

## **Orientalization of America: Soviet imagination of American 'Other' and modernization in Brezhnev's era**

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### **Abstract**

Western observers and scholars had described Russia through oriental images and metaphors since the Early modern times. The Soviet Union was also perceived through this long-living tradition. It is especially interesting that Soviet journalists and scholars specializing in the USA (Amerikanists) also started using oriental metaphors and images to describe the Cold War America.

This article focuses on the so called 'Orientalization' of America that took place in the Soviet Union during the Brezhnev's era. Like the Orient from the famous work by Edward Said, America was excluded from historical time and social progress by Soviet experts, using Marxist ideas of European origin. But unlike Said's Orient, the USA was economically and technically ahead of the USSR. The author argues that Soviet Amerikanists disconnected social modernization from an economic one. According to this view, America was technologically modernized but at the same time failed social modernization, while the Soviet Union was quite the opposite.

**Keywords:** Orientalism, Soviet American Studies, the Cold War imagination, modernization in the USSR, Postcolonial Studies

# Orientalization of America: The Soviet Imagination of the American 'Other' and Modernization in Brezhnev's Era

Igor Tarbeev

## Introduction

In the last three decades there were plenty of publications that focused on “orientalization” of Russia. From the early modern times Eastern Europe and Russia were perceived as “non-West.”<sup>1</sup> Western writers and travelers described Russia using oriental metaphors and underlining Russian exotic wildness.<sup>2</sup>

Orientalism as a methodological framework can be applied not only to western perception of Russia, but to Russia itself. The Russian Empire and the Soviet Union had their own Orient. Russian politics toward its eastern provinces could be studied through the lens of Edward Said's approach.<sup>3</sup> Although approaching Russian history with this methodological framework is still a matter of academic debates,<sup>4</sup> it can be productive to use Orientalism as Max Weber's ideal type that can highlight differences and similarities of certain phenomena of Russian history.

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1. Larry Wolf, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford University Press, 1994).

2. For example: Iver B. Neumann, *Uses of the Other: "the East" in European Identity Formation* (University of Minnesota Press, 1999), Martin Malia, *Russia under Western Eyes: From the Bronze Horseman to the Lenin Mausoleum*. (Harvard University Press, 2000), Alexander M. Etkind, *Tolkovanie puteshestvij. Rossiya i Amerika v travelogah i intertekstah* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2001), Viktoria I. Zhuravleva *Ponimanie Rossii v SSHA: obrazy i mify. 1881-1914* (RGGU, 2012).

3. For example: Alexander M. Etkind, *Internal Colonization. Russia's Imperial Experience*, (Cambridge: Polity 2011), Roy Bolton, Edward Strachan, Sphinx Fine Art, *Russian Orientalism: Central Asia and the Caucasus* (Sphinx Books, 2009); David Schimmelpenninck, *Russian Orientalism: Asia in the Russian Mind from Peter the Great to the Emigration* (Yale University Press, 2010), Alfrid K. Bustanov, *Soviet Orientalism and the Creation of Central Asian Nations* (Taylor & Francis, 2014). There is also a PhD dissertation dedicated to imagination of Russia in the USA and imagination of the USA in Russia: Anton S. Panov, *Rossia i SSHA v poslednej chetverti XVIII - pervoj treti XIX vv.: opyt vzaimnyh reprezentacij*. [http://www2.rsu.ru/binary/object\\_23.1592390857.83573.pdf](http://www2.rsu.ru/binary/object_23.1592390857.83573.pdf)

4. For example, the book *Orientalism vs. orientalistika* (Moscow, OOO "Sandra," 2016) was dedicated to the problem of implementation of Orientalism concept to Russian History.

