipe, waiting until everything was ready and we could set off... "You could have helped, Dersu," said V. K. Arsenyev in a tone of reproach. Dersu made a displeased face but stood up and walked several times around the already-loaded mule. Then, squinting, he looked up at the sky, filled his pipe with tobacco again, and, after standing a little while, sat down on a stump of wood. Kuz'michëv, *Pisatel' Arsenyev*, 166–167.

<sup>240</sup> Kuz'michëv, 167.

<sup>241</sup> You're sly, Dersu, not always the tiger «jumped on you and twirled his tail». There have been times when you have jumped on it and twirled your tail as well. Kuz'michëv, 167.

<sup>242</sup> The myth of the noble savage is usually attributed to the French philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778). Rousseau thought that "man" before entering society was free from sin. In this sense, the "savages" were considered to be not inferior to the civilized man but "noble". See more in Section 3.2.2.

<sup>243</sup> «сильная любовь к человеку и всему живому». Kuz'michëv, *Pisatel' Arsenyev*, 170.



Mikhail Prishvin's remark that there was more Dersu in Arsenyev than in Dersu himself would explain the origin of the literary portrayal of the savage.

Korovashko suggested that Arsenyev was the only one who adhered to the moral code of only killing when necessary, during the expeditions. Hence, the author subsequently incorporated this quality in the character of Dersu Uzala, reflecting his own values.<sup>244</sup>

The animism of the Goldi allowed Arsenyev to construct a portrait of an aborigine uncorrupted by the vices of civilization and unaffected by the bonds of society. The "myth of the noble savage" has been brought back into literature by other writers like Daniel Defoe with *Robinson Crusoe* or Lev Tolstoy in *The Cossacks*. However, it is interesting to note that Vladimir Arsenyev's status as a writer-scientist introduces an additional layer of intrigue to his work. His method of narration leads readers to believe that everything he wrote is factual, which has resulted in the formation of two opposing factions regarding the interpretation of his works. However, a more accurate portrayal of Dersu, as the one depicted in Bordakov's article, probably would not have evoked the same captivation as the limpid and unspoiled character of the animist native who coexists in harmony with nature and the spirit realm.

---

<sup>244</sup> Rezepov, "Zdravstvuy, Dersu!"

## 2.5 – The last expedition: *Through the Taiga* (1930)

### 2.5.1 – The origin of the *povest'*

Some months before his death, in September 1930, Vladimir Arsenyev signed the preface of his last literary expedition *Through the Taiga* (original title: *Skvoz' Taygu*).<sup>245</sup>

*Through the Taiga* is a short story of approximately one hundred fifty pages divided into eleven chapters that portrays the adventures of Arsenyev and his detachment (made of Russians and Orochi people) during the 1927 expedition on the Khabarovsk – Sovetskaya Gavan route. Although not as captivating as the previous books, *Through the Taiga* features both the classic traits of Arsenyev's prose: pristine natural landscapes and interactions with small peoples of the Russian Far East, with moments of fascinating analysis of local flora and fauna and considerations on nature of pure artistic-literary flair while, at the same time, portraying the author's melancholy for his last expedition.

The theme of melancholy assumes a prominent position within the text, as it represents the perspective of a more “mature” Vladimir Arsenyev, who frequently engages in reflections on the past, particularly remembering the deceased Orochi, Udege, and Nanai companions.

The digressions, although they occasionally interrupt the chronological progression of the expedition, emphasize the emotional weight of Arsenyev's experience.<sup>246</sup>



From left to right: Butungari, Kyalondiga, Aleksandr Namuka, Fëdor Mulinka, V. K. Arsenyev, geobotanist and writer N. Kabanov, Prokopiy Khutyanka. Year 1927: [https://www.todaykhv.ru/news/in-areas-of-the-province/26976/?sphrase\\_id=2853569](https://www.todaykhv.ru/news/in-areas-of-the-province/26976/?sphrase_id=2853569)

<sup>245</sup> *Through the Taiga* is considered to be Arsenyev's last book since *In the Sikhote-Alin Mountains* (*V Gorakh Sikhote-Alinya*) remained unfinished and was published posthumously by Arsenyev's widow only in 1937.

<sup>246</sup> It should be noted that, alongside several of his Orochi and Udege companions, the renowned geobotanist Nikolay Kabanov (1905-1992) played a significant role in the 1927 expedition. His 1948

Undertaking the final journey through the Sikhote-Alin mountain range, the author bids farewell to the expeditions, the deep taiga, and the natural world, destined to disappear as a result of the uncontrolled Soviet urbanization that was advancing in the Primorsky Krai.

In contrast to *Across the Ussuri Krai* and *Dersu Uzala*, *Through the Taiga* is known primarily to Arsenyev enthusiasts in Russia, while abroad it is almost unknown, as it was translated only into five languages: once in Ukrainian, Polish, Slovak, and twice in Czech and Bulgarian.<sup>247</sup>

Furthermore, in the latter part of his life, Arsenyev was preoccupied with several projects, such as *In the Sikhote-Alin Mountains* and the unpublished monograph *The Land of the Udege* (§ 1.2.1). Consequently, according to Kuz'michëv, the author harbored the fear that his final work would not receive the creative satisfaction it warranted.<sup>248</sup> Nonetheless, *Through the Taiga* is an exceptionally poetic short story that contains several noteworthy passages deserving of analysis.

### **2.5.2 – Text in translation: considerations on the style of Arsenyev's last short story: examples of “Arsenyevskaya forma”**

In the opening pages of the book, the author outlines the primary objective of the expedition, which is to investigate the state of colonization along the planned railway route between Khabarovsk and Sovetskaya Gavan by examining the beds of the Khora, Anyuy, Kopi, and Khadi rivers. However, the expeditionary group encountered financial difficulties that postponed the organization of the expedition, which was originally scheduled to commence in the early spring of 1928. As a result of the delayed financial support, the expedition's start was pushed to April 1928. Sovetskaya Gavan Harbor is the departure point for Arsenyev's last literary expedition.

As early as the third chapter, from scientific observations of nature, the reader is transported without warning into a magical atmosphere: the moment when, from behind a stump, Arsenyev sees a little elf appear with a red hood, gray beard, and pickaxe in his hands. However, the animal turns out to be a stoat that was hunting for lizards:

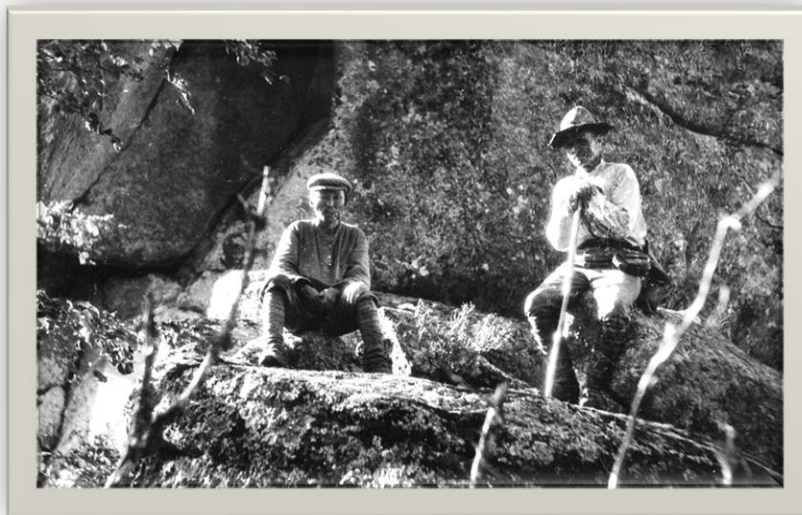
---

biography on Vladimir Arsenyev, which was instrumental in the development of the first chapter of this thesis (§ 1.1.2), further attests to his expertise and involvement.

<sup>247</sup> The book has not been translated into any non-Slavic language. Slavist Filippo Boscolo Gioachina is currently engaged in the translation of the text into Italian, which is set to be published in the year 2024. For more information on the other translations of Arsenyev's works see Tarasova, *Vladimir Klavdiyevich Arsenyev*, 6.

<sup>248</sup> Kuz'michëv, *Pisatel' Arsenyev*, 215.

Так и казалось, что вот-вот откуда-нибудь из-за пня выглянет маленький эльф в красном колпаке с седой бородой и с киркой в руках. Я задумался и, как всегда в таких случаях бывает, устремил глаза в одну точку. Эльф не показывался, а вместо него я вдруг увидел небольшого грациозного зверька рыже-бурого цвета с белым брюшком и черным хвостиком.<sup>249</sup>



Arsenyev and his guide Suntsay Geonka, 1927: <https://m.123ru.net/mix/223732721/>

The writing in this passage showcases a unique blend of scientific information and poetry, which is emblematic of the “*Arsenyevskaya forma*” that is prevalent in this particular literary work.<sup>250</sup> The author typically commences with highly detailed scientific observations, before progressively transitioning into personal reflections and subjective impressions of the event.

In the fourth chapter, the expeditionary group is caught unprepared by a strong storm, which is heralded by the Orochi with the name of Agdy: “It will be Agdy” (“*Budet Agdy*”).<sup>251</sup> Agdy is often featured in the Evenk tales as the personification of lightning, often depicted as a humanoid creature with a bear’s head or as a gray bird. Interestingly, Agdy is also found in *Dersu Uzala* since Orochi and Nanai, despite belonging to different tribes, share common beliefs. In this case, some mythological figures are present in both animist views on nature:

– Гром – это Агды. Когда черт долго держится в одном месте, то бог Эндули<sup>252</sup> посылает грозу, и Агды гонит черта. Значит, там, где разразилась гроза, был черт. После ухода черта (то есть после грозы) кругом воцаряется спокойствие: животные, птицы, рыбы, травы и насекомые тоже понимают, что черт ушел, и становятся жизнерадостными, веселыми...<sup>253</sup>

<sup>249</sup> It seemed as if a little elf in a red cap with a gray beard and a pickaxe was about to emerge from behind a tree stump. I thought about it and, as I always do in such cases, stared at one point. The elf didn’t show up, but instead, I saw a small, graceful, red-brown animal with a white belly and a black tail. Arsenyev, *Skvoz’ Taygu*, 26.

<sup>250</sup> In this regard, Kuz’michëv referred to it as being “hard to say whether there’s more scientific information or poetry.” Kuz’michëv, *Pisatel’ Arsenyev*, 197.

<sup>251</sup> Arsenyev, *Skvoz’ Taygu*, 40.

<sup>252</sup> According to the footnotes contained in this edition of the work, Enduli is the God of the sky. Arsenyev, *Po Ussuriyskomu Krayu, Dersu Uzala*, 380.

<sup>253</sup> - The thunder is Agdy. When the devil stays in one place for a long time, the god Enduli sends a thunderstorm, and Agdy drives the devil away. So, there was a devil where the thunderstorm broke out. After the devil has left ( that is, after the thunderstorm), calmness reigns around: animals, birds, fish,

On the other hand, the depiction of the thunderstorm in *Through the Taiga* is equally captivating. The description begins phenomenally (as in the elf episode), but evolves imaginatively with the storm raging like an ominous monster with shaggy fur that swallows the sun while its paws cover the celestial vault:

В виде страшного лохматого чудовища летела туча над землей, протянув вперед свои лапы и стараясь как бы охватить весь небосклон. От рева его содрогалась земля, и из пасти вылетали длинные языки пламени. Вдруг на земле сразу сделалось сумрачно — чудовище поглотило солнце. Несколько крупных капель упало на землю, деревья сердито зашумели и все разом качнулись в одну сторону. Вслед за тем хлынул ливень вместе с градом. Молнии прорезывали темные тучи огненными стрелами, сильные удары грома сотрясали воздух, отчего дождь шел еще сильнее.<sup>254</sup>

In contrast to earlier works, *Through the Taiga* features a significantly reduced amount of dialogue and a greater emphasis on the narrator's reflections. There are only a few brief exchanges of dialogue with the Orochi and the Russian members of the expedition. Furthermore, in this short story, there is a much closer connection between the author and the narrator, resulting in a more "realistic" portrayal of the character of Arsenyev compared to previous works (§ 2.1.2).<sup>255</sup>

In conclusion, the book frequently alludes to past journeys (in 1906, 1907, and 1908) and interactions with indigenous people. Thus, *Through the Taiga* can be regarded as a “*povest’ vstrech’*” or a story of encounters, where Arsenyev wistfully reminisces about the evenings spent by the campfire with his companions:

Время шло, а мы втроем все сидели и тихо разговаривали между собой. Такие бессонные ночи у огня в глухой тайге в дружеской беседе с человеком, к которому питаешь искреннюю симпатию и которого не видел много лет, всегда полны неизъяснимой прелести. Это лучшие страницы моих путевых дневников.<sup>256</sup>

The absence of distance between the narrator and author, the scarcity of dialogues, and the greater presence of scholarly observations and monologues, albeit with an important presence of lyricism, make *Through the Taiga*, in its formulation, more similar to travel letters

---

vegetation and insects also realize that the devil has left and become cheerful and joyful... Arsenyev, *Po Ussuriyskomu Krayu, Dersu Uzala*, 380–381.

<sup>254</sup> In the form of a terrible furry monster, the cloud flew over the earth, stretching forward its paws and trying as if to cover the whole firmament. Its roar shook the earth, and long tongues of flame flew out of its mouth. Suddenly the earth became gloomy at once - the monster had swallowed the sun. Several large drops fell to the ground, the trees rumbled angrily and all at once swayed to one side. A downpour of rain followed, along with hail. Lightnings cut through the dark clouds with arrows of fire, and violent thunderclaps shook the air, making the rain fall even harder. Arsenyev, *Skvoz’ Taygu*, 40.

<sup>255</sup> Kuz’michëv, *Pisatel’ Arsenyev*, 187.

<sup>256</sup> Time passed, and the three of us sat and talked quietly with each other. Such sleepless nights by the fire in the deep taiga in a friendly conversation with a person for whom you have a sincere sympathy and whom you have not seen for many years are always full of inexplicable charm. These are the best pages of my travel diaries. Arsenyev, *Skvoz’ Taygu*, 56.

than the writer's earlier books. In this sense, Kuz'michëv's statement that "In the books, and particularly in *Through the Taiga*, the diary methods are preserved"<sup>257</sup> finds an interpretation. It should also be taken into consideration that the experiences narrated in *Across the Ussuri Krai*, *Dersu Uzala*, and *Through the Taiga* were divided by a number of important events in the writer's life, including the death of almost the entirety of his family (§ 1.1.2), the World War, and, finally, the Russian Revolution and Civil War that tore apart the writer's homeland, who, despite remaining in the Far East, felt enormously the weight of the changes that shook the world at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Arsenyev's attempt to retrace his steps by adopting a style closer to the travel letters with which he had unwittingly begun his experience as a writer should probably be understood in this light.



Meeting of V. K. Arsenyev's expedition with N. M. Lvov's expedition. Iggu River. Suntsai Geonka - 1st from left, V. K. Arsenyev - 2nd, N. M. Lvov - standing 3rd from left. Year 1927: <https://news-life.pro/bikin/322760191/>

---

<sup>257</sup> «в книгах, и в частности в «Сквозь Тайгу», методы дневников сохранены». Kuz'michëv, *Pisatel' Arsenyev*, 192.

## 2.6 – Arsenyev’s fame in the international arena: *Dersu Uzala* (1975) by Akira Kurosawa

The success of the explorer’s works in the West between 1924 and 1925 was largely due to *Dersu Uzala*’s German translation by Yevgeniy Peppel’ (§ 1.3.1), but appreciation for the author’s works remained limited to the scientific community rather than the general public, whose attention was mostly drawn after the author’s death in 1930. The posthumous publication of *In the Sikhote-Alin’ Mountains (V Gorakh Sikhote-Alinya)* in 1937 by his wife Margarita Nikolayevna Solovyëva contributed to the writer’s increased fame, as the unfinished work recounted the events of the legendary 1908–1910 Jubilee Expedition, which was organized to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the annexation of Primorsky Krai to the Russian Empire (§ 1.1.2). Finally, the last contribution was made by the film adaption by renowned Japanese director Akira Kurosawa (1910–1998), which further amplified the popularity of the explorer more than forty years after his death.

The director, who made his debut in the 1940s, became known in Japan and abroad particularly in the 1950s, with films such as *Rashomon* (1950) and *Seven Samurai* (1954).<sup>258</sup> However, in the early 1970s, his career took a setback, leading to a failed suicide attempt in 1971.<sup>259</sup> Although initially pondering ending his career in the industry, Kurosawa signed a contract with the Soviet Mosfilm studios for the adaptation of Vladimir Arsenyev’s work *Dersu Uzala* in 1973.

The director had desired to bring the project to life as early as the 1930s, but the opportunity to shoot it, retracing Arsenyev’s expeditions in the taiga, proved unattainable.<sup>260</sup> Nevertheless, the following words demonstrated the director’s determination to shoot his latest film in Russia, despite the strained relationship between Japan and the Soviet Union during the 1970s:

---

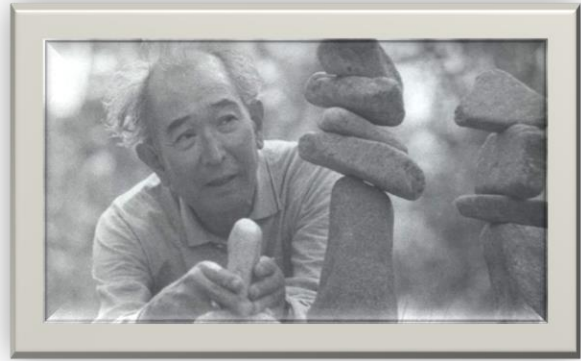
<sup>258</sup> Michael Wilmington and Peter Hogue, “Akira Kurosawa: 1910-1998,” *Film Comment* 35, no. 1 (1999): 18–25.

<sup>259</sup> Following the film *Dodes’ka-den* (1970), Kurosawa’s career suffered a setback, which led the director to cut himself several times with the intent to kill himself. See more in “The Life of Akira Kurosawa – Part 9: A Difficult Decade (1969–1978),” *Akira Kurosawa Info* (blog), March 2017, <https://akirakurosawa.info/biography-part-9/>.

<sup>260</sup> “The Life of Akira Kurosawa – Part 9.”

На Хоккайдо такой фильм по-настоящему не мог бы получиться. Там иные, не похожие на Уссурийскую тайгу масштабы природы. Там не мог бы жить такой человек, как Дерсу Узала. Эту картину нужно было снимать в русской земле.<sup>261</sup>

As a result, Akira Kurosawa left for the Soviet Union on December 11, 1973, and stayed there for a year and a half. The role of Vladimir Arsenyev was given to the well-known East Siberian actor Yuriy Solomin (1935–2024), who recently passed away.



*Akira Kurosawa on the set of Dersu Uzala (1975) in Primorsky Krai, building a stone stack that has spiritual meaning for many cultures of Siberia and the Far East: <https://akirakurosawa.info/biography-part-9/>*

Dersu Uzala, in turn, was played by Tuvan actor Maksim Munzuk (1910–1999). Once the shooting was over on April 28, 1975, as well as the post-production phase, Kurosawa returned to Japan in June of the same year.<sup>262</sup>

The settings, also due to the director's close attention to detail, produced a general enthusiasm that led many to define *Dersu Uzala* as Akira Kurosawa's "masterpiece," together with *Rashomon* and *The Seven Samurai*, which had earned him two Academy Awards in the 1950s. Avchenko recalled several instances of the director's scrupulousness, which contributed to the overall success of the film:

Усы и бороды у актёров были настоящими, солдатские ремни Кurosава собственноручно старил наждачной бумагой. Клал в ручей камень, чтобы течение каким-то особенным образом разбивалось о него, поправлял что-то в зарослях, подкрашивал листья, чтобы продлить золотую осень...<sup>263</sup>

The film, comprised of two parts similarly to the books *Across the Ussuri Krai* and *Dersu Uzala*, presents an accurate depiction of the explorer's experiences, ranging from the event on Lake Khanka to his encounter with the tiger and Dersu's demise. Furthermore, the soundtrack by the Soviet composer Isaac Schwartz (1923–2009), and the footage of the Ussuri region's natural surroundings add to the timelessness of the film.

---

<sup>261</sup> In Hokkaido, such a movie could not really have turned out. The scale of nature there is different from that of the Ussuri taiga. A man like Dersu Uzala could not live there. This movie had to be shot on the Russian soil. Avchenko, *Literaturnye Pervoprokhodtsy Dal'nego Vostoka*, 96.

<sup>262</sup> "The Life of Akira Kurosawa – Part 9."

<sup>263</sup> The actors' mustaches and beards were real, the soldier's belts were aged by Kurosawa himself with sandpaper. He put a stone in the stream so that the current in some special way crashed against it, corrected something in the thickets, and tinted the leaves to prolong the golden autumn. Avchenko, *Literaturnye Pervoprokhodtsy Dal'nego Vostoka*, 97.