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One of the key points of Said's argument is that western scholars did not merely study the East but invented it and interpreted it; those researches of the eastern past were highly influenced by contemporary political and power relations between the West and the East.<sup>5</sup> To demonstrate the politicization of knowledge Said writes about Russian studies in Cold War America of the late 1970s. At the same time, Said insists that this politicization is possible not because scholars, writers, and painters wanted to construct the East in a bad way, but because the political context and the power relations determined their perception, and because a European in the East was a European in the first place and only then he was a scholar.<sup>6</sup>

Orientalism as a unique discipline also appeared within this context. While western society wanted to know about the East, the politicians needed expert knowledge that could be used in the process of policymaking. That is why Orientalism combines pure academic research with practical expertise. These two parts of the discipline did not contradict, but complemented each other, making the expertise more fundamental and the academic research more applicable. This combination turned Orientalism into a unique institution "for dealing with the Orient – dealing with it by making statements of it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, setting it, ruling over it..."<sup>7</sup>

Quite similarly, Amerikanistika as a special area studies discipline emerged in the Soviet Union in the 1950s. After Stalin's death and declaration of "peaceful coexistence" as a new concept of Soviet foreign policy, Soviet leaders realized that they needed a deeper understanding of the American "Other."<sup>8</sup> At the same time, Soviet society had a huge interest in the US, their everyday life, history, and culture. Amerikanistika responded to this demand. Amerikanists wrote confidential expert memos and advisory notes for Soviet officials, published academic papers for scholars and students, and created popular books and documentaries for the general public.<sup>9</sup>

Unfortunately, there are almost no academic publications focusing on Soviet Amerikanistika or on Soviet foreign expertise in general. There are no publications about Amerikanists in Russian language, except for short biographical "in memorial" papers. There are several publications in English about Soviet historians specializing in the USA by Sergei Zhuk.<sup>10</sup> He studies an academic part

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5. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western conceptions of the Orient* (New York: Penguin, 1995), 9-12.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid., p. 3.

8. Igor M. Tarbeev, *The Formation of American Studies in the USSR as an Expert and Academic Discipline in the 1950s – 1960s, RSUH/RGGU Bulletin Series "Political Science. History. International Relations"*. 2018 №3 (2018) :77-92. (In Russ.), <https://politicalscience.rsu.ru/jour/article/view/197>

9. Ivan I. Kurilla, Viktoria I. Zhuravleva, *Soviet Studies in the United States, Amerikanistika in Russia: Mutual Representations in Academic Projects*. (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016), p. vi-xviii.

10. Sergei Zhuk, *Soviet Americana: The Cultural History of Russian and Ukrainian Americanists* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018).

of the Soviet *Amerikanistika*, i.e., scholars that worked in the Institute of World History, were interested primarily in early American history and supposedly had little to do with expertise, and policymaking process or construction of the public image of the American “Other.” This paper, instead, studies the image of American “Other” created by experts, and journalists for different stratus of Soviet society.

It is important to discuss who *Amerikanists* were and what kind of works they produced.<sup>11</sup> Experts coming into *Amerikanistika* had very different academic backgrounds. They had scholarly degrees in history, philosophy, or economics. Many of them were journalists in foreign departments of Soviet journals such as *Kommunist*, *Problemy Mira i Socialisma*, *Voprosy Filosofii*, or *Novoe Vremya*.<sup>12</sup> In the late 1950s and early 1960s, many experts worked at the Institute of World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO), the first Soviet “think tank.” In the first half of the 1960s, the Central Committee of CPSU created its own expert groups and employed a lot of experts from journals and academic institutions to work as foreign policy advisors. By the 1970s, these foreign policy advisors had left the CPSU and entered different academic institutions. Some of them went to the Institute for the USA, which had been created in 1968 and was part of the Soviet Academy of Sciences.

Their career trajectories could be a case for a study of the Soviet “revolving doors” system. But for now, it is important that they initially were journalists, academicians, and experts. They had never forgotten their backgrounds. They published academic papers, but at the same time they created popular essay collections about their trips to the United States.<sup>13</sup> They got doctoral degrees and at the same time they filmed a series of documentaries about the USA in the 1970s and political talk-shows that were broadcasted across the whole Soviet Union. Some of them were correspondents of main Soviet newspapers but were considered to be experts by party officials who required their opinions and commentaries on political situations.

By the 1970s, *Amerikanistika*’s process of institutionalization had finished. Former journalists and advisors had turned into academicians who were involved in offering expertise from time to time. Paraphrasing Said’s famous definition of Orientalism, *Amerikanistika* turned into a special corporate institution for dealing with the US, dealing by making statements, by interpreting their past and present from the only right and proven point of view. For Orientalism this point of view was a western and European one, for *Amerikanistika* it was a Marxist point of view.

In some ways Marxism was quite similar to Orientalism. Both intellectual

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11. The question of background and career track of Soviet American experts was not in the center of any academic research. Unfortunately, this publication has no room to fully answer it, but I am going to publish a paper about this topic as soon as possible.

12. Only one of these journals – *Problemy Mira i Socialisma* – focused primarily on international relations and foreign policy.

13. See for example a brochure by Yuri Shvedkov, a scholar from the Institute for the US: Yuri A. Shvedkov, *SSHA*, 1968 (Moscow: *Znanie*, 1968). This brochure was published in a series called “New in life, science and technologies: International series,” “*Znanie*” publishing house was specialized in popular science publications.

movements were created by the Enlightenment, and they both had an idea of constant and universal progress of humanity. History was considered to be a story of development. Orientalism imagined western societies as modern, dynamic, and progressive. It constructed western identity by opposing it to eastern societies, which were ancient, static, and undeveloped. In turn, the Soviet Union used Marxist theory to imagine itself modern, dynamic, and progressive. Quite the opposite, western countries were imagined to be in decline, stuck in the past.

Marxism also claimed to know the only way of social progress and the only way to the future. From that perspective, one can predict the American future by researching and interpreting the American past and present. That is why history and social sciences were considered to be an important part of the ideological struggle between the Soviet Union and the capitalist West. Amerikanists were constantly trying to comprehend and to construct contemporary America through historic metaphors and comparisons.

This paper focuses on how the images of the USA was constructed through images of European and Oriental past and how they fit into Soviet idea of modernity. I am going to use different kinds of sources such as academic publications, documentaries, popular books and classified notes. All these materials were created by Amerikanists but for various groups of people: party officials, scholars, and the general public. This way we can demonstrate how the United States were imagined and constructed for different audiences, and how it created different discourses. These images of the American “Other” and Soviet “Self” were influencing both processes of political decision-making and popular perception of the US.

It is important to note, that almost every term and notion we have to describe Soviet expert community and foreign policy expertise was initially developed and applied to the American expertise. I have already used terms like “experts,” “think tank,” and “revolving doors system,” but none of these notions were used in the Soviet Union. So, by experts I mean people who studied the United States and influenced the process of foreign policy making by advising officials, writing confidential memos, etc. I apply the term “think tank” to those Soviet academic institution that were constantly involved into policymaking process by writing confidential memos, advising politicians etc. Still, it should be noted that these terms could not truly represent soviet historical reality and I use them only because there is nothing to substitute them.

### **Oriental metaphors**

In the second half of the 1970s, the famous Soviet Amerikanist Valentin Zorin made TV documentaries called “America of the 70s.” Zorin was not merely a journalist, but also a scholar and an expert. In 1943, he entered Moscow State University (MSU) and studied foreign relations. By the time of his graduation in 1948 the department of foreign relations had been turned into a new University of Foreign Relations known as MGIMO. In 1940-1950s, Zorin worked as columnist for different Soviet newspapers and journals. In the 1960s he became a Doctor of Sciences, a professor of his *alma mater* and an expert at the new Institute for the

US studies in which he was a head of the US domestic policy department. Zorin also worked on Soviet TV, and in the 1970s he became very popular as a political commentator and a host of political shows.

Every episode of “America of the 70s” was focused on one American city, taking it as a case for showing American lifestyle and American social problems. The first episode of this documentary was called “Two New Yorks.” Zorin focused on two sides of New York – it was a very wealthy city of Wall Street and 5th Avenue on the one hand, and it was a very poor city of Harlem and slums on the other.

There was no better time to make such an episode than in 1976, because in 1975 New York almost declared its bankruptcy. The city had a lot of problems such as fiscal and housing crises, high crime rates, and an outflow of population. In July of 1977, the year after Zorin’s documentary, there was a famous New York blackout, that lasted 25 hours and was followed by crimes, looting, and massive arrests. Thus, Valentin Zorin came to the city in the middle of its decline.