Apart from being the first Japanese-Soviet co-produced work (by the aforementioned Mosfilm with the Japanese studio Daiei Film), the significance of the cinematic adaptation of Arsenyev's book is evidenced by the numerous honors and accolades it has received over time. The movie was awarded the 40<sup>o</sup> Academy Awards for Best Foreign Language Film, the Cinema Writers Circle Awards for Best Art and Experimental Film (*Mejor Pelicula de Arte y Ensayo*), the David di Donatello Awards for production, the Grand Jury Prize at the Moscow International Film Festival, and the French Syndicate of Cinema Critics for Best Foreign Film in 1978. At the same time, Akira Kurosawa received the David di Donatello and Silver Ribbon as Best Foreign Director.<sup>264</sup>

Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that the adaptation did not receive a positive reception in China due to the adverse comments made about Chinese poachers throughout the movie. In light of this, the opinions of the Chinese media are of significant value:

Ренегатская клика советских ревизионистов не упускает случая использовать литературу для пропагандирования своей экспансионистской политики... В сценарии не только описан ряд действий царя по оккупации китайской территории, но и обнаружилась претензия нового царя к нашей территории и в настоящее время.<sup>265</sup>

Even though the film was not intended to convey a political message, it has been subject to such criticism. Therefore, it is interesting to note that the same Sino-phobic remarks were made about Vladimir Arsenyev's *Dersu Uzala*, and his account *Kitaytsy v Ussuriyskom Kraye*, published in the 1920s. The similar backlash against the film demonstrates its faithfulness to the source material, as evidenced by both the overwhelmingly positive feedback it received and the criticism it faced. Despite their different upbringings, the two shared a remarkable affinity with looking at life and interpreting the world, which confirms the indisputable high esteem of Akira Kurosawa toward Vladimir Arsenyev:

Я очень уважаю его и как художника. Как и другие творцы русской литературы, он обладает способностью глубоко проникать в человеческие души. Для меня его книги дают еще и возможность продолжить размышления о том, что волнует меня всегда: почему люди не стараются быть счастливыми, как сделать их жизни счастливой?<sup>266</sup>

---

<sup>264</sup> *Dersu Uzala*, Adventure, Biography, Drama (Atelier 41, Daiei Studios, Mosfilm, 1976).

<sup>265</sup> The renegade clique of Soviet revisionists does not miss an opportunity to use the literature to propagandize their expansionist policy... In the movie script, not only a number of actions of the tsar to occupy Chinese territory are described, but also the claim of the new tsar to our territory is exposed and is presented in the present day. Avchenko, *Literaturnye Pervoprokhodtsy Dal'nego Vostoka*, 97. See also Raumolin, "L'Uomo Società Tradizione Sviluppo," 116.

<sup>266</sup> I have great respect for him as an artist as well. Like other creators of Russian literature, he possesses the ability to penetrate deeply into human souls. For me, his books also give the opportunity to continue reflecting on what has always bothered me: why do not people try to be happy, how to make their lives happy? Kuz'michëv, *Pisatel' Arsenyev*, 236.

In the twentieth century, both Akira Kurosawa and Vladimir Arsenyev explored the theme of ‘happiness’ in their works. This recurring motif captivated the Japanese filmmaker, who, like Arsenyev, found the answer to this question in the simplicity of the Nanai hunter (§ 3.3.2). In the film, the opening scene of the 1902 expedition can assume a symbolic value, since Vladimir Arsenyev’s expeditionary group is portrayed marching in the deep taiga while singing the ancient Cossack song *V ostrovakh okhotnik* (*There is a hunter in the isles*). Accordingly, the scene metaphorically represents the arrival of European civilization in the world of the natural man (§ 3.2.2):



Akira Kurosawa on the set of *Dersu Uzala* with Maksim Munzuk in the role of Dersu:  
[https://www.dvfu.ru/upload/medialibrary/a6a/ИВИ\\_202017%20N%203\\_108-120.pdf](https://www.dvfu.ru/upload/medialibrary/a6a/ИВИ_202017%20N%203_108-120.pdf)

В островах охотник целый день гуляет  
 Ему счастья нету –  
 Сам себе ругает  
 Как ему быть, счастливо служить да служить  
 Нельзя быть ему веселому,  
 Что зверь не бежит  
 Поехал охотник на теплые воды  
 Где гуляла рыбочка при ясной погоде  
 Там, на берегу вздумал отдохнуть да уснуть  
 да уснуть.<sup>267</sup>

All day our hunter goes around the isles  
 No luck him beguiles –  
 He curses his bad fortune  
 What is there to do, How can he perform his job  
 Never forgets our hunter,  
 That beast is no easy drop  
 There went our hunter to a warm seaside,  
 Where fish abounded on days quiet and bright  
 There, by the seaside, decided to rest  
 and fall asleep.<sup>268</sup>

Inspired by the widespread environmental consciousness in Japan during the 1970s, the filmmaker conceived the idea of bringing to life the struggle against the senseless devastation of nature so deeply ingrained in the spirit of the turn-of-the-century explorer. Nevertheless, Vladimir Arsenyev’s expeditions ultimately contributed to the environmental catastrophe, as stated by Christensen: “With his expeditions, Arsenyev laid the foundation stone to the disaster.

<sup>267</sup> Aleksandr Ryzhakov et al., *13. S Bol'shoy Kunaley - V ostrovakh okhotnik* (Moscow, 1966), <https://pesni.guru/text/13-с-большой-куналей-в-островах-охотник>. See also *V Ostrovakh Okhotnik. C Bol'shoy Kunaley. Zabaykal'skiye Semeyskiye*, 2021, accessed February 10, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fa1Oj23FoGk>.

<sup>268</sup> For the English translation of the Cossack song, the MA candidate decided to use the translation employed by Mosfilm for *Dersu Uzala*'s English subtitling: *Dersu Uzala | DRAMA | FULL MOVIE*, 2022, accessed on February 10, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sFaL03SKEzE>.

Destruction of what he is so fascinated with namely the World of Dersu Uzala.”<sup>269</sup> The comparison between the two film adaptations of Arsenyev’s work made by Christensen in *The Beginning of the 1900s, Russian Civilization of the Outer Manchuria Seen from the Artistic World*, is of extreme value in this regard.

The first adaptation of *Dersu Uzala* is less widely known and dates back to the early 1960s at the hands of the Armenian director Agasi Arutyunovich Babayan. The roles of Vladimir Arsenyev and Dersu Uzala were assigned to the Russian actor Adolf Shestakov (1928–1998) and the Kazakh Kasym Zhakibayev (1929–2011) respectively.

Unlike Kurosawa’s film which serves as a tribute to both the pioneering spirit of the author and the timeless message of environmental conservation, Babayan’s film focuses on shots of Far Eastern landscapes and praise of the Soviet Union and communist ideology without dealing with any issues of particular social relevance. For these reasons, Christensen labeled the first cinematic version as an “old propaganda movie of the communists,”<sup>270</sup> where Akira Kurosawa’s adaptation appears as “an example of how the Soviet film industry gave complete independence to a foreign director with several international film awards.”<sup>271</sup> Nonetheless, Babayan’s version, with its shots of extreme naturalistic charm of the fauna and flora of the Ussuri region, deserves more consideration.

Overall, the film adaptations of Vladimir Arsenyev’s text succeeded in fascinating millions of people in the Soviet Union and abroad, making the character of Dersu Uzala one of the most popular figures in twentieth-century Russian literature. The 1975 version allowed the world to embrace a film charged with enormous humanism that managed to find its ideal setting in the pristine forests of the Ussuri region.



*Adolf Shestakov and Kasym Zhakibayev in the role of Vladimir Arsenyev and Dersu Uzala on the set of Dersu Uzala (1961). Shot from the movie Dersu Uzala by Agasi Babayan.*

---

<sup>269</sup> Christensen, “The Beginning of the 1900s, Russian Civilization of the Outer Manchuria Seen from the Artistic World: Akira Kurosawa’s ‘Dersu Uzala’, Vladimir Arsenyev’s Book, the Russian Far Wild East, American Wild West and Greenland.”

<sup>270</sup> Christensen.

<sup>271</sup> Christensen.

## **CHAPTER III – A Colonial Travel Literature? Methodological considerations of Vladimir Arsenyev’s prose according to the Orientalist approach**

### **3.1 – *Orientalism* by Edward Said**

Edward Wadie Said (1935–2003) was a Palestinian American academic, literary and cultural critic, and political activist who, in 1978, published a controversial book, *Orientalism* that polarized public opinion. Born in Jerusalem into a Palestinian Christian family, he was forced to move to Alexandria due to the outbreak of the Palestinian War (1947–1949). Subsequently, Said went to the United States in 1951 and received his education in Massachusetts at Northfield Mount Hermon School.<sup>272</sup> After obtaining his bachelor’s degree from Princeton University (1957), and his master’s and Ph.D. degrees from Harvard University (1960, 1964), he became a full professor in 1969.

Labeled as one of the most influential books of the twentieth century, *Orientalism*<sup>273</sup> is the product of the author’s identity between Jerusalem, Egypt, and the United States. Said’s work, often regarded as the founding book for Postcolonial Studies and the one that gave birth to postcolonial criticism, examines the concept of ‘Orient’ developed by Europeans and, in general, by so-called “Westerners,” with particular reference to the Arab Islamic world, uncovering all its fallacies and biases. According to Said, the Romano-Germanic civilization, as a result of its colonial policy, arrogated to itself the right to distinguish as ‘Oriental’ everything belonging to a civilization other than itself, loading this term with negative connotations deriving from stereotypes aimed at making European civilization stand out as superior to the ‘Other.’

From a chronological perspective, Said outlined the historicization of Orientalism in two phases: Early and Contemporary Orientalism. By the former, he refers to the way Westerners described the East around the seventeenth century as mysterious and wild. While Contemporary Orientalism, in the European mindset, is usually connected to the Arab world or former European colonies in Africa. The generalizations of the latter perspective are similar for all

---

<sup>272</sup> Edward W. Said, “Edward Said | American Literary Critic & Philosopher | Britannica,” November 29, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Edward-Said>.

<sup>273</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, trans. Stefano Galli (Milan: Feltrinelli Editore, 2022).

different types of Orientalism; however, the present thesis follows the American perspective on Orientalism, which usually associates the term ‘Orient’ first and foremost with the Far East.<sup>274</sup>

Russia is a country that, over the centuries, has been confronted several times with other languages, religions, and cultures. Specifically, with the conquest of the Tatar Khanates of Kazan’ (1552) and Astrakhan (1556), the Russian Empire began to reunify the territories that were part of the former Golden Horde.<sup>275</sup> The long conquest of the Far East began with the expedition of Cossack Yermak in 1581 and Yerofey Khabarov (1603–1671) fifty years later. It was Khabarov who spoke of the fertility of the lands around the Amur River, which could have boosted the agricultural production of Siberia. Following the confrontation between the Manchu and Russia, the Tsarist Empire was able to acquire the Pacific region in 1858, which, according to Mark Bassin: “became the repository of hopes about national regeneration and destiny among progressives in the imperial metropole.”<sup>276</sup> This sensation, also known as “Amur Euphoria”<sup>277</sup> reflects the debate around the true identity of the Russian state between the Slavophiles and the Westernizers, as noticed by David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye. The so-called “*vstrechi solntsu*”<sup>278</sup> (“encountering the sun”) brought the Russians to engage for the first time with Asia, shamanic beliefs, and the various frontier peoples including Nanai, Honghuzi, Koreans, featured in the literary works of Vladimir Klavdiyevich Arsenyev.

### 3.1.1 – The representation of the East in literature

Orientalism is described as “a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient’s special place in European Western experience.”<sup>279</sup> According to Said, an objective ‘Orient’ does not exist, since it is a concept that stems from a relationship of power and dominance; instead, there are different types of Orients (philological, psychoanalytic, racist, etc.<sup>280</sup>). The various forms of hegemony underlying the East-West dichotomy have therefore allowed the West to assert itself as a superior civilization that had the task (often assigned by God) of educating other peoples:

---

<sup>274</sup> Said, 11.

<sup>275</sup> Kappeler, *Rußland als Vielvölkerreich. Entstehung. Geschichte. Zerfall*.

<sup>276</sup> David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, review of *Imperial Visions: Nationalist Imagination and Geographical Expansion in the Russian Far East, 1840–1865*, by Mark Bassin, *Historical Geography* 29 (1999): 913.

<sup>277</sup> Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, 914.

<sup>278</sup> I. S. Trusova, “Metodicheskie rekomendatsii k izucheniyu distsipliny ‘Literatura Dal’nego Vostoka’” (MGU imena adm. G. I. Nevel’skogo, 2008), 4.

<sup>279</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 1.

<sup>280</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 2022, 31.

To restore a region from its present barbarism to its former classical greatness; to instruct (for its own benefit) the Orient in the ways of the modern West; to subordinate or underplay military power in order to aggrandize the project of glorious knowledge acquired in the process of political domination of the Orient; to formulate the Orient, to give it shape, identity, definition...<sup>281</sup>

In the relationship of power between the West and the East, which aims to legitimize imperial conquests in the hands of the former, ‘knowledge’ plays an important role in preserving one’s position of superiority, namely knowing in order to conquer.<sup>282</sup> Furthermore, there is a relationship of complementarity whereby one cannot define itself except by confronting its opposite, which means that the East cannot exist<sup>283</sup> except in its opposition to the West.<sup>284</sup>

One prejudice common to the United States and Russia concerns the perception of the East as a threat. As mentioned in the previous chapter of this thesis (§ 2.3, footnote 60), especially since the breakdown of Sino-Russian relations, there has been an increasing fear of Asia, the so-called ‘Yellow Peril.’<sup>285</sup> Nevertheless, such negative perceptions of the East and China in particular were widely held in Russia well before the 1960s. Whilst during the eighteenth century the term “*kitayshchina*” (*Chinoiserie*) was used to give an exotic image of the Orient, in the early nineteenth century it was associated with images of despotism and corruption.<sup>286</sup> As for literature, Schimmelpenninck van der Oye noted that Anton Chekhov uses the term “*aziatchina*” to connote something negative. Similarly, Vladimir Arsenyev extensively sets out negative judgments about the Chinese as early as the beginning of the twentieth century (§ 3.2.1), since the regions of Manchuria and the Sino-Russian border have proven to be considerably more hazardous due to the proliferation of bandits, Honghuzi, and poachers, posing a challenge even to the indigenous populations of the Far East, as can be seen in *Dersu Uzala*.

Nevertheless, the Russian case is peculiar in that different types of East<sup>287</sup> can be distinguished: the Muslim East of the Caucasus highlanders and Crimea, East of the Central

---

<sup>281</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 1979, 86.

<sup>282</sup> Said, 27.

<sup>283</sup> This assertion is a notion that has been challenged by those who critique Said’s work, and who argue that an equivalent and counterbalancing Occidental theory should be considered (§ 3.1.3).

<sup>284</sup> Serena Andrea Brioschi and Marco De Pietri, eds., *Visioni d’Oriente. Stereotipi, impressioni, rappresentazioni dall’antichità ad oggi* (Milan: Pavia University Press, 2021), 6–7.

<sup>285</sup> Lewis H. Siegelbaum, “Another ‘Yellow Peril’: Chinese Migrants in the Russian Far East and the Russian Reaction before 1917,” *Modern Asian Studies* 12, no. 2 (April 1978): 307–30, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X00006132>.

<sup>286</sup> David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, “Asia Before Eurasianism: The Pre-Revolutionary Roots of a Russian Emigré Ideology,” in *The Return of Eurasia*, ed. Glenn Diesen and Alexander Lukin (Singapore: Springer Singapore, 2021), 87, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-2179-6\\_3](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-2179-6_3).

<sup>287</sup> See more in Vera Tolz, *Russia’s Own Orient: The Politics of Identity and Oriental Studies in the Late Imperial and Early Soviet Periods* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) and David

Asian steppes and towns, and the Far East of the taiga.<sup>288</sup> Taking this last Orient into consideration, it is worth reporting the Western representation of not only the imaginary Orient but also of the Orientals.<sup>289</sup> When referring to “Orientals or Arabs,” Said noted that in literature these are often depicted as naive, “devoid of energy and initiative,”<sup>290</sup> and reportedly unkind toward animals in terms of ethics.

On the one hand, the attributes presented by Said are completely antithetical to the Nanai hunter depicted by Vladimir Arsenyev (§ 2.4.1). Dersu lives in tune with nature, deeply respects animals and, at the same time, fears them:

– Вода, – отвечал он просто. – Ему могу кричи, могу плакать, могу тоже играй. Долго мне говорил этот первобытный человек о своем мировоззрении. Он видел живую силу в воде, видел ее тихое течение и слышал ее рев во время наводнений.<sup>291</sup>

Moreover, the Nanai is an enterprising character who bursts with life despite his old age, as seen when he temporarily transfers to live at Arsenyev’s estate in Khabarovsk. It is precisely his “doing nothing” and that he is sitting all day “in a box” (“*sidet’ v yashchike*”) that unsettles the Goldi.

On the other hand, the “realistic” portrayal of Dersu Uzala delineated by Pëtr Bordakov in the article *Poberezhye Yaponskogo Morya* (§ 2.4.2) partially matches the interpretation of the lazy Oriental neglectful of nature.<sup>292</sup> Consequently, it is legitimate to ponder whether Bordakov’s portrayal of Dersu Uzala was, after all, antithetically to Arsenyev’s but equally biased, influenced by the European colonialists’ preconceptions of the Orientals that Said discussed in *Orientalism*. However, if this were the case, it would not explain Arsenyev’s statement according to which the account drawn by Bordakov is: “*ves’ma zhivo i pravdivo*”

---

Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Russian Orientalism. Asia in the Russian Mind from Peter the Great to the Emigration* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

<sup>288</sup> Differently from the generic denomination of “Eastern Siberia”, the Far East is usually defined as the territory consisting of the lands east of Lake Baikal, thus referring purely to the territories of Transbaikal, Amur, Primorye, and the islands of Kamchatka and Sakhalin. Moreover, it is necessary to note that important contributions have been made from the perspective of Russian Orientalism in terms of the Caucasian-Central Asian relationship with Russia, whereas “Far Eastern” Orientalism remains an understudied field of research.

<sup>289</sup> In the Russian context, the term ‘Oriental’ is employed to label the ethnically non-Russian person: a Muslim in the case of Central Asia or Asian in the Far Eastern. For more information see Michael Kemper, “Russian Orientalism,” in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Asian History*, by Michael Kemper (Oxford University Press, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277727.013.297>.

<sup>290</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 1979, 38.

<sup>291</sup> - Вода,- he answered simply. - Him can shout, him can cry, him can play too. For a long time, this primitive man was telling me about his worldview. He saw a living force in the water, saw its quiet flow, and heard its roar during floods. Arsenyev, *Po Ussuriyskomu Krayu, Dersu Uzala*, 56.

<sup>292</sup> It should be noted that in Bordakov's article, Dersu claims to have killed numerous tigers as well as several Honghuzi (§ 2.4.2), whereas in Arsenyev's *Dersu Uzala*, the Nanai, along with the explorer and the other soldiers, help the wild animals escaping the trap holes set by the Honghuzi.

(“pretty vivid and trustworthy”).<sup>293</sup> Either way, what is certain is that in both transpositions of Dersu Uzala’s character: “What matters here is that Asia speaks through and by virtue of the European imagination.”<sup>294</sup> Said, as well as John London (§ 3.1.3), believed that the Oriental must be able to wake up and speak out, thus making its voice heard against the “European imagination” that seeks to control nature and its aborigines.

The title of the first chapter of this thesis introduced Vladimir Arsenyev as a geographer, ethnographer, writer, Far East researcher, and military orientalist, which is the department in charge of studying the East from a military perspective. In every profession pertaining to the Orient, it is imperative for the researcher to adopt a detached and unbiased approach when examining the subjects under consideration. However, the challenge for an Orientalist lies precisely in his distance from the object of research. Said believes that an unbiased analysis is impossible, since the Orientalist, “as a judge of the Orient,”<sup>295</sup> can hide his sympathies and antipathies for the East behind a professional façade, but he cannot suppress his preconceptions entirely. As a matter of fact, Igor’ Kuz’michëv corroborates this idea while discussing the scientific research of the explorer:

Таежные аборигены не были для Арсеньева посторонним объектом академического изучения, он писал о них как о своих знакомых, помощниках, подчас спасителях [...] Даже в чисто научных работах [...] есть страницы, не лишённые лирики, а точнее говоря – человеческой теплоты.<sup>296</sup>

The first chapter thoroughly covered the qualities and moral principles of the author, among which his great empathy plays a relevant role (§ 1.1). Hence, despite the high level of expertise that Vladimir Arsenyev demonstrated in his steadfast integrity, the explorer is precluded from complete objectivity toward the peoples he studied: “His Orient is not the Orient as it is, but the Orient as it has been Orientalized.”<sup>297</sup>

Nonetheless, Vladimir Arsenyev’s is a distinctive case since he had contrasting relationships with the different peoples of the Far East, therefore, it is not possible to delineate a univocal attitude toward the aborigines (§ 3.2.1). However, regardless of his considerations, the mission to “civilize” and urbanize the region advanced, whereby the Far East was kept

---

<sup>293</sup> Arsenyev, *Po Ussuriyskomu Krayu, Dersu Uzala*, 274.