Zorin portrayed the wealthy side of New York through buildings of main American banks, calling the Rockefellers and Morgans “counts and dukes of Wall Street.”<sup>14</sup> Then he showed 5th Avenue’s private mansions, clubs, and fancy magazines, to underline the detachment of New York aristocracy from ordinary people of the city. Owning mansions with servants and doormen, “counts and dukes” rarely lived there, while buildings for ordinary people were demolished despite of the housing crisis.

In that episode, Zorin did not use the word “aristocracy” itself, but it was a common notion for the Soviet discourse about America. For example, another famous Soviet Amerikanist Aleksander Fursenko<sup>15</sup> wrote in the introduction of his book about the Rockefellers:

There are entire dynasties of business world kings in the US, and among them the first place rightfully belongs to the Rockefellers, the richest family in the world. “Although the absence of nobility in America has become a traditional point of pride,” writes the famous journalist Manchester, “many Americans, especially women, secretly yearn for titles. Evidence of this is the popularity of the English Queen Elizabeth. Attempts to find their homemade American substitute for nobility lead to the fact that the public turns a Hollywood movie star or a gangster into its idol. But usually, attention is focused on the wealthy class, and therefore newspapers publish pages about the social life of the rich. If

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14. "Amerika 70-h. Dva N'yu-Jorka (1976)," Sovetskoe televidenie. GOSTELERA-DIOFOND, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yI2\\_olezbbA&t=153s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yI2_olezbbA&t=153s) (5:25)

15 In 1990’s Alexander Fursenko became very famous because of his and Timothy Naftali’s book *One Hell of a Gamble: Khrushchev, Castro, and Kennedy, 1958-1964 – The Secret History of the Cuban Missile Crisis*. Back in Brezhnev’s era he was famous Soviet scholar from Leningrad, specializing in history of American oil industry. His book about Rockefellers was written as popular scholarly publication and became quite popular in the Soviet Union.

the rich are the aristocracy of capitalism, then the Rockefellers are their royal majesty.<sup>16</sup>

Describing rich people, their lifestyle, their mansions etc. Soviet observers commonly used historical metaphors to underline the backwardness of American social order, in contrast to which the USSR was constructed as a modern and progressive one. Indeed, in the modern and progressive Soviet state there were no mansions or aristocrats. Those people and those mansions reminded Soviet experts and journalists of czars and kings of the past.

Unlike Orientalists who dismissed any oriental voices, Amerikanists constantly demonstrated that there were “progressive” Americans who shared the Soviet point of view or at least criticized American social order. Instead of making his own statement, Fursenko just agreed with the American journalist. Aristocracy had negative connotations in both Soviet and American context as a class which had been defeated during the American and Russian revolutions. That was something from the past that should stay in the past. Unfortunately, American society was not progressive enough to leave aristocracy in history books, instead it created a new kind of aristocracy – a moneyed one.

Fursenko expanded that comparison:

At the beginning of the 20th century one Russian newspaper amazed its readers by comparing the profits of financial kings and those of crowned people. The list published by the newspaper began with Rockefeller. Only the Turkish Sultan was in third place, and all the other monarchs, including the German Kaiser, the Russian Tsar and the Spanish King, trailed behind the money aces.<sup>17</sup>

Oriental sultans were known to the Soviet (and Western) public through academic works, literature, paintings, and legends of the Orientalist period. In this western imagination of the Orient sultans were portrayed astonishingly rich, bathing in silk, gold, and concubines of harem. Comparing the Rockefellers to sultans, Fursenko aroused these images of the Orient, making the famous billionaire dynasty simultaneously exotic and outdated.

Fursenko was not the only one who used oriental metaphors to describe America. Here is another example from a famous political commentator Yuri Zhukov's book *The USA on the turn of 1970*. Zhukov worked in *Pravda* newspaper. He did not have any background in US studies, but he published a lot of books about America and was involved as an expert for the CPSU. In 1969 Zhukov interviewed Ronald Reagan, the governor of California at that time, at his residence. The residence made an impression on the Soviet correspondent:

While I was being led to him through a suite of ceremonial halls hung and lined with paintings and engravings, souvenirs, flags, I tried to remember

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16. Alexander Fursenko, *Dinastiya Rokfellerov* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1967), p.3-4.