<sup>294</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 1979, 56.

<sup>295</sup> Said, 104.

<sup>296</sup> Taiga natives were not an extraneous object of academic research for Arsenyev, he wrote about them as his acquaintances, helpers, sometimes saviors [...] Even in purely scientific works, [...] there are pages not devoid of lyrics, or to put it more precisely - human warmth. Igor’ Sergeyeovich Kuz’michëv, *Pisatel’ Arsenyev* (Leningrad: Sovetskiy pisatel’, 1977), 123–124.

<sup>297</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 1979, 104.



‘silent.’<sup>298</sup> On the one hand, the urbanization processes of the Far East (§ 3.2) have inevitably led to a shrinking of the once-rich fauna; on the other hand, the Tungus people have been forcibly subjected to modernization practices<sup>299</sup> introduced in the Primorye territory (§ 3.3.2), in spite of the evident incapacity of the aborigines to live in the Imperial context (“*Kak mozhno lyudi v yashchike sidet’?*”<sup>300</sup>).

### 3.1.2 – Latent and Manifest Orientalism

Saidian Orientalism can be divided into two strands: latent and manifest. The first is represented by the Orientalists’ unconscious ideas about the East, where manifest Orientalism is the way Westerners concretely portray the East after being brought into contact with it.<sup>301</sup>

During his stays in Petersburg and Łomża in the first period of his life (§ 1.1.1), Vladimir Arsenyev adhered to a latent idea of the Orient: wild, distant, namely a world that, as Said put it, is “a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences.”<sup>302</sup> Stemming from the literature that was read by the author in his childhood, such as the *Arabian Nights* and Jules Verne works (§ 1.1.1), and the scientific contributions of Przheval’sky explored at the Saint Petersburg gymnasium, this notion differs from the manifest Orientalism upheld by Arsenyev in the second phase of his life. By moving to the Far East and interacting with the locals, the writer made artistic and scientific contributions, thereby fostering the myth of an East pure and free from Western corruption.

### 3.1.3 – Praise and criticism of Said’s methodology

Since its publication in 1978, Edward Said’s *Orientalism* has garnered both praise and criticism. While some have lauded its contribution to colonial discourse and postcolonial studies, others have pointed out its imperfections. Despite the criticism, the book’s relevance to these fields remains unquestionable.

The subject of colonialism is multifaceted and complex because it encompasses various forms of Orientalism. Nevertheless, according to some scholars, Said’s work stands apart due

---

<sup>298</sup> Said, 94.

<sup>299</sup> Kappeler, *Rußland als Vielvölkerreich. Entstehung. Geschichte. Zerfall*, 186.

<sup>300</sup> “How can people stay in a box.” Arsenyev, *Po Ussuriyskomu Krayu, Dersu Uzala*, 435.

<sup>301</sup> Min Pun, “The East-West Dichotomy: From Orientalism to Postcoloniality,” *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 24, no. 1 (2019): 75–79, <https://doi.org/10.9790/0837-2401087579>.

<sup>302</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 1979, 1.

to its exceptional “true critical worldliness,”<sup>303</sup> which allows it to portray the East-West contrast thoughtfully, encompassing multiple disciplines within the humanities and social sciences. It is noteworthy to mention that Noam Chomsky acknowledged the significance of Edward Said’s work, which enabled the European audience to reflect upon their own culture. Furthermore, the author’s background, influenced by both Eastern and Western cultures, played a crucial role in his ability to provide unique insights into the subject matter:

His scholarly work has been devoted to unraveling mythologies about ourselves and our interpretation of others, reshaping our perceptions of what the rest of the world is and what we are. The second is the harder task; nothing’s harder than looking into the mirror.<sup>304</sup>

As pointed out by Ahmad Ameen Al-shamiri in his work *A Critique of Edward Said’s Orientalism as a Source Text for Postcolonial Approaches to Literature*, prior to the publication of *Orientalism*, no direct connection had been established between the “representation/perception of colonialism and colonial power”<sup>305</sup> within the literary sphere.

Nevertheless, Said was accused of politicizing Orientalist Studies, and additional criticism was levied against his stance on the Palestinian issue,<sup>306</sup> which challenged his support for a two-state solution in the Middle East. As a result, *Orientalism* was published in Israel, but never in Arabic.<sup>307</sup> Besides, some others feel that Said’s book appears “restrictive” and “reductionist” because it primarily considers the European (particularly Anglo-French) and American perceptions, leaving out completely other realities (such as, for instance, that of Russian Orientalism)<sup>308</sup> and not making any reference to the positive cultural exchange that had taken place over the centuries between the East and West.<sup>309</sup> Overall, as observed by Noam Chomsky, although Said’s work is not exempt from biases and generalizations that make it

---

<sup>303</sup> Mohammed Harrag, “Edward Said’s Controversial Work *ORIENTALISM* and the American Orientalism,” *International Journal of Science and Research* 7, no. 7 (2018): 205, <https://doi.org/10.21275/ART20183781>.

<sup>304</sup> Moustafa Bayoumi and Andrew Rubin, eds., *The Edward Said Reader* (New York: Vintage Books, 2000), 6.

<sup>305</sup> Mohammed Ahmad Ameen Al-shamiri, “A Critique of Edward Said’s Orientalism as a Source Text for Postcolonial Approaches to Literature,” *International Journal of Language and Literature* 4, no. 1 (2016): 271, <https://doi.org/10.15640/ijll.v4n1a32>.

<sup>306</sup> In this regard, the following year Edward Said wrote a book, *The Question of Palestine* (1979), which further polarized public opinion.

<sup>307</sup> Bayoumi and Rubin recall that a publishing house in Beirut offered Said to have the book published in Arabic. However, faced with the demand to remove his criticism of Syria and Saudi Arabia, the author declined the offer. See more in Bayoumi and Rubin, *The Edward Said Reader*, 63.

<sup>308</sup> Keith Windschuttle, “Edward Said’s ‘Orientalism Revisited,’” *The New Criterion* 17, no. 5 (1999), <https://ontology.buffalo.edu/smith/courses01/rrtw/Windschuttle.htm>. The same criticism is addressed to Said by Monika Greenleaf in *Pushkin and Romantic Fashion. Fragment, Elegy, Orient, Irony* (Stanford (CA): Stanford University Press, 1994), 108.

<sup>309</sup> Harrag, “Edward Said’s Controversial Work *ORIENTALISM* and the American Orientalism,” 206.

attackable<sup>310</sup> from many aspects, the Palestinian-American writer achieved a remarkable degree of influence and notoriety, shedding light on the notion of colonial representation that made him the intellectual initiator of the colonial discourse theory and Postcolonial studies at large.

Concerning the branch of Russian Orientalism, Said himself explained the reason for not referring to the Far East in his book:

Immediately upon doing that, a large part of the Orient seemed to have been eliminated – India, Japan, China, and other sections of the Far East – not because these regions were not important (they obviously have been) but because one could discuss Europe’s experience of the Near Orient, or of Islam, apart from its experience of the Far Orient.<sup>311</sup>

Hence, several scholars, moving from *Orientalism*, have subsequently analyzed the issue of Russian Orientalism within the context of Said’s conceptualization of the term.<sup>312</sup> As underscored in *Russia, Oriente, Orientalismo*, it is essential to scrutinize the case of Russia, since it should be viewed as both the object and subject of the Orientalist discourse.<sup>313</sup> Interestingly, one of the interpretations of the Coat of Arms of the Russian Federation is its symbolic meaning for the country’s sovereignty over Europe and Asia, as represented by the double-headed eagle, since both regions hold equivalent significance in the Russian discourse.

It has been previously stated that the country is characterized by a diverse array of ‘East’s’ (§ 3.1.1), therefore, it is essential to differentiate between the ‘real Orient’s’ and the ‘imaginary Orient’s.’<sup>314</sup> Aldo Ferrari observes that the Russian case must be examined in its historical specificities, therefore criticizing Said’s affirmation that: “every European, in what he could say about the Orient, was consequently a racist, an imperialist, and almost totally ethnocentric.”<sup>315</sup> As a matter of fact, the author states that the Russian Empire and the European colonial empires should be analyzed separately in Orientalist discourse, as they have differences in history, geography, and anthropology; an opinion also shared by Andreas Kappeler, who cautions against trivializing the concepts of ‘imperialism’ and ‘colonialism’.<sup>316</sup> In this sense, it

---

<sup>310</sup> Several criticisms have been raised against Said’s work, especially concerning the inconsistencies of his method and the inaccuracies of his representation of the East. See more in Ahmad Ameen Al-shamiri, “A Critique of Edward Said’s Orientalism as a Source Text for Postcolonial Approaches to Literature,” 271.

<sup>311</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 1979, 17.

<sup>312</sup> Michael Kemper clarifies that the Russian concept of “*Vostokovedenie*” is associated with the field of Orientology (“*Orientalistika*”), while to refer to Said’s critique one refers to “*Orientalizm*”: Kemper, “Russian Orientalism,” 1. In this regard, see also V. O. Bobrovnikov and Seyed Dzhavad Miri, eds., *Orientalizm vs. orientalistika: Sbornik statey*, Islamica & Orientalistica (Moscow: Sadra, 2016).

<sup>313</sup> Aldo Ferrari, “Russia, Oriente, Orientalismo,” ed. Serena Andrea Brioschi and Marco De Pietri, *Visioni d’Oriente. Stereotipi, impressioni, rappresentazioni dall’antichità ad oggi*, 2021, 85.

<sup>314</sup> Ferrari, 86.

<sup>315</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 1979, 204.

<sup>316</sup> Kappeler, *Rußland als Vielvölkerreich. Entstehung. Geschichte. Zerfall*, 9.

is worth noting that European imperial powers were physically isolated from their colonies by the sea, whereas the Russian Empire's conquests were confined to the continent.<sup>317</sup> Furthermore, as David Schimmelpenninck observes in *The Curious Fate of Edward Said in Russia*, this distinction had significant implications on the nature of imperial rule and the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized since "many Russians had Asian roots themselves – and were quite conscious of the fact."<sup>318</sup> Hence, the ambivalence between Europe and Asia has allowed Russia to relate, in alternating stages of its history, to both its identities, seeking a compromise in the middle between East and West, as Pëtr Chaadayev pointed out:

[...] we have never advanced along with other people; we are not related to any of the great human families; we belong neither to the West nor to the East, and we possess the traditions of neither. Placed, as it were, outside of the times, we have not been affected by the universal education of mankind.<sup>319</sup>

Referring to Peter the Great's reforms that brought profound Europeanization to Russia in the eighteenth century, Ferrari shares the view of Tolz, Kappeler, and other scholars who highlighted Russia's self-identification difficulties in the bipolar East-West context, as was also evident in Chaadayev's 1836 *First Philosophical Letter*.

Similarly, at the beginning of the twentieth century, Vladimir Arsenyev questioned the concepts of East and West and of Orientals and Westerners. Constant interactions with the aborigines of the *Dal'niy Vostok* and the friendship with Dersu Uzala cracked the author's firm military orientalist convictions about the colonization of Russia's remote areas and the notion of civilization. In the very first pages of *Po Ussuriyskomu Krayu*, Arsenyev indulges in reflections on his preconceptions as a European and thoughts on his idea of the East prior to the relocation to the Ussuri krai (i.e. Arsenyev's latent Orientalism), and the reality observed after "experiencing" the East (§ 3.1.2):

Чем ближе я присматривался к этому человеку, тем больше он мне нравился. С каждым днем я открывал в нем новые достоинства. Раньше я думал, что эгоизм особенно свойствен дикому человеку, а чувство гуманности, человеколюбия и внимания к чужому интересу присуще только европейцам. Не ошибся ли я?<sup>320</sup>

---

<sup>317</sup> In this regard, Vera Tolz notes that Russia, as a "land-based Empire", unlike the European colonial powers, possessed the contiguity that allowed its elites to culturally subjugate and integrate more efficiently the nationalities of the newly annexed territories. Tolz, *Russia's Own Orient: The Politics of Identity and Oriental Studies in the Late Imperial and Early Soviet Periods*, 24.

<sup>318</sup> David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, "The Curious Fate of Edward Said in Russia," *Études de Lettres*, no. 2–3 (September 15, 2014): 83, <https://doi.org/10.4000/edl.686>.

<sup>319</sup> Yuri Glazov, "Chaadayev and Russia's Destiny," *Studies in Soviet Thought* 32, no. 4 (1986): 284.

<sup>320</sup> The closer I looked at this man, the more I liked him. Every day I discovered new virtues in him. I used to think that selfishness was particularly characteristic of the wild man, and that the sense of humanity, compassion, and attention to other people's interests were inherent only in Europeans. Was I not mistaken? Arsenyev, *Po Ussuriyskomu Krayu, Dersu Uzala*, 51–52.

This passage from *Across the Ussuri Krai* stands in antithesis (like the character of Dersu) to the fictional interpretation of East and Orientals in the Saidian text. Despite the colonial traits that are to be found in Arsenyev's works,<sup>321</sup> his books can be read as an attempt to understand the 'other' side of Russia and consider it in its specificities (§ 3.3.2).

In the same timeframe, the American writer John London (1876–1916), who also penned works about the Far Eastern regions, (§ 2.1) believed that “the heyday of white supremacy, Western expansionism, and imperialism was coming to an end.”<sup>322</sup> Since he was an enthusiast of the peoples of Asia and the South Pacific, his disdain for imperialism in the Far East is indisputable. By applying his thoughts to the matter of Russian pretensions in the East, the loss suffered in the Russo-Japanese War, and the emergence of a literature representing the small peoples of Siberia and the Far East (he predicted that “Asia was waking up”<sup>323</sup>), Jack London's perspective can be considered legitimate. The ongoing debates among scholars about Saidian and Russian Orientalism, in particular, attest to the complexity of such issues, which may not have a clear-cut solution. Nonetheless, the significance of this topic is exemplified in Arsenyev's works, including his diaries, travelogues, and private correspondence.

---

<sup>321</sup> The explorer's expeditions (in 1906, 1907, and 1908) moved from an imperial task, namely, to carry out assignments for the Russian Geographical Society. Others, such as the Secret Missions of 1911–1915, in which the main task was to exterminate the Honghuzi from the Russian Far Eastern regions, have also an important military utility, as well as geographical and ethnographic value. See more in Ivan Yegorchev, *Neizvestnyy Arsenyev* (Vladivostok: Izdatel'stvo Dal'nevostochnogo universiteta, 2016), Ivan Yegorchev, *Soglasno Lichnogo Prikazaniya Vashogo Vysokoprevoskhoditel'stva... Sekretnye Ekspeditsii V. K. Arsenyeva 1911-1913 gg.* (Vladivostok: Izdatel'stvo Dal'nevostochnogo federal'nogo universiteta, 2014).

<sup>322</sup> Daniel A. Métraux, “Jack London and The Yellow Peril,” *Education About Asia*, History, Literature, and the Construction of “Memory” in Asia, № 1, no. 14 (2009): 30.

<sup>323</sup> Métraux, 30.

## 3.2 – Implementing Orientalist views to the works of V. K. Arsenyev: A European perspective on the Russian Far East

### 3.2.1 – Sympathies and antipathies toward the ethnic groups of the Far East

Despite the efforts to comprehend the complexities of the ‘Other Russia,’ Arsenyev could not avoid passing judgment on the diverse array of individuals he encountered during his travels, including the Chinese, Koreans, Nanai, Orochi, Honghuzi, and Russian settlers as well. Therefore, as a “judge of the Orient”<sup>324</sup> (§ 3.1.1), the writer’s works reflect the various encounters he had with these groups and the impression he formed as a result.

As for Nanai and Orochi-Udege, the author developed a relationship of friendship, mutual trust, and respect that marked his perception of these two tribes permanently, as can be seen in the depiction of Dersu Uzala (§ 2.4.1), in whom Arsenyev inscribed all the positive traits of the aborigines he met on the expeditions. Furthermore, several relevant passages in the literary works report the extreme solidarity of the overall natives of the Far East, which captivated the sympathies of the Russian explorer:

1. Чужая нужда – его нужда. Вот почему семья умершего никогда не остается без хлеба.<sup>325</sup>
2. Если у удэхе не хватило продовольствия [...] он просто идет к соседу, зная, что ему никогда не будет отказа.<sup>326</sup>

In addition, as anticipated in the first chapter (§ 1.3.1), the observations of Avchenko,<sup>327</sup> Kuz’michëv,<sup>328</sup> and other scholars in relation to Fadeyev and Arsenyev are worth mentioning. On multiple occasions, both writers refer to aborigines as inherently communist people because of their values of sharing:

1. Это первобытный коммунизм<sup>329</sup> всегда красной нитью проходил во всех его действиях. Трудями своей охоты он одинаково делился со всеми соседями, независимо от национальности, и себе оставлял ровно столько, сколько давал другим.<sup>330</sup>

---

<sup>324</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 1979, 104.

<sup>325</sup> The stranger’s need is his need. That is why the family of the deceased is never left without bread. Kuz’michëv, *Pisatel’ Arsenyev*, 122.

<sup>326</sup> If the Udege has not had enough food [...] he just goes to his neighbor, aware that he will never be rejected. Kuz’michëv, 121.

<sup>327</sup> Avchenko, *Literaturnye Pervoprokhodtsy Dal’nego Vostoka*.

<sup>328</sup> Kuz’michëv, *Pisatel’ Arsenyev*.

<sup>329</sup> In this passage, Vladimir Arsenyev is referring to Dersu Uzala’s ethics.

<sup>330</sup> This primordial communism has always permeated all his actions. He equally shared the fruits of his hunting with all his neighbors, regardless of nationality, and kept for himself exactly as much as he gave to others. Arsenyev, *Po Ussuriyskomu Krayu, Dersu Uzala*, 279.

2. Пржевальский совершенно не понял удэгейцев... Он, конечно, не мог и подозревать, что имеет дело с первобытными коммунистами...<sup>331</sup>

The second excerpt, taken from Fadeyev's letters, highlights the strong influence Arsenyev had on the writer, which is echoed in his best-known works, including *The Last of the Udege*. In this passage, the writer emphasizes the limitations of Przheval'sky's renowned work, *Puteshestviye v Ussuriyskom Kraye. 1867–1869 g*, due to the historical context in which it was written. The writer argues that the views of the explorer are not accurate, since they are based on a lack of knowledge about the communist nature of the Udege, as Communism was not a popular ideology yet. The topic of 'Communism' is particularly relevant for the examination of Soviet Imperialism, which viewed the indigenous peoples and their beliefs as outdated and sought to impose "civilization" upon them. However, in the works of Arsenyev and Fadeyev, the native inhabitants of the Far East are portrayed as more in line with Communism than Russian settlers. This is particularly exemplified by the brief exchange between Arsenyev and an Old Believer in the pages of *Dersu Uzala*, where the validity of the Goldi faith is debated:

– Хороший он человек, правдивый, – говорил старовер. – Одно только плохо – нехристь он, азиат, в бога не верует, а вот поди-ка, живет на земле все равно также, как и я. Чудно, право! И что с ним только на том свете будет?

– Да то же, что со мной и с тобой, – ответил я ему.

– Оборони, царица небесная, – сказал старовер и перекрестился. – Я истинный христианин по церкви апостольской, а он что? Нехристь. У него и души-то нет, а пар.<sup>332</sup>

Unlike the moral, ethical, and spiritual connection that Arsenyev shared with the aborigines, he deals in a cold and detached tone with the Old Believers. The writer believed that, in the occurrence of a war, the "starovery" would have remained neutral toward the Japanese threat, as pointed out by Vasilii Avchenko in *Literaturnye Pervoprokhodtsy Dal'nego Vostoka*.<sup>333</sup> Instead, the Nanai rather than being a hindrance to the war effort could have potentially proved useful in battle, given their strategic skills and animosity toward the Japanese: "[...] the best scouts that one can only imagine and what our Russian migrant

---

<sup>331</sup> Przheval'sky did not understand the Udege at all... He, of course, could not suspect that he was dealing with primordial communists... Avchenko, *Literaturnye Pervoprokhodtsy Dal'nego Vostoka*, 127.

<sup>332</sup> - He is a good man, a trustworthy man, - said the Old Believer. - The only bad thing is that he is a heathen, an Asiatic, he does not believe in God, and yet he lives on earth just as I do. Strange indeed! And what will happen to him on the other side?

- The same thing that will happen to me and you, - I replied to him.

- Protect me, O Queen of Heaven, - said the Old Believer and crossed himself. - I am a true Christian according to the Apostolic Church, and who is he? An unholy man. He doesn't even have a soul, just steam. Arsenyev, *Po Ussuriyskomu Kraju, Dersu Uzala*, 278–279.

<sup>333</sup> «Они в лучшем случае займут нейтралитет по отношению к японцам». Avchenko, *Literaturnye Pervoprokhodtsy Dal'nego Vostoka*, 106.

peasants will never be.”<sup>334</sup> Beyond utilitarian purposes, Arsenyev’s antipathy for Old Believers is mainly related to their intolerance, as is the case in *Dersu Uzala*’s following passage:

– На охоту, – отвечал он. – Моя хочу один козуля убей – надо староверу помогай, у него детей много. Моя считал – шесть есть.

«Не душа, а пар», – вспомнились мне слова старовера. Хотелось мне отговорить Дерсу ходить на охоту для этого «истинного христианина по церкви апостольской», но этим я доставил бы ему только огорчение, и воздержался.<sup>335</sup>

In other cases, Arsenyev describes the Russians as lazy drunks who spend everything they have on alcohol, but more importantly, he believes that they are unsuitable for a future confrontation with Japan: “It is painful to realize that these are Russian people!”<sup>336</sup>

Nevertheless, the author’s considerations of the settlers in the Far East are not univocally negative, as can be seen from the encounter with the peasants in the village of Permskoye, near Ol’ga Bay in the Primorye territory. These individuals are highly regarded by the writer for their sober and reasonable nature, as they have resided in the Far East since the early years of the Russian annexation in 1858. Furthermore, they are commended for the introduction of “temporary regulations” (“*vremennye pravila*”) to control hunting: “They take hunting very seriously and, most interestingly, they are especially concerned about the preservation of the animals.”<sup>337</sup>

The writer also had mixed attitudes toward different Asian nationalities. Unlike aborigines, Koreans and Chinese people have been criticized in several instances. The latter, in particular, were subjected to judgment, which is to be found especially in Arsenyev’s scientific account *Kitaytsy v Ussuriyskom Kraye*.<sup>338</sup> This work led to Gerontiy Yefimov’s reproof of Arsenyev as an alleged supporter of Russian Imperialism in the interests of the bourgeoisie (§ 1.2), although the explorer had criticized only the Chinese who did not recognize Russian sovereignty over the Primorye territory:

---

<sup>334</sup> «[...] это лучшие лазутчики, каких можно только себе представить и какими никогда не будут наши русские крестьяне-переселенцы». Avchenko, 106.

<sup>335</sup> To hunt, - he answered. - I want one roe deer to kill - the Old Believer needs to be helped, he has a lot of children. My counted - there are six.

"Not a soul, just a steam", - I remembered the words of the Old Believer. I wanted to dissuade Dersu from going hunting for this "true Christian according to the Apostolic Church," but by this, I would have caused him only grief, so I refrained. Arsenyev, *Po Ussuriyskomu Kraju, Dersu Uzala*, 279.

<sup>336</sup> «Больно сознавать, что это русские люди!» Avchenko, *Literaturnye Pervoprophodtsy Dal'nego Vostoka*, 110.

<sup>337</sup> «К охоте они относятся весьма серьезно и, что интереснее всего, особенно заботятся о сохранении зверя». Kuz'michëv, *Pisatel' Arsenyev*, 68.

<sup>338</sup> This work, which was the result of the secret expeditions of 1911-1915, in which Arsenyev led a series of raids against illegals and poachers, has resulted in the author being awarded the IRGO Silver Medal, a prestigious honor bestowed by the Imperial Russian Geographical Society in recognition of exceptional accomplishments. Avchenko, 102.



Вообще китайцы по природе народ крайне жестокий. По виду они чрезвычайно добродушны, но в то же время в характере их есть какая-то затаенная страсть к мучениям.<sup>339</sup>

Both the book of *Dersu Uzala* and Akira Kurosawa's eponymous film depict the trap holes left by the Honghuzi,<sup>340</sup> who sentence the animals of the taiga to a cruel death. Notably, it is a wealthy Chinese man who initially robs Dersu while the explorer, on the other hand, is wary of the unexpected generosity shown by a Chinese man: "I myself found this Chinese man suspicious and disliked his ingratiating and familiarity very much."<sup>341</sup> In this particular episode, the exploratory company encounters a group of hostile Udege who inquire as to why the Russians rested in the *fanza*<sup>342</sup> of Li Tan-kuy. It is later revealed that the Chinese exploited the "inorodtsy," thereby confirming Dersu's suspicions:



Participants of the first secret expedition at the beast hut in the taiga. V. K. Arsenyev - far left (sitting), 1911: <https://pvs-rgo.ru/2020/05/31/vladimir-klavdievich-arsenev/>

Китаец Ли Тан-куй нещадно эксплуатировал туземцев долины Имана и жестоко наказывал их, если они к назначенному времени не доставляли определенного числа мехов.<sup>343</sup>

<sup>339</sup> In general, the Chinese are naturally an extremely cruel people. They look extremely kind-hearted, but at the same time, there is a hidden passion for torture in their character. Sazonov, *Pervoprokhodtsy Dal'nego Vostoka. Nastoyashchie russkie geroi: ot Yerofeya Khabarova do Vladimira Arsenyeva, Ivana Yefremova i Grigoriya Fedoseyeva*, 328.

<sup>340</sup> From the Russian "Khunkhuzy," which means "with the red beards" ("krasnoborodye"), was a Chinese group found in Manchuria, North China, Korea, Amurskiy krai and oblast' of Primorye. They were fugitives from the Chinese authorities who engaged in theft, poaching, looting and various crimes: Arsenyev, *Po Ussuriyskomu Krayu, Dersu Uzala*, 223.

<sup>341</sup> «Мне самому китаец этот казался подозрительным и очень не нравились его заискивания и фамильярность». Arsenyev, 257.

<sup>342</sup> Rural habitation of Chinese, Korean and taiga peoples.

<sup>343</sup> The Chinese Li Tan-kuy mercilessly exploited the natives of the Iman Valley and severely punished them if they did not deliver a certain amount of fur by the appointed time. Arsenyev, *Po Ussuriyskomu Krayu, Dersu Uzala*, 258.

Resembling the episode of Li Tan-Kuy, several cases of aboriginal abuse by Chinese bandits have been observed. Together with their cruelty toward nature and disregard for Russian laws or territories («Китайцы отняли у тазов женщин и разделили между собою как движимое имущество»<sup>344</sup>), Avchenko considers such practices to be manifestations of Chinese “soft power” in the Russian Far East.<sup>345</sup>

As noted by Vladimir Arsenyev in his scientific account, the Chinese used to illegally emigrate to the Far Eastern region to change the aborigines’ perspective on Russians:

За последние годы китайцы по отношению к тазам избрали другую политику, и эта политика гораздо опаснее, чем эксплуатация. Они стали устраивать среди инородцев свои школы [...] Дети изучают китайские иероглифы [...] Учитель учит их этике, знакомит их с историей Китая, ни слова не говорит о России или говорит о ней то, что не надо [...] инородец на всё уже будет смотреть китайскими глазами. То, что должны были сделать русские, сделали китайцы [...] за счет тех же инородцев.<sup>346</sup>

Like the Chinese in the Russian Far Eastern territories, the practice of Russification was typically used by the Russian Empire to culturally and administratively incorporate the subdued populations with the aim of “strengthening the integrity of the empire with nation-building tools.”<sup>347</sup>

The history of the relations between the Nanai (or Heje) and the Chinese deserves more consideration, as it stems from a centenary struggle between the Chinese and Manchu for control over Northern and Southern Manchuria. The Nanai people, who were commonly settled in the northern part along the banks of the Ussuri and Sungari Rivers,<sup>348</sup> participated in a Manchu-directed Federation for the conquest of China in 1644, carrying out border control duties.<sup>349</sup> While providing protection for the preservation of their ethnic traditions, the Manchu leaders decided to introduce Chinese fur traders into northern Manchuria to stimulate the local market, which attracted Russians in the second half of the nineteenth century. The Chinese introduced opium and alcohol into Manchuria, bringing about several cases of addiction among

---

<sup>344</sup> “The Chinese took the women from the Tazis and divided them among themselves as chattels.” Avchenko, *Literaturnye Pervoprokhodtsy Dal’nego Vostoka*, 107.

<sup>345</sup> Avchenko, 107.

<sup>346</sup> In recent years, the Chinese have adopted a different policy toward the Taz, and this policy is much more dangerous than exploitation. They have begun to set up their own schools among the natives [...] Children learn Chinese characters [...] A teacher teaches them ethics, introduces them to the history of China, does not say a word about Russia or says something about it that is not appropriate [...] a native will look at everything with Chinese eyes. What the Russians had to do, the Chinese did [...] at the expense of the very same natives. Arsenyev, *Kitaytsy v Ussuriyskom Kraye*, 90–91.

<sup>347</sup> Tolz, *Russia’s Own Orient: The Politics of Identity and Oriental Studies in the Late Imperial and Early Soviet Periods*, 24.

<sup>348</sup> Yernakov, “Goldi in Northeast China.”

<sup>349</sup> Jussi Raumolin, “Dersu Uzala, Colonialism and Romance: Some Anthropological Reflections on a Kurosawa’s Film,” *L’Uomo Società Tradizione Sviluppo* 2, no. 2 (2019): 116–117.

members of the Nanai tribe.<sup>350</sup> In this context, the two main addictions of Dersu Uzala observed in Bordakov's *Poberezhye Yaponskogo Morya* (§ 2.4.2) seem relevant.

The Russian conquest prompted the Manchu permission for the Chinese to settle in Northern Manchuria out of an anti-Russian strategy, which caused “the beginning of the end of the Heje culture.”<sup>351</sup> Accordingly, relations of mutual trust between Russians and aborigines and distrust toward the Chinese in the Ussuri territory could be mentioned in this light:

Рассчитывать на обрусение китайцев не приходится. Скажу более – это было бы наивно! Известно, что все «желтые» туго поддаются ассимилированию со стороны европейцев.<sup>352</sup>

Arsenyev, a staunch opponent of Chinese influence, posited that Russians had reached Ussuri prior to the Chinese, thereby asserting their rightful ownership over the territory.<sup>353</sup> As a matter of fact, the imperialist nature of the author takes on particular relevance in the Anti-Chinese sentiment, which shows that, despite the philanthropic side of his persona, Vladimir Arsenyev was primarily a European who sought to map and strengthen the territories along the Sino-Russian border: “The Chinese knew almost nothing about the region, and it was only the appearance of Russians in this land that drew their attention to it. The Ussurisky krai was apart, and the Chinese knew even less about it until Nevelskoy and Zavoyko appeared with their ships.”<sup>354</sup> In addition, perceiving the Chinese as a threat, he proposed measures to eradicate their presence from Russian lands, despite the Russians' complicity in the “ethnocide”<sup>355</sup> of indigenous peoples such as the Nanai, an issue that is to be explored in greater detail in the subsequent section of this chapter (§ 3.3.2). Accordingly, as early as the beginning of the twentieth century, the ‘Yellow Peril’ was perceived as a real danger, in spite of the rapprochement, in alternate periods of history, between the Russians and Chinese. In this regard, Lewis Siegelbaum's *Another ‘Yellow Peril’: Chinese Migrants in the Russian Far East and the Russian Reaction before 1917* is of relevance, as it deals comprehensively with the European-

---

<sup>350</sup> Raumolin, 117.

<sup>351</sup> Raumolin, 117. Regarding the consequences that the Russians also brought about in the colonization of the Far East and, specifically, Primorskiy krai, see § 3.3.2.

<sup>352</sup> You can't count on the Chinese russification. To say more - it would be naive! It is known that all "yellows" are difficult to assimilate by Europeans. Arsenyev, *Kitaytsy v Ussuriyskom Krae*, 196.

<sup>353</sup> Lewis Siegelbaum pointed out the scarcity of documentation related to Chinese migration to the Russian Far East, however, as early as the late 18th century there were reports of Chinese settlers moving into the northern territories of Manchuria. See more in Siegelbaum, “Another ‘Yellow Peril.’”

<sup>354</sup> «Край китайцы почти совсем не знали, и только появление в этой стране русских заставило их обратить на нее свое внимание. Уссурийский же край находился в стороне, и о нем китайцы знали еще меньше, пока не появились Невельской и Завойко со своими кораблями». Vasilii Olegovich Avchenko, “Imperialist, ekolog, mistik i lirik. Arsenyev, kotorogo my ne znayem,” *Gor'kiy* (blog), September 11, 2017, <https://gorky.media/context/imperialist-ekolog-mistik-i-lirik/>.

<sup>355</sup> Raumolin, “L’Uomo Società Tradizione Sviluppò.”

Western fear of the menacing Asia that worried even a “romantic” like Vladimir Arsenyev. It is noteworthy that the early twentieth century witnessed the appearance of written accounts from soldiers, workers, and other individuals that contain instances of Asia phobia, which was not only directed at Japan, but also at China:

1. If we sleep our lethargic dreams, the [Far Eastern] territories will become saturated with foreign juices and when we awake perhaps they will be Russian only in name.<sup>356</sup>
2. It is not unthinkable that in the near future China by means of an internal transformation will obtain the political and economic capability with which it will be necessary to reckon. Thus, success in the struggle for political domination in the Far East between the white and yellow races, which before the Russo-Japanese War inclined toward the white race, now appears to be within the grasp of the yellow.<sup>357</sup>

The foremost consideration in this context is the philosopher and theologian Vladimir Solovyëv (1853–1900), who believed that Russia had a crucial role to play as a third pole capable of transcending the East/West rivalry.<sup>358</sup> Solovyëv, a Slavophile, conveyed his views on Asia in his articles, such as *Kitay i Evropa*, *Yaponiya Istoricheskaya kharakteristika*, and *Vrag s Vostoka*.<sup>359</sup>

His opinions were shaped by the prevailing sentiment of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which regarded Asia as incompatible with European civilization and a potential threat. As Aldo Ferrari observes in *The Forest and the Steppe. The myth of Eurasia in Russian culture*, Solovyëv’s perspectives on the Russian/Chinese context were pessimistic, predicting an impending “clash of civilizations” between the two worlds.<sup>360</sup> Although the philosopher initially believed that Japan was more receptive to Western culture, this perception later became a source of anxiety. In his 1892 article, *Vrag s Vostoka*, the author expressed concern that Asia was preparing to engage in a conflict with the West by focusing its military power around China and the Buddhist religion. As Ferrari thoroughly documented,<sup>361</sup> Solovyëv’s catastrophic perspective reached its peak in the poem *Panmongolism* (1894), which showcased the author’s deep-seated fears of Asia, as evidenced by the following excerpt:

---

<sup>356</sup> Siegelbaum, “Another ‘Yellow Peril,’” 322.

<sup>357</sup> Siegelbaum, 323.

<sup>358</sup> Aldo Ferrari, *La Foresta e la Steppa. Il mito dell’Eurasia nella cultura russa*, Simory 28 (Mimesis Edizioni, 2012), 140.

<sup>359</sup> Vladimir Sergeevich Solovyëv, “Sobranie sochineniy Vladimira Sergeevichicha Solovyëva: Solovyëv Vladimir Sergeevich — Alfavitnyy katalog — Elektronnyaya biblioteka Runivers,” accessed February 4, 2024, <https://runivers.ru/lib/book3562/>.

<sup>360</sup> Ferrari, *La Foresta e la Steppa. Il mito dell’Eurasia nella cultura russa*, 141.

<sup>361</sup> Ferrari, 142–143.

О Русь! забудь былую славу:

Орел двуглавый сокрушен,

И желтым детям на забаву

Даны клочки твоих знамен.<sup>362</sup>

Therefore, throughout the early twentieth century, the presence of Sinophobia was accompanied by Japanophobia, which coincided with the period when Vladimir Arsenyev led his initial expeditions across the Sikhote-Alin mountain range. Consequently, it is essential to consider this socio-cultural context when interpreting the writer's portrayals of Asia and Asians in his literary works and diaries. In this time of imminent danger, on one hand, the Japanese were perceived by the author as spies dispatched to the Far Eastern territories, as can be inferred from his letters ("All Japanese coming to the Russian coast for predatory fishing are spies to a greater or lesser degree"<sup>363</sup>); on the other hand, it is worth mentioning chapter 29 of *Across the Ussuri Krai*, which features a peculiar scene about a Korean scammer of the taiga. In this episode, a Korean settler offers Vladimir Arsenyev a pair of gloves, but becomes offended when the explorer accepts the gift without offering anything in return. It is notable that the response of Dersu, who, being a Nanai and a "*pervobytniy kommunist*," is furious at the Korean's behavior:

Больше всех рассердился Дерсу. Он шел, плевался и все время ругал возчика разными словами. – Вредный люди, – говорил он, – мой такой не хочу посмотри. У него лица нету.<sup>364</sup>

The emigration of Koreans to Russia dates back to 1873, significantly later than that of the Chinese; moreover, as Ivan Sablin and Alexander Kuchinsky pointed out, the Korean settlers wanted to remain permanently in the Far Eastern territories without Russification or conversion to Orthodox Christianity, which prevented Russians from trusting them entirely. Nevertheless, Korean settlers continued to live in Russia throughout the nineteenth century, taking advantage of favorable political relations between the Tsar and the Korean king, who was in favor of a

---

<sup>362</sup> О Русь! Forget the former glory: The two-headed eagle is crushed, And to the yellow children's amusement are given the scraps of your banners. Vladimir Sergeyevich Solovyëv, "Panmongolizm - Solovyëv. Polnyy tekst stikhotvoreniya," Kul'tura.RF, accessed February 4, 2024, <https://www.culture.ru/poems/21899/panmongolizm>.

<sup>363</sup> «Все японцы, приезжающие на русское побережье для хищнической ловли рыбы, – шпионы в большей или меньшей степени» Avchenko, *Literaturnye Pervoprokhodtsy Dal'nego Vostoka*, 106.

<sup>364</sup> Dersu got the angriest of all. He was walking, spitting and all the time scolding the driver in different ways. - Harmful people, - he said, - My don't want to look at such. They have no face. Arsenyev, *Po Ussuriyskomu Krayu, Dersu Uzala*, 266.

Russian protectorate in Korea in 1885.<sup>365</sup> Therefore, Koreans played a relevant role in boosting Far Eastern agricultural productivity until 1926, when the Bolshevik government strove to stop immigration in the region, eventually carrying out ethnic cleansing in 1937.<sup>366</sup> In the pages of *Dersu Uzala*, Arsenyev inquires about Dersu's motives for despising Koreans vehemently. In response, the Nanai shares the following insights:

Потом пришли корейцы. Леса начали гореть, соболь отделился, и всякого другого зверя стало меньше. А теперь на берегу моря появились еще и японцы. Как дальше жить? [...] – Как дальше жить? – вдруг опять проговорил Дерсу с глубоко вздохнул. – Ничего, старик, – ответил я ему, – на наш с тобой век хватит.<sup>367</sup>

The similarities between the worldview of Dersu and the explorer highlighted in the previous chapter recur in the insights regarding both the 'Yellow Peril' that Dersu dreads,<sup>368</sup> and the vicissitudes surrounding the colonization processes in the Far East. In this sense, the 'Literary Dersu' takes on the European prejudice against Asia, thus the Nanai could be read as a mirror of the author's personality, addressing Mikhail Prishvin's statement that "there was more Dersu in Arsenyev himself than there was in the wild Goldi"<sup>369</sup> (§ 2.4.1). At the same time, Dersu does not seem to perceive Arsenyev as a colonizer, or at least not on the same level as the Chinese, Japanese, or Koreans, while the author does not consider himself a colonizer, but merely a friend of the Nanai hunter («Ничего старик, на наш с тобой век хватит»<sup>370</sup>).

Despite several considerations of the nationalities of the Far East, Arsenyev's primary objective is to recount a story: the story of a friendship between a European and an Asian, but most importantly, the bond between humanity and nature. The aesthetic value of Arsenyev's

---

<sup>365</sup> Schimmelpenninck van der Oye noted that Tsar Aleksandr III decided not to expand the Imperial control to the Korean peninsula because of its huge territory and the risk of damaging the relations with China: David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, "Tsar'-Mirotvorets: Povорот k Vostoku," trans. Aleksandr Polunov, *Rodina* 2 (2015): 60.

<sup>366</sup> What is more, Sablin and Kuchinsky noted that the Koreans "became the first group subject to a Soviet ethnic cleansing", by deporting them to Central Asia. Ivan Sablin and Alexander Kuchinsky, "Making the Korean Nation in the Russian Far East, 1863–1926," *Nationalities Papers* 45, no. 5 (September 2017): 1, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2017.1308347>.

<sup>367</sup> Then the Koreans came. The forests began to burn, the sable alienated more, and all kinds of other animals became fewer. And now the Japanese came to the seashore. How can we go on living? [...] - How to go on living? - Dersu suddenly pronounced again with a deep sigh. - It is all right, old man, - I replied to him, - we will live it through anyways. Arsenyev, *Po Ussuriyskomu Krayu, Dersu Uzala*, 354.

<sup>368</sup> Relations between Far Eastern aborigines and other nationalities in Asia remain a complex topic that requires further analysis, which, however, is beyond the scope of this thesis. For a significant contribution in this regard see Natalya Nikolayevna Tkachëva and Sergey Viktorovich Tkachëv, "Chinese Cultural Influence on the Aboriginal Population of the Ussuri Region in the middle 19th - early 20th Century," *Vestnik KemGUKI, Kul'turologiya*, 45 (2018): 204–213.

<sup>369</sup> «В самом Арсеньев было больше Дерсу, чем в диком гольде». Yegorchev, *Zagadki Dersu Uzala*, 123.

<sup>370</sup> "It is all right, old man, we will live it through anyways." Arsenyev, *Po Ussuriyskomu Krayu, Dersu Uzala*, 354.

works lies in the pivotal themes of his prose, which possess considerable artistic and scientific importance. These themes should not be undermined by political motives that are ultimately insignificant, as Avchenko notes, referring to the words of film director Akira Kurosawa:

Но «Дерсу Узала» книга о вечном. Вот и Кurosава писал: «Я настойчиво выступаю против того, чтобы включить политику в этот фильм». Мастер был прав: политика слишком изменчива. Сегодня едва ли кто-то увидит в фильме антикитайский подтекст. Осталось главное: человек и его место в мире.<sup>371</sup>

To carry out an exhaustive literary analysis of Vladimir Arsenyev's work from a postcolonial perspective, it is imperative to identify and examine the two primary oppositions that are central to his prose, namely the civilization-nature juxtaposition (§ 3.2.2) and that between the colonizer and the colonized (§ 3.3). Therefore, the following sections of this thesis examine the two main motifs that the author contemplated throughout his life.

### **3.2.2 – Industrialisation and repudiation of progress: “Razve eto tsivilizatsiya?” Civilization–nature juxtaposition**

В моей книге Вы, вероятно, заметили, что я описал первобытный коммунизм, особую таежную этику, деликатность туземца, которого еще не коснулась цивилизация большого города. Дерсу действительно погиб только потому, что я увел его из тайги в город. Я до сих пор не могу себе этого простить...<sup>372</sup>

In a letter dated September 14, 1929, addressed to Vladimir Bogoraz,<sup>373</sup> Arsenyev expressed his profound sorrow over the tragic demise of Dersu, who was brutally murdered as a result of a theft attempt. This correspondence holds particular significance, as it sets the stage for the introduction of the first of the two contrasting themes present in the work, namely, the opposition between civilization and nature.

As previously discussed in this study, the character of the ‘Literary Dersu,’ who reflects the author’s personality, is portrayed in the frame of the ‘Noble Savage myth’ as an individual

---

<sup>371</sup> But “Dersu Uzala” is a book about eternal things. So, Kurosawa wrote: “I strongly oppose the inclusion of politics in this movie”. The Master was right: politics is too volatile. Today, anyone would hardly see an anti-Chinese overtone in the movie. The essential point remains: the human being and his place in the world. Avchenko, *Literaturnye Pervoprokhodtsy Dal'nego Vostoka*, 97–98.

<sup>372</sup> In my book, you probably noticed that I described primordial communism, the specific taiga ethics, the sensitivity of the native, who had not yet been touched by the big city civilization. Dersu indeed died only because I took him from the taiga to the city. I still cannot forgive myself for that... Kuz'michëv, *Pisatel' Arsenyev*, 145.

<sup>373</sup> Vladimir Germanovich Bogoraz (1865–1936) was a Russian ethnographer, linguist, folklorist and writer best known for his work on Siberian and Far Eastern peoples. Russian Geographical Society, “Bogoraz Vladimir Germanovich (nastoyashcheye imya; psevdonim N. A. Tan) — Otechestvennye etnografy i antropologi. XX vek,” *Russkoe Geograficheskoye Obshchestvo*, accessed January 20, 2024, [http://ethnotest.kunstkamera.ru/w/index.php?title=Богораз\\_Владимир\\_Германович\\_\(настоящее\\_им\\_я;\\_псевдоним\\_Н.А.\\_Тан,\\_В.Г.\\_Тан\)](http://ethnotest.kunstkamera.ru/w/index.php?title=Богораз_Владимир_Германович_(настоящее_им_я;_псевдоним_Н.А._Тан,_В.Г._Тан)).

who managed to maintain a ‘state of nature,’ as defined by French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau in the first half of the eighteenth century. The philosopher posits that each person begins life in a state of liberty and contentment before engaging with society: “the sensitivity of the native, who had not yet been touched by the big city civilization.”<sup>374</sup> In *The Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* (1755), Jean-Jacques Rousseau affirmed that modern society has eroded the innate compassion and empathy of the ‘natural man’, transforming him into a self-centered individual.<sup>375</sup> The Literary Dersu Uzala is known for his high moral qualities, which extend even to those he does not know («Гольд заботился о неизвестном ему человеке»<sup>376</sup>). However, upon relocating to the Arsenyev estate in Khabarovsk, the Goldi displays a change in demeanor, becoming irritable, anxious, losing his once-vibrant enthusiasm for life, hence making him seem even older: “The old man began to contemplate, to seclude himself; he became thin, with a gaunt face, and he looked as if he had got even older.”<sup>377</sup>

In the spirit of Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s concept of ‘man of nature,’ Dersu Uzala, at the age of fifty-nine, embodies vitality despite having spent his entire life in the wilderness. However, his energy seems to wane, as he starts living in comfortable conditions, being well-fed, and relaxing in front of the fireplace at Arsenyev’s house. Therefore, when the hunter is subjected to societal constraints, he is left thin and fatigued. Tragically, Dersu’s attempt to return to his natural state ultimately proves futile, and although he manages to escape into the taiga, he ultimately perishes in the spring of 1908.

The letter to Bogoraz was composed nearly two decades after Dersu’s demise, yet the burden of indirectly contributing to his death continued to weigh heavily on the writer. Furthermore, as previously mentioned, Raumolin Jussi connected Dersu’s “unanthropological death”<sup>378</sup> (§ 2.4) to the end of the Goldi culture, which was destined to make way for the “savage” Soviet urbanization of the region. The sadness of a vanishing world can be discerned throughout the pages of Arsenyevist literature, commencing with the preface of *Po*

---

<sup>374</sup> «деликатность туземца, которого еще не коснулась цивилизация большого города». Kuz'michëv, *Pisatel' Arsenyev*, 145.

<sup>375</sup> Seth David Halvorson, “Historical Context for Discourse on the Origin of Inequality | The Core Curriculum,” Columbia University, accessed January 20, 2024, <https://www.college.columbia.edu/core/content/discourse-inequality-and-social-contract/context>.

<sup>376</sup> “The Goldi was taking care of a man who was a stranger to him.” Arsenyev, *Po Ussuriyskomu Krayu, Dersu Uzala*, 42.

<sup>377</sup> «Старик начал задумываться, уединяться; он похудел, осунулся и даже как будто еще более постарел». Arsenyev, 436.

<sup>378</sup> Raumolin, “L’Uomo Società Tradizione Sviluppo,” 119–121.



*Ussuriyskomu Krayu*, published in 1921, where the author's state of mind regarding the expedition conducted fifteen years prior is evident:

Там, где раньше ревел тигр, ныне свистит паровоз, где были редкие жилища одиноких звероловов, появились большие русские селения.<sup>379</sup>

The 1920s were a psychologically fraught period for the writer, who sought to escape the city and embark on new adventures in the taiga. The hustle, bustle, and hypocrisy of city life became irksome to him, as evidenced in his 1924 letter, following a brief visit to Moscow. This desire to flee the city and seek solace in the wilderness reflects the complexity of his psychological state and the splitting of the author's personality, who partly identified himself with the character of Dersu:

У Вас в Москве я устал от беготни и суеты. Мне захотелось покоя так, как утомленный ищет сна [...] И снилось мне, что я плыву на лодке по большой реке, а кругом лес, лес, – чудный лес, где все величественно, спокойно, где силы природы проявляются в тишине, где нет суеты и суеты [...] чем меньше людей, тем лучше, а где их совсем нет – там рай.<sup>380</sup>

Similarly, Dersu Uzala was introduced as a hermit who rejected the initial invitation to join Arsenyev in Khabarovsk, illustrating the conflict between nature and civilization. Therefore, Dersu Uzala is the representation of a person who has not been touched by the vices of the urban society, as Vladimir Arsenyev pointed out in *Across the Ussuri Krai*: “those vices that urban civilization brings with it.”<sup>381</sup> The nature-civilization juxtaposition is characterized as the struggle between the science-based ethics (“*nauchno-osnashchennaya*”) of European scientists and the intuitive ethics (“*intuitivnaya*”) of the indigenous people. Furthermore, the encounter between these two opposing forces, as depicted by the novelist Mikhail Prishvin, carries a “profound philosophical overtone” (“*gluboko filosofskaya okraska*”<sup>382</sup>).

In his literary works, the author not only reproved the regional administration for the lack of policies to protect local wildlife (“Local authorities in the region should ensure the protection of these nurseries now before it is too late”<sup>383</sup>) but also warned in several episodes of the

---

<sup>379</sup> Where a tiger roared once, now a steam locomotive whistles, where rare dwellings of lonely fur trappers were, large Russian settlements have appeared. Arsenyev, *Po Ussuriyskomu Krayu, Dersu Uzala*, 27.

<sup>380</sup> At your place in Moscow, I got tired of running around and hustle and bustle. I wanted to rest as a weary person seeks sleep [...] And I dreamed that I was floating on a boat along a large river, and all around was forest, forest, - a wonderful forest, where everything is majestic, calm, where the forces of nature manifest themselves in silence, where there is no hustle and bustle [...] the fewer people, the better, and where there are none at all, there is paradise... Kuz'michëv, *Pisatel' Arsenyev*, 209.

<sup>381</sup> «тех пороков, которые вместе с собой несет городская цивилизация». Arsenyev, *Po Ussuriyskomu Krayu, Dersu Uzala*, 39.

<sup>382</sup> Kuz'michëv, *Pisatel' Arsenyev*, 173.

<sup>383</sup> «Местным властям в крае следовало бы позаботиться об охране этих питомников теперь же, пока еще не поздно». Arsenyev, *Po Ussuriyskomu Krayu, Dersu Uzala*, 350.

impending danger that the taiga would have faced if the local government continued its criminal and irresponsible policy of land urbanization.

1. Куда ни взглянешь, всюду наталкиваешься на хищничество. Где же русские власти, где же охрана лесов, где закон? В недалеком будущем богатый зверем и лесами Уссурийский Край должен превратиться в пустыню. Охрана лесов и закон об охоте здесь появятся тогда, когда будет уже слишком поздно.<sup>384</sup>
2. Недалеко уже то время, когда от первобытной, девственной тайги и следа не останется. Исчезнут и звери.<sup>385</sup>

The considerations of the first and second passages taken from *Across the Ussuri Krai* and *Dersu Uzala*, respectively, are transposed in books whose storyline takes place in a tsarist backdrop during the 1906 and 1907 expeditions. However, it is not a stretch to assume that the author was referring to the rapid, uncontrolled urbanization policies of the Soviet government, which did not hesitate to destroy the natural environment for the construction of railways, settlements, and roads.

Therefore, in the context of the urbanization-nature juxtaposition, the author's literature serves as a dual contestation and conveys a strong ecological idea, which Arsenyev seeks to propagate especially among the younger generation, as he explicitly stated in his diaries: "It is essential to explain to children in all schools the issues of nature protection, the importance of nature reserves and hunting periods. It is essential to educate the youth in this spirit."<sup>386</sup>

Lastly, Arsenyev underscored the importance of recognizing the gravity of the situation, as neglecting it could result in an irreparable ecological catastrophe, much like the one that befell China, which, as previously mentioned in Section 3.2.1, elicited considerable backlash since being perceived in the PRC as discriminatory: "In their homeland, the Chinese have wiped out the entire wildlife. Only crows, dogs, and rats are now left in their country."<sup>387</sup>

The ecological issues presented in his literary works develop concurrently with the protagonist's relationship with Dersu Uzala.

---

<sup>384</sup> Everywhere you look, you come across predation. Where are the Russian authorities, where is the protection of forests, where is the law? In the near future, the Ussuriskiy krai, rich in animals and forests, is supposed to turn into a desert. The forest protection and the law on hunting will be introduced here when it is too late. Arsenyev, 244.

<sup>385</sup> The time is not far off when there will be no trace left of the primordial, unspoiled taiga. The animals will also disappear. Arsenyev, 354.

<sup>386</sup> «Надо во всех школах объяснять детям вопросы охраны природы, значение заповедников и сроков охоты. Надо воспитывать в этом духе молодежь». Larisa Vladimirovna Saleyeva, "Veryu, chto nas budut vspominat' dobrym slovom...", *Slovesnitsa Iskusstv*, Obereg zemli, 2, no. 12 (2003), <https://www.slovoart.ru/node/1560>.

<sup>387</sup> «У себя на родине китайцы уничтожили все живое. У них в стране остались только вороны, собаки и крысы». Avchenko, *Literaturnye Pervoprokhodtsy Dal'nego Vostoka*, 118.

The author employs the voice of his alter ego, the Literary Arsenyev, to demonstrate the transformation of a European imperialist's perspective.<sup>388</sup> The alter ego serves as a conduit for the author's message as the story unfolds through the eyes of a character who is simultaneously part of the problem and its solution. The Literary Arsenyev's change of perspective, influenced by Dersu's wisdom and the harsh realities of the natural world, represents the paradox of a European imperialist who is being instructed by a 'savage' on the rules of a world he does not understand: "Civilization has to learn from nature or otherwise it will not survive."<sup>389</sup> This device is used to explore the complex interplay between humanity and nature and the potential for individuals to transcend their preconceived notions and embrace a more holistic understanding of the world. *Across the Ussuri Krai* and *Dersu Uzala* are an escalating climax of doubts and reflections that culminate in a question that shakes the very foundation of the author's identity and also provides the title for this section: "*Razve eto tsivilizatsiya?*"<sup>390</sup>



Vladimir Arsenyev and Dersu Uzala after the route along the Kulumbe River in the 1906 expedition:  
<https://pvs-rgo.ru/2020/05/31/vladimir-klavdievich-arsenev/>

<sup>388</sup> It was mentioned in Section 3.2.1 that Vladimir Arsenyev, as a staunch opponent of Chinese influence, claimed that the Russians were the first to reach the Ussuri territories and that consequently, the lands were the rightful property of the Russian Empire: «Вопреки весьма распространенному, но ни на чем не основанному мнению, что китайцы будто бы владели Уссурийским краем с незапамятных времен, совершенно ясно можно доказать противное: китайцы в Уссурийском крае появились весьма недавно» ["Contrary to the very widespread, but not based on anything opinion that the Chinese as if owned the Ussuriyskiy region from time immemorial, it is quite clear to prove the opposite: the Chinese in the Ussuriyskiy region appeared very recently"]. See more in Avchenko, "Imperialist, ekolog, mistik i lirik. Arsenyev, kotorogo my ne znayem."

<sup>389</sup> Christensen, "The Beginning of the 1900s, Russian Civilization of the Outer Manchuria Seen from the Artistic World: Akira Kurosawa's 'Dersu Uzala', Vladimir Arsenyev's Book, the Russian Far Wild East, American Wild West and Greenland."

<sup>390</sup> "But is this civilization?" Vladimir Klavdiyevich Arsenyev, "Dersu Uzala," az.lib.ru, 2016, chap. 24, [http://az.lib.ru/a/arsenew\\_w\\_k/text\\_1907\\_dersu\\_uzala.shtml](http://az.lib.ru/a/arsenew_w_k/text_1907_dersu_uzala.shtml).

### 3.3 – Was this a different kind of colonial process? Albert Memmi's considerations on the relationship between *The Colonizer and the Colonized* and the Russian Far East

Albert Memmi (1920–2020) was a renowned French Tunisian author and essayist. Born into a Jewish family in Tunis, a French colony at the time, Memmi was educated in French schools and later attended the prestigious Sorbonne in Paris. Following his incarceration in a Nazi labor camp during World War II, the writer relocated to France.

Due to his ethnic background, the author was considered a second-class citizen by the French colonizers. Therefore, in his preface to *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (1957), Memmi admits that he grew up in a state of existential conflict, which compelled him to contend with the social status of both the colonizer and colonized.<sup>391</sup> Additionally, unlike Muslim people, Jews adopted the customs of European colonizers and identified with them. Even though the Jewish citizens were kept in higher regard because considered more “racially pure” than Muslims, the author recounts: “I was a sort of half-breed of colonization, understanding everyone because I belonged completely to no one.”<sup>392</sup> Thus, from the perspective of not belonging entirely to either world but identifying with both, Memmi decided to join the voice of the exploited ones or “*The Wretched of the Earth*,”<sup>393</sup> as referenced in Frantz Fanon’s renowned work on the subject.

*The Colonizer and the Colonized* (*Portrait du colonisé, précédé par Portrait du colonisateur*) is widely regarded as a seminal text in the field of postcolonial literature. Written by Albert Memmi in response to the decolonization of North Africa in 1956, the work serves to provide a psychological portrait of the two primary figures in the discourse of colonialism. Specifically, the author seeks to examine not only the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, but also the internal contradictions that exist within each party and the reciprocal effects of colonialism on their psyches. While Memmi primarily refers to the African context, he believes that the dynamics of the two protagonists are similar in any colonial situation. As such, the author asserts that consulting his book is “useful to the colonizer as well as to the colonized.”<sup>394</sup>

---

<sup>391</sup> Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (London: Profile Books Ltd, 2021), 10-11.

<sup>392</sup> Memmi, 12.

<sup>393</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (London: Penguin Books, 2001).

<sup>394</sup> Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, 14.

Based on Albert Memmi's work, this section attempts to situate the figure of Vladimir Arsenyev within the colonial discourse, taking into account the peculiarities of his persona and the colonial processes that occurred in the Russian Far East. Particularly for this task, Vera Tolz's *Russia's Own Orient: The Politics of Identity and Oriental Studies in the Late Imperial and Early Soviet Periods*<sup>395</sup> and Sokolovskiy's *The Construction of 'Indigenusness' in Russian Science, Politics, and Law*<sup>396</sup> provided valuable insights.

To undertake an examination of the relations between the colonizer and the colonized with reference to the Russian Far East, it is relevant to explain the basic terms of colonial discourse and to place under analysis the terminology used with regard to the aborigines of the Russian Empire. Regarding the active role of the colonial relationship, namely the figure of the colonizer, Albert Memmi considers it essential to define the following terms: colonist, colonizer, and colonialist.

The term 'colonist' refers to an individual who moves to live in a colony with no privileges given by his or her status, frequently for economic<sup>397</sup> or religious<sup>398</sup> reasons. Therefore, the term does not carry with it negative connotations: "Can one talk of privileges with respect to railroad workers, minor civil servants, or even small farmers who will probably live as well as their counterparts back home?"<sup>399</sup> Nevertheless, the author does not believe in the colonist's existence, since to assume that a European in a colony can lack any privileges given by his origin is contrary to the very nature of colonial discourse, which always involves two protagonists: a colonizer and a colonized. A colonial person should be associated with the existence of a benevolent European ("by temperament or ethical conviction"<sup>400</sup>) who has no colonial attitude toward the colonized. According to Albert Memmi, this is not possible, since every colonist in a colony, just by the fact that is inherently European, has privileges, be they

---

<sup>395</sup> Tolz, *Russia's Own Orient: The Politics of Identity and Oriental Studies in the Late Imperial and Early Soviet Periods*.

<sup>396</sup> S.V. Sokolovskiy, "The Construction of 'Indigenusness' in Russian Science, Politics and Law," *The Journal of Legal Pluralism and Unofficial Law* 32, no. 45 (January 2000): 91–113, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07329113.2000.10756547>.

<sup>397</sup> In the first chapter (§ 1.1.2, footnote 31), it was discussed the trend of many workers moving to the newly annexed territories of the Far East to seek better wages and in order to be provided with the so-called "*Amurskiye pensii*" ("Amur pensions"). Furthermore, in *Across the Ussuri Krai* and *Dersu Uzala*, several cases of Russian settlers who moved to the Far East to make a living through fishing, hunting, or farming were observed (§ 3.2.1).

<sup>398</sup> In Arsenyev's works, his encounters with Old Believers are exemplary of such Russian emigration to the Far East (§ 3.2.1).

<sup>399</sup> Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, 54.

<sup>400</sup> Memmi, 54.

solely socio-economic or in terms of law: “Whether he expressly wishes it or not, he is received as a privileged person, by the institutions, customs and people.”<sup>401</sup>

Although the author undertakes a generalization of colonial discourse, the universality of his analysis is of particular interest when associated with Russian imperial expansion in the Far East. As a matter of fact, the Statute of Alien Administration<sup>402</sup> (*Ustav ob upravlenii inorodtsev*) of 1822 excluded gatherers, nomads, and hunters from the list of full-right citizens, as observed by Andreas Kappeler in *Rußland als Vielvölkerreich. Entstehung. Geschichte. Zerfall*.<sup>403</sup> Despite the fact that the original purpose of the statute was to protect and then gradually integrate the *inorodtsy*,<sup>404</sup> this intention was supplanted by “forms of segregation and discrimination, as well as by a Western-style racism.”<sup>405</sup> In this specific case, Kappeler draws a comparison between the Western colonial powers and the attitude of Russia toward its aborigines, which likewise intended to carry out a “civilizing mission” to Asia, in order to bring to “the non-Russian ‘primitives’ the blessing of the “superior” European culture.”<sup>406</sup> Therefore, the colonial mechanism has the function of turning citizens into colonizers or colonialists. The difference between these two terms is crucial in order to place Vladimir Arsenyev within the colonial discourse.

A colonizer is an individual who performs the act of establishing a colony, as in the case of Arsenyev. However, the term is not inherently negative, as it can be employed neutrally to describe a person who engages in colonization on behalf of one’s state; thus, every colonial is a colonizer. Once it is established that every European has, willingly or unwillingly, privileges that distinguish him from the colonized and make him a colonizer *a priori*, he can be distinguished from being a colonialist, that is a colonizer who socially, politically, or ethically supports the colonial system in which he is involved, its establishment and eventual expansion. While a colonialist feels superior to the indigenous population, Vladimir Arsenyev places himself in a different category, defined by Albert Memmi as “the colonizer who refuses.”<sup>407</sup>

Arsenyev, in line with the portrait drawn by Memmi, is a person deprived of his tranquility (most evident in the last ten years of the writer’s life), since he is a victim of a contradiction

---

<sup>401</sup> Memmi, 61.

<sup>402</sup> See more in Sokolovskiy, “The Construction of ‘Indigenusness’ in Russian Science, Politics and Law,” 98–99.

<sup>403</sup> Kappeler, *Rußland als Vielvölkerreich. Entstehung. Geschichte. Zerfall*, 188–189.

<sup>404</sup> *Inorodets*: ‘of different kin’. This term will be considered in relation to the figure of the colonized in section 3.3.1.

<sup>405</sup> Kappeler, *Rußland als Vielvölkerreich. Entstehung. Geschichte. Zerfall*, 188.

<sup>406</sup> Kappeler, 188.

<sup>407</sup> Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, 63.

intrinsic to his being: “To refuse means either withdrawing physically from those conditions or remaining to fight and change them.”<sup>408</sup>

The settler who does not adhere to colonial practices, therefore, finds himself at a crossroads: to leave or try to change the situation. The previous chapters of this thesis stressed how Vladimir Arsenyev intended to pursue the latter course, trying by all his efforts to help the aborigines by taking advantage of his privileged status and influence as a Russian lieutenant and a renowned writer. Raising the issue of the native’s exploitation by the Chinese or stressing the ecological problem related to the urbanization of the Primorsky territory are clear examples of that. However, as pointed out by French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre:

The work established some strong truths. First of all, that there are neither good nor bad colonists: there are colonialists. Among these, some reject their objective reality.<sup>409</sup>

Having arrived in the Far East in the late summer of 1900 and made the acquaintance of Dersu in the 1906 expedition, Arsenyev first tried to introduce the Nanai into civilization. However, this act of kindness indirectly caused the death of Dersu, a forest man who could in no way live in the society of the colonizers (§ 3.2.2). As previously mentioned, remorse for indirectly causing his friend’s death deepened the writer’s reflections on the dynamics of civilization-nature and colonizer-colonized, which is why from 1908 till the onset of his death in 1930 the writer supported the peoples of the Far East within their “state of nature,” rather than pushing them to adhere to the Western customs and lifestyle as suggested by Aleksandr Fadeyev (§ 3.3.2).

In his analysis, Albert Memmi explains how an average person in the homeland can become successful in a colony as well as the tyranny of the colonizer who defends his own privileges. Moreover, the author lists the psychological effects of colonization, which, as in Arsenyev’s case, led the explorer to question the intrinsic values of his identity:

Я думал, что эгоизм особенно свойствен дикому человеку, а чувство гуманности, человеколюбия и внимания к чужому интересу присуще только европейцам. Не ошибся ли я?<sup>410</sup>

The second part of the book features a detailed analysis of the colonized: the way he is ostracized from the language of the colonizer (“Asia speaks through and by virtue of the

---

<sup>408</sup> Memmi, 63.

<sup>409</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, “Introduction,” in *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, by Albert Memmi (London: Profile Books Ltd, 2021), 21.

<sup>410</sup> I used to think that selfishness was particularly characteristic of the wild man and that the sense of humanity, compassion, and attention to other people's interests were inherent only in Europeans. Was I not mistaken? Arsenyev, *Po Ussuriyskomu Krayu, Dersu Uzala*, 51–52.

European imagination”<sup>411</sup>) and how he is represented in the colonial context with the same attributes previously observed in the Saidian text (§ 3.1.1): laziness (in opposition to the action of the European), wickedness, sadism, and a deficiency that justifies the “protection” by the colonizer.<sup>412</sup>

### 3.3.1 – The intertwining of the colonizer and the colonized

To better understand Russian attitudes toward the natives of the Far East, it is necessary to examine the terminology associated with the figure of the colonized, which takes on a peculiar overtone in colonial discourse.

In the early 1900s, the term ‘*tuzemtsy*’ or ‘*inorodtsy*’ was commonly used to refer to individuals hailing from the Far East. These terms were widely employed during the conquest of Siberia and underwent linguistic transformations between 1924 and 1932, ultimately leading to a decline in their usage during the Soviet period.<sup>413</sup>

According to Sokolovskiy’s *The Construction of ‘Indigenosity’ in Russian Science, Politics and Law*, the term ‘*tuzemets*’ comes from the expression ‘those lands’ (‘*te zemli*’) and refers to an individual who originates from a far-off location. Although they are not considered foreigners or aliens, they do not hold the same status as full-right citizens on the lands where they reside.<sup>414</sup> Concerning Arsenyev’s prose, the term *tuzemets* with respect to the indigenous peoples appears more than fifty times in *Dersu Uzala* and as many as seventy-one times in the short story *Through the Taiga*, since this designation was typical of peoples who inhabited territories considered to be ‘no man’s lands’ by the Russians, namely areas in the process of colonization that had yet to be fully explored or developed. Therefore, considering the 1822 statute on the *inorodtsy* (§ 3.3), it is possible to grasp the variety of shades embedded in the connotation of ‘*tuzemets*,’ widely present in the writer’s works, since it refers to the status of the colonized as an element of colonial discourse placed in a position of subordination, deprived of his rights and privileges, as observed in Albert Memmi’s analysis. Moreover, it is noteworthy

---

<sup>411</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 1979, 56.

<sup>412</sup> Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, 123-126.

<sup>413</sup> In the Soviet period, as Sokolovskiy notes, the terms *inovertsy* (‘of a different faith’) and *iasachnye* (referring to the tribute of furs that certain peoples had to pay to the Soviet state) are prevalent in the official documentation. The author describes the period from 1924 to 1932 as the “peak of terminological and legal innovations” concerning the aborigines. Sokolovskiy, “The Construction of ‘Indigenosity’ in Russian Science, Politics and Law,” 106.

<sup>414</sup> Interestingly, this designation referred only to non-Russian Siberians. See more in Kappeler, *Rußland als Vielvölkerreich. Entstehung. Geschichte. Zerfall*, 186; Sokolovskiy, “The Construction of ‘Indigenosity’ in Russian Science, Politics and Law,” 94.



that while the term ‘*inorodets*’ was used mostly in the administration field, the designation of ‘*tuzemets*’ became associated with poetry and literature at large during the eighteenth century, therefore attaching to the term “an emotional flavor [...] rather than the dry prose of official documents.”<sup>415</sup> From this perspective, one can better appreciate the reasons for such frequent employment of this terminology in the writer’s prose.

The colonization of the Russian Far East occurred with not only geographical and historical but also anthropological specificities. Since there were no elites in the region, their cooptation into Russian imperial society did not seem to be a viable option. Therefore, the natives were incorporated into Russian territory “in the same manner as the lands where they lived were ‘attached to’, developed, and incorporated into Russia.”<sup>416</sup> As previously remarked, the Russian superiority complex toward Asian peoples<sup>417</sup> proved to be well in line with Western colonial policies of the nineteenth century, which saw the East as an inferior and morally backward world.

Of interest are the relevant contributions by Tatiana Saburova, Marisa Karyl Franz, and Zachary Hoffman.<sup>418</sup> Researchers have observed how, in the late nineteenth century, in the Russian Empire there was a practice of conducting ethnographic expeditions for photographing various Siberian populations in order to classify them into a list based on their evolutionary development.<sup>419</sup> Such research was aimed at showing the hard work of Russian settlers in trying to “civilize” the savage part of the Tsarist Empire and incorporate it, together with exoticizing the East and defining “Russian cultural superiority as a justification for empire.”<sup>420</sup>

Therefore, upon analyzing the Russian perspective on Asia and the Far East, it becomes evident how Albert Memmi’s universal portrayal of the two main characters in the colonial discourse gains further significance. *The Colonizer and the Colonized* vividly exhibits the enduring interdependence between them by drawing from the author’s personal experiences. Like the Western world, which asserts itself in comparison to the Eastern (§ 3.1.1),<sup>421</sup> both

---

<sup>415</sup> Sokolovskiy, “The Construction of ‘Indigenoussness’ in Russian Science, Politics and Law,” 96.

<sup>416</sup> Sokolovskiy, 92–93.

<sup>417</sup> Jane F. Hacking, Jeffrey S. Hardy, and Matthew P. Romaniello, “Asia in the Russian Imagination,” *Sibirica* 19, no. 1 (March 1, 2020): 3, <https://doi.org/10.3167/sib.2020.190102>.

<sup>418</sup> Hacking, Hardy, and Romaniello, “Asia in the Russian Imagination.”

<sup>419</sup> Zachary Hoffman’s study indicated that, in the Russian Empire, Chinese and Japanese were often represented through “grotesque caricatures designed to create a sense of primitive otherness.” Hacking, Hardy, and Romaniello, 2–3.

<sup>420</sup> Hacking, Hardy, and Romaniello, 2.

<sup>421</sup> Brioschi and De Pietri, *Visioni d’Oriente*, 6–7.

subjects of the colonial discourse can define themselves only in relation to the other, as observed by French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre:

A relentless reciprocity binds the colonizer to the colonized – his product and his fate. Memmi has vividly recorded this. With him, we find that the colonialist system is a form in motion...<sup>422</sup>

A colonizer is characterized by three indispensable factors: privilege, profit, and usurpation.<sup>423</sup> However, these three components exist only by virtue of his relationship with the colonized individual. Therefore, Vladimir Arsenyev is a colonizer who seeks to go against these three fundamental determinants, in order to fit into a system of which he is not a member: “under the sign of a contradiction which looms at every step, depriving him of all coherence and all tranquility.”<sup>424</sup>

Memmi comes to the conclusion that if the colonizer continues the struggle with himself, he will eventually launch an undeclared conflict against his own people.<sup>425</sup> In this respect, it might be possible to understand why the explorer, in the last years of his life, felt increasingly estranged from the society around him, which he had repeatedly criticized: “I have grown tired of people and do not understand much about them, what they want, and why they are so embittered against each other.”<sup>426</sup> This aspect of the author turns out to be more in line with the empathetic and harmless character of Dersu Uzala than with the Arsenyev-colonizer who repudiates the Chinese people in the Far East, observed in the scientific account *Kitaytsy v Ussuriyskom Krae* (§ 3.2.1).

By virtue of Albert Memmi’s remarks on the peculiarities that distinguish the colonizer who refuses, it can be assumed that Arsenyev decided to go against his own society and join the natives’ community, partly assuming their beliefs and worldviews, consequently alienating himself from the careerism and hypocrisy of the Saint Petersburg society, which is now seen as the ancient city of Babylon that stifles all positive in man:

Я всегда идеализировал – мне казалось, что между учеными должна быть полная солидарность и внимание к обоюдным интересам, – а увидел я другое... Нехороший осадок оставил у меня на душе Питер – карьеризм поглотил хорошие чувства человека! Этот Вавилон закрутил было и меня, да, слава богу, я во время очнулся и убежал к себе в Приамурье.<sup>427</sup>

---

<sup>422</sup> Sartre, “Introduction,” 24.

<sup>423</sup> Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, 53.

<sup>424</sup> Memmi, 64.

<sup>425</sup> Memmi, 65.

<sup>426</sup> «Я стал уставать от людей и многого не понимаю, чего они хотят и почему так озлоблены друг на друга». Avchenko, *Literaturnye Pervoprokhodtsy Dal'nego Vostoka*, 134.

<sup>427</sup> I always idealized - it seemed to me that there should be complete solidarity between scientists and respect for mutual interests - but I saw something different... Petersburg left a bad residue on my soul -

Arsenyev is a colonizer in denial, who cannot escape from his contradictory situation of being both a spokesman of colonization and perceiving himself as a member of the Far Eastern community: in tune with nature, its peoples, and their values. In this existential crisis, the author rejects his status as a colonizer and strives to become part of a society in which he is an outsider (§ 3.2.1).

As a result, the writer embellishes the traits of the colonized, portraying them with qualities similar to his own, while simultaneously elevating them to a higher moral standing, thus diminishing the level of subjugation. Therefore, the process of idealization reduces the gap between the colonizer and the colonized: “This savage was much more benevolent than me.”<sup>428</sup>

Arsenyev connected himself with the native’s perspective by recognizing the commonality between their worldviews and the state ideology he represented, aiming to find common ground between the civilized Soviet society and the taiga’s perceived savagery through his values of solidarity, equality, and unity (§ 3.2.1):

Все удэге – коммунисты. Дайте ему какое-нибудь лакомство, он ни за что не будет его есть один: он поделится им со всеми окружающими [...]<sup>429</sup>

As in the case of Arsenyev, who intends to leave the colonial society to settle in that of the aborigines, Albert Memmi considered the fate of such refusing colonizer “intertwined”<sup>430</sup> with that of the colonized: “My desire is to finish processing my scientific treatises and escape, escape far away, escape completely - to Dersu!”<sup>431</sup> The words of Soviet writer Vladimir Lidin, according to whom Arsenyev succeeded in conveying the true nature of the Nanai hunter after having “stumbled upon” his universal soul, give pause for thought.<sup>432</sup> Vladimir Arsenyev’s unique approach, which combines scientific and literary elements, and his natural ability to meticulously observe nature and record not only visual details but also emotional and psychological insights, is a product of a creative awareness that is exclusive to genuine writers.

---

careerism has swallowed up good feelings of a man! This Babylon had almost twisted me as well, but, thank God, I woke up in time and escaped to my Priamurye. From Vladimir Arsenyev’s letter of 1910 to Lev Yakovlevich Shternberg. Kuz’michëv, *Pisatel’ Arsenyev*, 95–96.

<sup>428</sup> «Этот дикарь был гораздо человеколюбивее, чем я...». Arsenyev, *Po Ussuriyskomu Krayu, Dersu Uzala*, 42.

<sup>429</sup> All the Udege are communists. Give him some dainty, he will never eat it alone: he will share it with all those around him [...] “Pochemu udegeytsev nazyvali ‘lesnymi kommunistami,’” *Sibir’.Realii*, December 17, 2022, <https://www.sibreal.org/a/pochemu-udegeytsev-nazyvali-lesnymi-kommunistami/30583815.html>.

<sup>430</sup> Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, 80.

<sup>431</sup> «Мое желание – закончить обработку своих научных трудов и уйти, уйти подальше, уйти совсем – к Дерсу!». Avchenko, *Literaturnye Pervoprokhodtsy Dal’nego Vostoka*, 134.

<sup>432</sup> «Набрел на вселенскую душу Дерсу Узала». Kuz’michëv, *Pisatel’ Arsenyev*, 231.

### 3.3.2 – A “spontaneous” colonialism? Arsenyev’s proposal for coexistence with Far Eastern natives: criticism of Tsarist and Soviet policies

In his youth, Arsenyev was fascinated by the rhetoric of English historian Henry Thomas Buckle (1821–1862) and his unfinished work, *History of Civilization*.<sup>433</sup> In this manual, the author placed trust in human reason, rejecting the idea of progress based on morality. His worldview had a great impact on the explorer, who, from the gymnasium years in Saint Petersburg, started reflecting on the contrast between the positivist vision of progress and the moral virtues of the human being. The uncertain vision of the foundations on which a civilization striving to develop should be based led the explorer to deep existential doubts:

Каковы уроки цивилизации, насколько материальный прогресс влияет на мораль человека, что несет цивилизация народам диким и первобытным? Проблема эта – глобальная, она не имеет однозначного решения.<sup>434</sup>

First, the explorer adopted Buckle’s vision of intellectual progress, therefore engaging in geography ethnography, and science at large, with the primary role of bringing advancement to society through his intellectual contributions. However, after moving to the Far East and encountering the Nanai, and above all, witnessing the unjust colonial practices and hazardous exploitation of the once-unspoiled nature, Arsenyev underwent a deep psychological crisis.

Hence, the colonial experience brought about a radical change in the explorer’s science-based rhetoric. Specifically, the extraction of resources led to “a demographic stagnation of ethnic groups in the Amur area,”<sup>435</sup> which was further aggravated by the spread of pandemics that the natives had not faced before. As a matter of fact, it should be noted that Dersu Uzala lost his wife and children precisely because of the smallpox brought by Europeans, and in this regard, Arsenyev admitted that “the Russians were in part responsible for the ethnocide of the Heje.”<sup>436</sup> Despite attributing most of the blame to the predatory and assimilating nature of the Chinese, as seen in earlier sections of this thesis (§ 3.2.1), it is remarkable that the encounter with the Saidian ‘Other’ gradually reshaped the writer’s blind faith in science and reason as the

---

<sup>433</sup> Kuz’michëv, 31.

<sup>434</sup> What are the lessons of civilization, to what extent does material progress affect human morality, and what does civilization bring to the wild and primitive peoples? This problem is global, it has no definite solution. Kuz’michëv, 32.

<sup>435</sup> Kappeler, *Rußland als Vielvölkerreich. Entstehung. Geschichte. Zerfall*, 186.

<sup>436</sup> Raumolin, “L’Uomo Società Tradizione Sviluppo,” 124.

only way for progress. As Vasiliy Avchenko pointed out: “The taiga itself turned the scientist and officer into a spontaneous mystic.”<sup>437</sup>

Interestingly, Vladimir Arsenyev, like Albert Memmi, considered the colonization of a native population always and everywhere leading to “decline and deterioration.”<sup>438</sup> Despite the common opinion in the European part of the Empire that these peoples were inferior morally, ethically, and, using Henry Thomas Buckle’s rhetoric, even from the point of view of ‘progress,’ the explorer adhered to an opposite standpoint since “he saw in the Udege’s way of life a paradise lost by Europeans.”<sup>439</sup>

Therefore, Vladimir Arsenyev agreed neither with the imperial practices of aboriginal subjugation, which in the case of Siberian peoples usually consisted of the collection of a tribute (the *yasak*<sup>440</sup>) that was paid in furs, nor with the Soviet practices of forced conversion to Karl Marx’s vision of historical materialism.<sup>441</sup> In line with the Soviet policies, Russian novelist Aleksandr Fadeyev asserted that Far Eastern natives were to be modernized to the “achievements of the century as soon as possible.”<sup>442</sup> Nevertheless, Arsenyev believed that for a just coexistence with Siberian peoples, it was essential to respect the natives’ culture, customs, and traditions, as “the Russian izba appears in the dissonance of their lives.”<sup>443</sup>

According to Kuz’michëv, Arsenyev’s ideas of coexistence with the indigenous population were influenced by the ethnographic guidelines set forth by his friend, Lev Yakovlevich Shternberg (§ 1.2.1). Specifically, Shternberg outlined a series of ten principles that an ethnographer should follow when studying native populations. The second and fourth “commandments” are particularly significant in this context:

2. Не делай себе кумира из своего народа, своей религии, своей культуры. Знай, что все люди потенциально равны: несть ни эллина, ни иудея, ни белого, ни цветного. Кто знает один народ – не знает ни одного, кто знает одну религию, одну культуру – не знает ни одной.<sup>444</sup>

---

<sup>437</sup> «Сама тайга сделала учёного и офицера стихийным мистиком». Avchenko, *Literaturnye Pervoprokhodtsy Dal'nego Vostoka*, 123.

<sup>438</sup> Raumolin, “L’Uomo Società Tradizione Sviluppo,” 129.

<sup>439</sup> «видел в образе жизни удэгейцев утраченный европейцами рай». “Pochemu udegeytsev nazyvali ‘lesnymi kommunistami.’”

<sup>440</sup> Sokolovskiy, “The Construction of ‘Indigenosity’ in Russian Science, Politics and Law,” 91.

<sup>441</sup> As a matter of fact, the shamanic and animistic beliefs were considered to be a relic of the past.

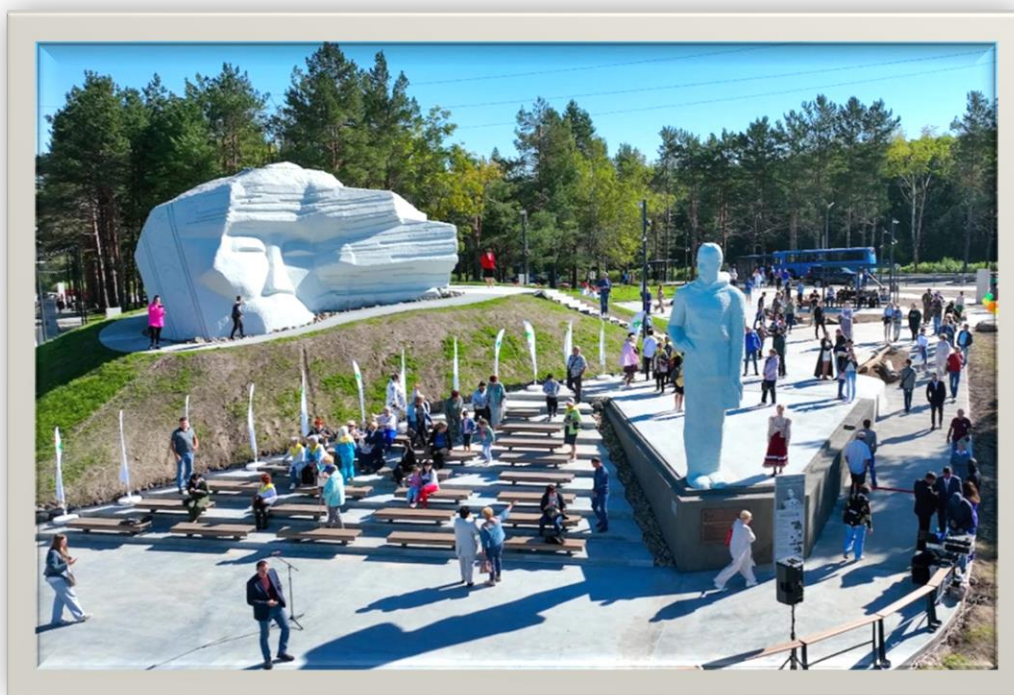
<sup>442</sup> «Скорейшего приобщения “туземцев” к достижениям века». “Pochemu udegeytsev nazyvali ‘lesnymi kommunistami.’”

<sup>443</sup> «Русская изба врывается диссонансом в их жизни». Avchenko, *Literaturnye Pervoprokhodtsy Dal'nego Vostoka*, 111.

<sup>444</sup> Do not make an idol of your people, your religion, your culture. Know that all people are potentially equal: there is neither Hellene nor Jew, neither white nor colored. Who knows one nation – knows none, who knows one religion, one culture – knows none. Kuz’michëv, *Pisatel’ Arsenyev*, 126.

4. Не навязывай насильно исследуемому народу своей культуры (курсив мой): подходи к нему бережно и осторожно, с любовью и вниманием, на какой бы ступени культуры он ни стоял, и он сам будет стремиться подняться до уровня высших культур.<sup>445</sup>

In this light, the explorer tried to apply Shternberg's principles to his research on the peoples of Siberia and the Far East, thus striving for a more "spontaneous" and non-coercive colonialism for the well-being of both Russian colonizers and colonized Asian peoples. Overall, the author's moral ethics were particularly distinguishable from those of the other colonizers of Asia. For this reason, even over ninety years after his death, Vladimir Arsenyev remains a striking personality: his curiosity and love of nature make him an ecologist *ante litteram*, who was able to raise a considerable number of social issues that would have an impact on the Soviet Union, especially in the decades to come.



In honor of the 150th anniversary of the birth of the traveler Vladimir Klavdiyevich Arsenyev, in the city of Arsenyev was renovated his square. <https://www.dv.kp.ru/daily/27443.5/4646024/>

---

<sup>445</sup> Do not forcibly impose your culture on the people under study (*italics mine*): approach it carefully and cautiously, with love and attention, whatever level of culture it stands on, and it will strive to rise to the level of higher cultures. Kuz'michëv, 126.

## **CONCLUSION: One hundred years of *Dersu Uzala* (1923–2023). Further analysis of the bond between colonizer and colonized could provide valuable insights for Orientalist and Postcolonial studies**

The literary circles of the independent Far Eastern Republic,<sup>446</sup> as well as those of Harbin, Tianjin, Beijing, and Shanghai, contributed to the creation of texts of significant cultural, historical, and literary interest that remain largely unknown in Russia and the West. In this regard, the recent monograph *Russkiy Kitay i Dal'niy Vostok*<sup>447</sup> provided valuable insights for this thesis. In contrast to his Far Eastern fellows, Vladimir Arsenyev gained popularity in part due to the support of internationally renowned writers like Maxim Gorky (§ 1.3), who helped bring his travelogues to an international audience in the 1930s. Later, the film adaptations of his *magnum opus* by Armenian director Agasi Babayan in 1961 and Japanese director Akira Kurosawa in 1975 helped to reintroduce the character of Vladimir Klavdiyevich Arsenyev to the public more than forty years after the publication of *Dersu Uzala*.

As a result, *Dersu Uzala* has become one of the most revered characters in twentieth-century Russian literature, transcending the recognition of his own creator. The depiction of the Nanai hunter exemplifies the finest qualities of human nature, with the aspiration that his selflessness and compassion would encourage future generations to be more attentive to ecological concerns and to show reverence toward the natural realm in its entirety. Indeed, Dersu's passing is often regarded as that of a "pure soul" ("*chistaya dusha*")<sup>448</sup> and an individual who unwaveringly adhered to the animist beliefs of his people (§ 2.3.2). In contrast, the impact of civilization was destruction and ruin.

The writer posited that the twentieth century was intrinsically materialistic, leading to the view that humanity had become nothing more than a detriment to the planet. According to this perspective, individuals now lived at the expense of their fellow beings and the natural environment, seeking to assert their dominance over others and the world around them:

---

<sup>446</sup> The Far Eastern Republic (April 1920 – November 1922) was a puppet state established by the Soviets as a buffer state against Japanese expansionism in Siberia. See more in James Minahan, *Encyclopedia of the Stateless Nations: Ethnic and National Groups Around the World.*, 2nd ed. (Santa Barbara, California: Greenwood, 2016).

<sup>447</sup> I. V. Silantyev, I. E. Loshchilov, and E. V. Kapinos, eds., *Russkiy Kitay i Dal'niy Vostok. Poeziya, proza, svidetel'stva* (Saint Petersburg: Aleteyya, 2020).

<sup>448</sup> Arsenyev, "Dersu Uzala," chap. 24.

Как бы процветала фауна и флора, если бы человека не было! И он еще осмеливается называть себя царем земли, царем природы. Нет, он *бич земли* (курсив мой). Это самый ужасный хищник, беспощадный, свирепый, ужасный...<sup>449</sup>

Although 'Asiatic Russia' is not immune to the shortcomings of civilization, as evidenced in the episodes of the Chinese practices of cruelty and exploitation, the Korean scammer of the Taiga, or the intolerance of the "true Christian according to the Apostolic Church"<sup>450</sup> (§ 3.2.1), the author perceives its natives as the embodiment of a vanishing romantic world.

In summary, Vladimir Arsenyev asserted that the defining characteristic of twentieth-century civilization was its acquisitive nature, responsible for the prevalence of fraud, slavery, theft, and murder. Hence, he stated that "The age of idealism and romanticism is over forever."<sup>451</sup> The author presents a negative outlook on the future, as he believes that the current century lost the values of brotherhood, equality, and the opportunities for adventure and exploration that were prevalent in the past, as exemplified by the life of the legendary explorer Nikolay Przheval'sky. Consequently, it can be inferred that the causes of the Nanai hunter's demise are rooted in the very fabric of European civilization:

Цивилизация родит преступников. Создай свою благополучие за счет другого – *вот лозунг двадцатого века* (курсив мой). Обман начинается с торговли, потом, в последовательном порядке, идут ростовщичество, рабство, кражи, грабежи, убийства и, наконец, война и революция со всеми их ужасами. Разве это цивилизация?!<sup>452</sup>

The feelings of hopelessness, pessimism, and decay were not limited to Arsenyev but were commonplace during the early twentieth century (§ 3.2.1). As previously highlighted, the entire Russian Empire, encompassing both its European and Far Eastern regions, was characterized by a widespread fear of an impending threat from the East, which spread also among the Russian intelligentsia. Notable among these individuals was the Symbolist poet Andrey Belyy (1880–1934), who expressed in the novel *Peterburg* the ominous anticipations for Russia's future:

---

<sup>449</sup> How fauna and flora would flourish without man! And he dares to call himself king of the earth, king of nature. No, he is the *scourge of the earth* (Italics mine). He is the most terrible predator, ruthless, ferocious, horrible... Sazonov, *Pervoprokhodtsy Dal'nego Vostoka. Nastoyashchie russkie geroi: ot Yerofeya Khabarova do Vladimira Arsenyeva, Ivana Yefremova i Grigoriya Fedoseyeva*, 328.

<sup>450</sup> «истинного христианина по церкви апостольской». Arsenyev, *Po Ussuriyskomu Krayu, Dersu Uzala*, 279.

<sup>451</sup> «Век идеализма и романтизма кончился навсегда». Avchenko, *Literaturnye Pervoprokhodtsy Dal'nego Vostoka*, 133.

<sup>452</sup> Civilization gives birth to criminals. Build your own prosperity at the expense of the other - that is the motto of the twentieth century. Deceit begins with trade, then, in sequential order, come usury, slavery, theft, robbery, murder, and, finally, war and revolution with all their horrors. Is this civilization?! Arsenyev, "Dersu Uzala," chap. 24.



Петербург же опустится.

Бросятся с мест своих в эти дни все народы земные; брань великая будет, – брань, небывалая в мире: желтые полчища азиатов, тронувшись с насиженных мест, обагрят поля европейские океанами крови; будет, будет – Цусима! Будет – новая Калка! Куликово Поле, я жду тебя! Воссияет в тот день и последнее Солнце над моею родною землей. Если, Солнце, ты не взойдешь, то, о, Солнце, под монгольской тяжелой пятой опустятся европейские берега, и над этими берегами закурчавится пена; земнородные существа вновь опустятся ко дну океанов – в прародимые, в давно забытые хаосы... Встань, о, Солнце!<sup>453</sup>

In line with the example of Vladimir Solovyëv, the ‘Yellow Peril’ was a widespread concern, and similarly, Vladimir Arsenyev held the view that the “*zhěltiy vopros*” (the “yellow issue”) needed to be addressed before it became critical: “The settlement of the yellow issue in Priamursky Krai greatly depends on the extent to which our policy in the Far East will be sustainable at all. Unfortunately, so far it has been very unstable.”<sup>454</sup>

Despite not being entirely exempt from the negative sociocultural environment of the Empire, Arsenyev put forth the notion of convergence between Russia and Asia through the character of Dersu Uzala. Moreover, the writer aimed to distance himself from both Eastern and Western civilizations, therefore adhering to Albert Memmi’s portrayal of the ‘Colonizer who refuses’ his status and seeks a new ‘homeland’ in the society of the colonized, namely the taiga of his loyal Orochi, Nanai, and Udege companions:

Мои сверстники-туземцы [...] уже сошли со сцены жизни [...] Пора умирать! Пора идти туда, куда ушли другие – я отстал на этом пути.<sup>455</sup>

In the “rhythmic movement”<sup>456</sup> of the natural world, Vladimir Arsenyev discovered his life’s purpose and significance, maturing from an ordinary Saint Petersburg lieutenant to a globally acclaimed explorer and ethnographer, whose reflections on the intertwinement between humans, nature, and civilization provided culturally enriching insights into the Far East.

---

<sup>453</sup> But St. Petersburg will decline. All the nations of the earth will rush from their places in these days; there will be a great battle, - a battle unprecedented in the world: the yellow hordes of Asians, having moved from their hiding places, will drench the European fields with oceans of blood; there will be, there will be Tsushima! There will be a new Kalka! Kulikovo Field, I am waiting for you! And on that day the last Sun will shine over my motherland. If, Sun, you do not rise, then, oh, Sun, under the Mongol heavy heel the European shores will sink, and over these shores, the foam will curl; the earth-born creatures will again sink to the bottom of the oceans - to the primordial, to the long-forgotten chaos.... Arise, O Sun! Andrey Belyy, *Peterburg. Roman v vos'mi glavakh s prologom i epilogom* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Nauka, 1981), 99, [https://imwerden.de/pdf/belyj\\_peterburg\\_1981\\_text.pdf](https://imwerden.de/pdf/belyj_peterburg_1981_text.pdf).

<sup>454</sup> «Разрешение желтого вопроса в Приамурском крае много зависит от того, насколько вообще наша политика на Дальнем Востоке будет устойчивой. К сожалению, до сего времени она была очень неустойчива». Avchenko, “Imperialist, ekolog, mistik i lirik. Arsenyev, kotorogo my ne znayem.”

<sup>455</sup> My fellow natives [...] have already left the stage of life [...] It's time to die! It's time to go where others have gone - I've fallen behind along the way. Avchenko, *Literaturnye Pervoprokhodtsy Dal'nego Vostoka*, 134.

<sup>456</sup> From Mikhail Prishvin's well-known quote: «Поэзия рождается в ритмическом движении природы» (§ 1.3.1). Kuz'michëv, *Pisatel' Arsenyev*, 103.

More than ninety years after his death, Vladimir Arsenyev (1872–1930) remains a striking figure. His curiosity and love of nature make him, for all intents and purposes, an *ante litteram* ecologist, who raised several environmental and social issues that would have an impact on the Soviet Union, especially in the decades to come. As recalled by Avchenko, Arsenyev’s peculiar contribution to Russian literature is a perfect “hybrid of a poetry collection with a textbook,”<sup>457</sup> which makes him, even one hundred years after the first publication of his *Dersu Uzala* in 1923, still capable of capturing the modern reader with the unique traits of his style; the result of a creative sensibility accessible only to true writers.

Referring to Edward Said’s considerations of the East and moving on to the field of Russian Orientalism, this Master’s thesis employed the theoretical approaches of Orientalism and Postcoloniality to explore the author’s relationship with different ethnic groups in the Far East. Furthermore, after categorizing the author’s literature as a colonial travel genre, there was achieved the objective of placing the persona of Vladimir Klavdiyevich Arsenyev within the colonial discourse through an in-depth analysis of Albert Memmi’s reflections on the colonizer and the colonized, thereby providing valuable insights for further research on the literary depiction of the bond between Russian colonizers and colonized in the works of other Far Eastern-born writers. In their monographic work, Silantyev, Loshchilov, and Kapinos asserted that to date manuscripts of extreme cultural-historical rarity are preserved, often in a single copy, in archival, museum, and library collections in Siberia and the Far East:

Общей картины этой богатой литературно-художественной жизни не восстановить без тщательной архивно-поисковой работы, которая вселяет надежду найти новые документы и уникальные издания.<sup>458</sup>

This observation seems of particular interest especially when associated with the recent discovery of Vladimir Arsenyev’s photographs in 2017, which were probably meant to serve as illustrations for the pages of the disappeared monograph *The Land of the Udege* (§ 1.2.1). In this regard, the work of Arsenyevists Ivan Yegorchev (1951-2017) and Aleksandr Lobychev (1958–2018) deserves particular praise.

Moreover, a comparison between the literary representations of Russians and Asian peoples in parallel with Far Eastern authors of Soviet cultural background and “white” authors of Russian emigration in Asia (to China, Japan, or San Francisco) could provide relevant

---

<sup>457</sup> «Книги его напоминают гибрид поэтического сборника с учебником». Avchenko, *Literaturnye Pervoprophodtsy Dal'nego Vostoka*, 94.

<sup>458</sup> The general picture of this rich literary and artistic life cannot be restored without thorough archival and search work, which raises the hope of finding new documents and unique editions. Silantyev, Loshchilov, and Kapinos, *Russkiy Kitay i Dal'niy Vostok. Poeziya, proza, svidetel'stva*, 7.

insights. If it is true that, as in Arsenyev's case, the writer's background largely shapes his literature, a comparison between different cultural and ideological frameworks seems legitimate. In a similar vein, a fascinating contrast can be made between the literary-cultural aspects of Asiatic and European Russia, which would highlight the two worlds that Vladimir Klavdiyevich Arsenyev endeavored to bridge for thirty years of his life.

The field of Postcoloniality in the context of the literature of the Russian Far East and Far Eastern Russian emigration is a relatively neglected area of research that warrants greater attention from scholars. In light of contemporary Russia's growing affinity with its Asian roots and its strengthening ties with the People's Republic of China, it is crucial to move beyond Eurocentric perspectives and reposition Russian culture within the broader East/West discourse. This thesis endeavors to do so by examining the persona of Vladimir Arsenyev. Given these factors, studying the Russian Far East is now more pertinent than ever before.

You are my teacher, my comforter, and my friend,  
You are my temple, my homeland  
the stirring, rustling, peaceful forest.

– Vladimir Klavdiyevich Arsenyev

Ты мой учитель, мой утешитель и друг,  
Ты мой храм, моя родина —  
Шумящий, шелестящий, тихий лес.<sup>459</sup>

– Владимир Клавдиевич Арсеньев

---

<sup>459</sup> Nikita T., "Zapis' dnevnika 'tragicheskaya sud'ba sem'i Arsenyeva...,'" Poembook.ru, August 19, 2020, <https://poembook.ru/diary/65429-tragicheskaya-sudba-semi-arseneva>.



Illustration: Sem' Strakhov, by Gennadiy Pavlishin for Dmitriy Nagishkin's "Amurskiye skazki", 1975.

## Bibliography

### Primary sources

Arsenyev, Vladimir Klavdiyevich. “Dersu Uzala.” az.lib.ru, 2016.

[http://az.lib.ru/a/arsenxew\\_w\\_k/text\\_1907\\_dersu\\_uzala.shtml](http://az.lib.ru/a/arsenxew_w_k/text_1907_dersu_uzala.shtml).

———. *Kitaytsy v Ussuriyskom Kraye*. Khabarovsk: Tipografiya kantselyarii priamurskogo general-gubernatora, 1914.

———. *Kratkiy voyenno-geograficheskiy i voyenno-statisticheskiy ocherk Ussuriyskogo kraya 1901-1911 gg.* Khabarovsk: tipografiya Shtaba Priamurskogo voyennogo okruga, 1912.  
<https://www.prlib.ru/item/341357>.

———. *Lesnye Lyudi Udekheytsy*. Vladivostok: Knizhnoye delo, 1926.  
<https://www.rulit.me/books/lesnye-lyudi-udehejcy-read-342391-1.html>.

———. *Po Ussuriyskomu Kraju, Dersu Uzala*. Podarochnye izdaniya. Velikiye puteshestviya. Moscow: Eksmo, 2022.

———. *Skvoz' Taygu*. Pal'mira-klassika. Saint Petersburg; Moscow: T8 Izdatel'skiye Tekhnologii, 2022.

———. *V Debryakh Ussuriyskogo Kraya*. Vladivostok: akc. o-vo Knizhnoye delo, 1926.

———. *Zhizn' i Priklyucheniya v Tayge*. Gosudarstvennoye izdatel'stvo geograficheskoy literatury, 1957.

*Dersu Uzala*. Adventure, Biography, Drama. Atelier 41, Daiei Studios, Mosfilm, 1976.

*Dersu Uzala* | DRAMA | FULL MOVIE, 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sFaL03SKEzE>.

Memmi, Albert. *The Colonizer and the Colonized*. London: Profile Books Ltd, 2021.

Said, Edward W. “Edward Said | American Literary Critic & Philosopher | Britannica,” November 29, 2023. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Edward-Said>.

———. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1979.

———. *Orientalism*. Translated by Stefano Galli. Milan: Feltrinelli Editore, 2022.

## Secondary sources

Ahmad Ameen Al-shamiri, Mohammed. “A Critique of Edward Said’s Orientalism as a Source Text for Postcolonial Approaches to Literature.” *International Journal of Language and Literature* 4, no. 1 (2016): 269–72. <https://doi.org/10.15640/ijll.v4n1a32>.

Akira Kurosawa info. “The Life of Akira Kurosawa – Part 9: A Difficult Decade (1969–1978),” March 2017. <https://akirakurosawa.info/biography-part-9/>.

Avchenko, Vasiliy Olegovich. “Avtor Total’nogo diktanta-2023 Vasily Avchenko rasskazal, pochemu yego geroyem stal issledovatel’ Dal’nego Vostoka Vladimir Arsenyev.” *Rossiyskaya gazeta*, December 12, 2023. <https://rg.ru/2023/03/29/kosmos-arseneva.html>.

———. “Bratya po krayu. Zhiznennye i tvorcheskiye svyazi Vladimira Arsenyeva i Aleksandra Fadeyeva.” *Trudy Instituta Istorii, Arheologii I Ètnografii DVO RAN* 36 (2022): 167–80. <https://doi.org/10.24412/2658-5960-2022-36-167-180>.

———. “Ekologiya Po Arsenyevu.” *Total’nyy diktant*. Accessed January 7, 2024. <https://totaldict.ru/dictants/ekologiya-po-arsenevu/>.

———. “Gol’d Star, ili Dersu Uzala v debryakh taygi i slovesnosti.” *God literatury*, July 31, 2023. <https://godliteratury.ru/articles/2023/07/31/gold-star-ili-dersu-uzala-v-debriah-tajgi-i-slovesnosti>.

- . “Imperialist, ekolog, mistik i lirik. Arsenyev, kotorogo my ne znayem.” *Gor’kiy* (blog), September 11, 2017. <https://gorky.media/context/imperialist-ekolog-mistik-i-lirik/>.
- . *Literaturnye Pervoprokhodtsy Dal’nego Vostoka. Zhizn’ zamechatel’nykh lyudey*. Moscow: Molodaya gvardiya, 2021.
- Azadovskiy, Mark Konstantinovich. *V. K. Arsenyev, puteshestvennik i pisatel’. Opyt kharakteristiki: [k 25 letiyu so dnya smerti]*. Chita: Chitinskoye knizhnoye izdatel’stvo, 1955.
- Bayoumi, Moustafa, and Andrew Rubin, eds. *The Edward Said Reader*. New York: Vintage Books, 2000.
- Belyy, Andrey. *Peterburg. Roman v vos’mi glavakh c prologom i epilogom*. Moscow: Izdatel’stvo Nauka, 1981. [https://imwerden.de/pdf/belyj\\_peterburg\\_1981\\_text.pdf](https://imwerden.de/pdf/belyj_peterburg_1981_text.pdf).
- Bobrovnikov, V. O., and Seyed Dzhavad Miri, eds. *Orientalizm vs. orientalistika: Sbornik statey. Islamica & Orientalistica*. Moscow: Sadra, 2016.
- Bojanowska, Edyta. *A World of Empires: The Russian Voyage of the Frigate Pallada*. Cambridge: Belknap Press, imprint of Harvard University Press, 2018.
- Bordakov, Pëtr Petrovich. *Dersu Uzala. Rozhdestvenskiy rasskaz*. Khabarovsk: Tipografiya T-va “Obshchiy trud”, 1909.
- Brioschi, Serena Andrea, and Marco De Pietri, eds. *Visioni d’Oriente. Stereotipi, impressioni, rappresentazioni dall’antichità ad oggi*. Milan: Pavia University Press, 2021.
- Christensen, Carsten Sander. “The Beginning of the 1900s, Russian Civilization of the Outer Manchuria Seen from the Artistic World: Akira Kurosawa’s ‘Dersu Uzala’, Vladimir Arsenyev’s Book, the Russian Far Wild East, American Wild West and Greenland.” *Studia Humanitatis* № 4 (2019): 22.

- Davydova, Yekaterina Sergeyevna. "Dal'niy Vostok kak Literaturnyy Geroy." *Kul'tura i nauka Dal'nego Vostoka* № 1, no. 21 (2017): 140–45.
- Egerton, Frank N. "A History of the Ecological Sciences, Part 27: Naturalists Explore Russia and the North Pacific During the 1700s." *Bulletin of the Ecological Society of America* Volume 89 (2008): 39–60. [https://doi.org/doi:10.1890/0012-9623\(2008\)89\[39:AHOTES\]2.0.CO;2](https://doi.org/doi:10.1890/0012-9623(2008)89[39:AHOTES]2.0.CO;2).
- Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Translated by Constance Farrington. London: Penguin Books, 2001.
- Ferrari, Aldo. *La Foresta e la Steppa. Il mito dell'Eurasia nella cultura russa*. Simory 28. Mimesis Edizioni, 2012.
- . "Russia, Oriente, Orientalismo." Edited by Serena Andrea Brioschi and Marco De Pietri. *Visioni d'Oriente. Stereotipi, impressioni, rappresentazioni dall'antichità ad oggi*, 2021, 85–97.
- Fetisova, Lidiya Yevgenyevna. "Dal'nevostochnaya Tema v russkoy Literature XVII-XIX vv." *Rossiya i ATR* № 1 (2006): 174–80.
- Glazov, Yuri. "Chaadayev and Russia's Destiny." *Studies in Soviet Thought* 32, no. 4 (1986): 281–301.
- Greenleaf, Monika. *Pushkin and Romantic Fashion. Fragment, Elegy, Orient, Irony*. Stanford (CA): Stanford University Press, 1994.
- Guzeva, Alexandra. "How Come There's a Jack London Lake in Russia?" *Russia Beyond*, January 9, 2022. <https://www.rbth.com/travel/334587-jack-london-lake-russia>.
- Hacking, Jane F., Jeffrey S. Hardy, and Matthew P. Romaniello. "Asia in the Russian Imagination." *Sibirica* 19, no. 1 (March 1, 2020): 1–4. <https://doi.org/10.3167/sib.2020.190102>.



- Halvorson, Seth David. "Historical Context for Discourse on the Origin of Inequality | The Core Curriculum." Columbia University. Accessed January 20, 2024. <https://www.college.columbia.edu/core/content/discourse-inequality-and-social-contract/context>.
- Harrag, Mohammed. "Edward Said's Controversial Work ORIENTALISM and the American Orientalism." *International Journal of Science and Research* 7, no. 7 (2018). <https://doi.org/10.21275/ART20183781>.
- Hirsch, Francine. *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union*. Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 2005.
- Kabanov, Nikolay Yevgenyevich. *V. K. Arsenyev. Puteshestvennik i naturalist, 1872-1930*. Istoricheskaya seriya, N. 29. Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Moskovskogo obshchestva ispytateley prirody, 1948.
- Kappeler, Andreas. *Rußland als Vielvölkerreich. Entstehung. Geschichte. Zerfall*. Edited by Aldo Ferrari. Translated by Stefano Torelli. Studi di Storia. Rome: Edizioni Lavoro, 2009.
- Kemper, Michael. "Russian Orientalism." In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Asian History*, by Michael Kemper. Oxford University Press, 2018. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277727.013.297>.
- Khisamutdinov, Amir. "'Chest imeyu' - Vladimir Arsenyev. Chast' 2." *Russkoye Geograficheskoye Obshchestvo*, June 29, 2022. <https://www.rgo.ru/ru/article/chest-imeyu-vladimir-arsenev-chast-2>.
- Korovashko, Aleksey Valeryevich. *Po sledam Dersu Uzala. Tropami Ussuriyskogo Kraya*. Moscow: Veche, 2016.
- Kucheryavenko, Vasilii Trofimovich. "Dva otveta V. K. Arsenyeva." *pgpb.ru*. Accessed September 15, 2023. <https://pgpb.ru/digitization/document/3117/>.

Kuz'michëv, Igor' Sergeyeovich. *Pisatel' Arsenyev*. Leningrad: Sovetskiy pisatel', 1977.

Lopatin, Ivan. *The Cult of the Dead Among the Natives of the Amur Basin*. The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1960.

Métraux, Daniel A. "Jack London and The Yellow Peril." *Education About Asia*, History, Literature, and the Construction of "Memory" in Asia, № 1, no. 14 (2009): 29–33.

Minahan, James. *Encyclopedia of the Stateless Nations: Ethnic and National Groups Around the World*. 2nd ed. Santa Barbara, California: Greenwood, 2016.

Morris-Suzuki, Tessa. "Lines in the Snow: Imagining the Russo-Japanese Frontier." *Pacific Affairs* 72, no. 1 (1999): 57–77. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2672336>.

Novomodnyy, Yevgeniy. "O roli E. I. Peppelya v populyarizatsii proizvedeniy V. K. Arsenyeva za rubezhom." *Zapiski Grodekovskogo Muzeya*, Vypusk 36, 2018, 75–84.

Orekhova, Kseniya. "Otdat' dan' uvazheniya: v chest 150-letiya so dnya rozhdeniya velikogo puteshestvennika v Arsenyeve otrestavrirovali skver." *dv.kp.ru*, September 11, 2022. <https://www.dv.kp.ru/daily/27443.5/4646024/>.

Petruk, Anzhelika Vitalyevna. *Strana Udekhe. Istoriya utrachennoy rukopisi*. Vladivostok: izdatel'stvo PSP, 2018.

Primorskaya Krayevaya Publichnaya Biblioteka Im. A. M. Gor'kogo. "Yubileynaya ekspeditsiya Vladimira Arsenyeva," January 27, 2020. <https://pgpb.ru/news/detail/862/>.

Potapov, Maxim Grigoryevich, and Leonid Pavlovich Levin. *Narody Sibiri. Narody mira. Etnograficheskie ocherki*. Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1956.

Pun, Min. “The East-West Dichotomy: From Orientalism to Postcoloniality.” *IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science* 24, no. 1 (2019): 75–79. <https://doi.org/10.9790/0837-2401087579>.

Raumolin, Jussi. “Dersu Uzala, Colonialism and Romance: Some Antropological Reflections on a Kurosawa’s Film.” *L’Uomo Società Tradizione Sviluppo* 2, no. 2 (2019): 113–30.

Rezepov, Yevgeniy. “Zdravstvuy, Dersu!” *RusskiyMir.ru*. *Russkiy mir*, August 3, 2023. <https://rusmir.media/2023/08/03/korovachko>.

Rosaldo, Renato. *Culture & Truth : The Remaking of Social Analysis*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1989.

Russia, U. S. Mission. “Vladivostok CG Honors Jack London Anniversary by Op-Ed in Novaya Gazeta.” U.S. Embassy & Consulates in Russia, November 28, 2016. <https://ru.usembassy.gov/vladivostok-cg-honors-jack-london-anniversary-op-ed-novaya-gazeta/>.

Russian Geographical Society. “Bogoraz Vladimir Germanovich (nastoyashcheye imya; psevdonim N. A. Tan) — Otechestvennye etnografy i antropologi. XX vek.” *Russkoe Geograficheskoye Obshchestvo*. Accessed January 20, 2024. [http://ethnotest.kunstkamera.ru/w/index.php?title=Богораз\\_Владимир\\_Германович\\_\(настоящее\\_имя;\\_псевдоним\\_Н.А.\\_Тан,\\_В.Г.\\_Тан\)](http://ethnotest.kunstkamera.ru/w/index.php?title=Богораз_Владимир_Германович_(настоящее_имя;_псевдоним_Н.А._Тан,_В.Г._Тан)).

———. “History.” *Russian Geographical Society*. Accessed September 20, 2023. <https://www.rgo.ru/en/society/history>.

Ryzhakov, Aleksandr, Fëdor Ryzhakov, Spiridon Nazarov, and Vlas Ivanov. *13. S Bol'shoy Kunaley - V ostrovakh okhotnik*. Moscow, 1966. Aleksandr Ryzhakov et al., 13. S Bol'shoy Kunaley - V ostrovakh okhotnik (Moscow, 1966), <https://pesni.guru/text/13-с-большой-куналей-в-островах-охотник>.

- Sablin, Ivan, and Alexander Kuchinsky. "Making the Korean Nation in the Russian Far East, 1863–1926." *Nationalities Papers* 45, no. 5 (September 2017): 798–814. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2017.1308347>.
- Saleyeva, Larisa Vladimirovna. "Veryu, chto nas budut vspominat' dobrym slovom..." *Slovesnitsa Iskusstv*, Obereg zemli, 2, no. 12 (2003). <https://www.slovoart.ru/node/1560>.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. "Introduction." In *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, by Albert Memmi, 208. London: Profile Books Ltd, 2021.
- Sazonov, Yevgeniy. *Pervoprophodtsy Dal'nego Vostoka. Nastoyashchie russkie geroi: ot Yerofeya Khabarova do Vladimira Arsenyeva, Ivana Yefremova i Grigoriya Fedoseyeva*. Moscow: KP-Izdatel'stvo, 2022.
- Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, David. "Asia Before Eurasianism: The Pre-Revolutionary Roots of a Russian Emigré Ideology." In *The Return of Eurasia*, edited by Glenn Diesen and Alexander Lukin, 79–98. Singapore: Springer Singapore, 2021. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-2179-6\\_3](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-2179-6_3).
- . Review of *Imperial Visions: Nationalist Imagination and Geographical Expansion in the Russian Far East, 1840–1865*, by Mark Bassin. *Historical Geography* 29 (1999): 913–14.
- . "Nikolai Przhevalski. Explorador y espía durante el Gran Juego." *Desperta Ferro: Historia Moderna*, 2014, 60–63.
- . *Russian Orientalism. Asia in the Russian Mind from Peter the Great to the Emigration*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010.
- . "Tsar'-Mirotvorets: Povорот k Vostoku." Translated by Aleksandr Polunov. *Rodina* 2 (2015): 58–60.

- Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, David. "The Curious Fate of Edward Said in Russia." *Études de Lettres*, no. 2–3 (September 15, 2014): 81–94. <https://doi.org/10.4000/edl.686>.
- Shorshin, Andrey. "Zdanya Vladivostokskogo filiala." *Tsentr Amurskiy Tigr*. Accessed September 20, 2023. <https://amur-tiger.ru/contacts/history-vladivostok>.
- Shreyder, David Il'ich. *Nash Dal'niy Vostok. Tri goda v Ussuriyskom kraye*. Saint Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo A. F. Derviena, 1897. <https://elib.rgo.ru/safe-view/123456789/231766/1/MjUyNzdfU2hyZWlkZXIgc5JLiBOYXNoIERhbCduaWnCoFZvc3RvayAoVHJpIGdvZGEgdiBVc3MucGRm>.
- Shternberg, Lev Yakovlevich. *Etnografiya. Sbornik "Tikhiy okean". Russkie nauchnye issledovaniya*. Saint Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1926.
- Sibir'.Realii. "Pochemu udegeytsev nazyvali 'lesnymi kommunistami,'" December 17, 2022. <https://www.sibreal.org/a/pochemu-udegeytsev-nazyvali-lesnymi-kommunistami/30583815.html>.
- Siegelbaum, Lewis H. "Another 'Yellow Peril': Chinese Migrants in the Russian Far East and the Russian Reaction before 1917." *Modern Asian Studies* 12, no. 2 (April 1978): 307–30. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X00006132>.
- Silantyev, I. V., I. E. Loshchilov, and E. V. Kapinos, eds. *Russkiy Kitay i Dal'niy Vostok. Poeziya, proza, svidetel'stva*. Saint Petersburg: Aleteyya, 2020.
- Sinor, Denis. "Ivan A. Lopatin: The Cult of the Dead among the Natives of the Amur Basin. (Central Asiatic Studies, VI.) 211 Pp., Map. 's-Gravenhage: Mouton & Co., 1960. Guilders 28." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 26, no. 2 (1963): 452–53. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0041977X00065022>.
- Slovar'-spravochnik po materialam pressy i literatury 70-kh godov*. Moscow: Russkiy yazyk, 1984.

Smiles, Samuel. *Self-Help*. Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1862.

Sokolovskiy, S.V. “The Construction of ‘Indigenouslyness’ in Russian Science, Politics and Law.” *The Journal of Legal Pluralism and Unofficial Law* 32, no. 45 (January 2000): 91–113. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07329113.2000.10756547>.

Solomentsev, Mikhail. “Postanovlenie Sovmina RSFSR Ot 29.12.1972 N. 753. O Pereimenovanii Nekotorykh Fiziko-Geograficheskikh Ob’ektov, Raspolozhennykh Na Territorii Amurskoy Oblasti, Primorskogo i Khabarovskogo Krayev.” Accessed December 27, 2023. [https://www.libussr.ru/doc\\_ussr/usr\\_7958.htm](https://www.libussr.ru/doc_ussr/usr_7958.htm).

Solovyëv, Vladimir Sergeevich. “Panmongolizm - Solovyëv. Polnyy tekst stikhotvoreniya.” Kul’tura.RF. Accessed February 4, 2024. <https://www.culture.ru/poems/21899/panmongolizm>.

———. “Sobranie sochineniy Vladimira Sergeevicha Solovyëva: Solovyëv Vladimir Sergeevich — Alfavitnyy katalog — Elektronnyaya biblioteka Runivers.” Accessed February 4, 2024. <https://runivers.ru/lib/book3562/>.

T., Nikita. “Zapis’ dnevnika ‘tragicheskaya sud’ba sem’i Arsenyeva...’” Poembook.ru, August 19, 2020. <https://poembook.ru/diary/65429-tragicheskaya-sudba-semi-arseneva>.

Tarasova, Anna Ivanovna. *Vladimir Klavdiyevich Arsenyev. Russkie puteshestvenniki i vostokovedy*. Moscow: Glavnaya redaktsiya vostochnoy literatury izdatel’sтва “Nauka,” 1985.

Tkachëva, Natalya Nikolayevna, and Sergey Viktorovich Tkachëv. “Chinese cultural Influence on the aboriginal Population of the Ussuri Region in the middle 19th - early 20th Century.” *Vestnik KemGUKI, Kul’turologiya*, 45 (2018): 204–13.

Tolz, Vera. *Russia’s Own Orient: The Politics of Identity and Oriental Studies in the Late Imperial and Early Soviet Periods*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

- Tropoy Arsenyeva. Dokumental'nyy fil'm. Documentary. Glavnaya redaktsiya literaturno-dramaticheskikh programm TST, 1984.* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z3nzfuHyJM8>.
- Trusova, I. S. "Metodicheskie rekomendatsii k izucheniyu distsipliny 'Literatura Dal'nego Vostoka.'" MGU imena adm. G. I. Nevel'skogo, 2008.
- Tvardovskiy, Aleksandr. "Aleksandr Tvardovskiy, Poema 'Za Dal'yu - Dal'," November 23, 2023. <https://pitzmann.ru/tvardovsky-dal.htm#bottom>.
- V Ostrovakh Okhotnik. C Bol'shoy Kunaley. Zabaykal'skiye Semeyskiye, 2021.* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fa1Oj23FoGk>.
- Vladimir, and Volpicelli Zenone. *Russia on the Pacific and the Siberian Railway*. Alpha editions, 2019.
- Wilmington, Michael, and Peter Hogue. "Akira Kurosawa: 1910-1998." *Film Comment* 35, no. 1 (1999): 18–25.
- Windschuttle, Keith. "Edward Said's 'Orientalism Revisited.'" *The New Criterion* 17, no. 5 (1999). <https://ontology.buffalo.edu/smith/courses01/rrtw/Windschuttle.htm>.
- Yalman, Nur. Review of *Shamans and Elders: Experience, Knowledge and Power among the Daur Mongols.*, by Urgunge Onon and Caroline Humphrey. *The Journal of Asian Studies* 58, no. 3 (1999): 827–30.
- Yefimov, Gerontiy Valentinovich. "V. K. Arsenyev kak Vyrazitel' Velikoderzhavnogo Shovinizma." *Krasnoye Znamya*, June 16, 1931.
- Yegorchev, Ivan. *Neizvestnyy Arsenyev*. Vladivostok: Izdatel'stvo Dal'nevostochnogo universiteta, 2016.

———. *Soglasno Lichnogo Prikazaniya Vashego Vysokoprevoskhoditel'stva... Sekretnye Ekspeditsii V. K. Arsenyeva 1911-1913 Gg.* Vladivostok: Izdatel'stvo Dal'nevostochnogo federal'nogo universiteta, 2014.

———. *Zagadki Dersu Uzala.* Vladivostok: Dal'nevostochniy Federal'niy universitet, 2014.

Yernakov, V. N. "Goldi in Northeast China." *Zeitschrift Der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 122 (1972): 173–79.

Yershov, Dmitriy. *Khunkhuzy. Neob'yavlenneya boyna. Etnicheskiy banditizm na Dal'nem Vostoke.* Moscow: Tsentrpoligraf, 2010.

Znamenski, Andrei. *Shamanism in Siberia. Russian Records of Indigenous Spirituality.* Berlin: Springer Science+Business Media Dordrecht, 2003.