17. *Ibid.*

what it reminded me of: the apartments of the Sultan of Morocco, the imperial palace in Addis Ababa, or the ceremonial halls of the White House in Washington, that I had once visited.<sup>18</sup>

The White House naturally finished the sequence of oriental palaces, and the residence of the California governor fit well in that sequence. The richness of the residence played an important role in construction of this comparison. According to the Soviet ideological clichés American politicians were just puppets of “money aces.” From the perspective of Soviet observer the lushness of the White House or the California residence underlined the intertwining of political and financial elites and separated them from ordinary people. Thus, the US society was divided into ordinary people and a new aristocracy.

This image is not easy to explain through the opposition of “Other” and “Self.” Soviet leaders also had their residence inside an ancient Kremlin fortress on the old Senate Palace, built at the end of 1700s. From this perspective, Soviet leaders were not different from their Americans counterparts. Probably, the impression made by Reagan’s office on Zhukov can be explained through the interiors, not the building itself. Offices of Soviet party leaders were quite modest, inheriting the tradition established by Vladimir Lenin, whose office and flat were preserved as a museum. Some interiors of the Kremlin Senate and the Kremlin palace were rebuilt during the Stalin era to fit the Soviet government. Still, this matter of symbolic power representation and perception through offices of leaders needs a more precise study.

At the same time Amerikanists used oriental metaphors not only to describe political and financial elites of the US or to underline the gap between elites and ordinary people. They also reconciled two Soviet perceptions – perception of the American glorious past and decline of the American present. The combination of these viewpoints created an idea of a failed social modernity.

Amerikanists always pictured the American past as a progressive and glorious one. Images of a glorious American past could be easily found in papers of historian-amerikanists.<sup>19</sup> But we could also easily find them in popular discourse about the US. For example, in his documentary series, Valentin Zorin called George Washington “a passionate fighter against colonizers and oppressors.”<sup>20</sup> Telling a story of Independence Hall and the Declaration of Independence, Zorin called Thomas Jefferson “an outstanding thinker and a revolutionary.” Signatories

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18. Yuri Zhukov, *SSHA na poroge 70-h godov* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1970), p. 56.

19. By “historian-amerikanists” Soviet scholars that were not involved in foreign policy expertise. These scholars worked at academic institutions like Institute of World History of Soviet Academy of Sciences or at universities. They often focused on American history of XIX – beginning of XX century to avoid extra politization of their work. Famous researcher of early American-Russian relations Nikolai N. Bolkhovitinov could be a vivid example of this kind of Amerikanist.

20. “Amerika 70-h. Gorod na Potomake. Valentin Zorin,” *Sovetskoe televidenie*. GOSTELERADIOFOND, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7RIUsaxc4ZY> (2:20)



of the Declaration were described as “brave people, who challenged the most powerful county of their time.”<sup>21</sup>

In contrast to this image of the glorious past, Amerikanists constantly pictured the decline of the American present. Valentin Zorin read out the famous line from the Declaration of Independence “all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” Commenting this quotation, he said:

It was a daring challenge... The stubborn and long-term efforts of the bourgeoisie ideologists of the decline period put a textbook gloss on the once explosive lines of the Declaration of Independence. Every effort has been made to make the revolutionary demand for freedom and equality for all look like the pious, museum-preserved wishes of old-fashioned dreamers.<sup>22</sup>

Let us take a closer look at this image of reevaluation of history, of putting certain concepts into museums and abandoning them through the lenses of our orientalist approach. As I have already said, concepts of progress and development were very important in classical Orientalism. Orientals were not merely undeveloped, they were static. They did not participate in the historical process; they were excluded from history itself. To prove this exclusion, western observers pointed to the lack of historical knowledge of oriental people. Orientals did not know how great their past was, they had forgotten it. Because of that, they did not value ancient artifacts or buildings, they did not appreciate their history and their heroes. Only western societies could preserve these treasures.

Amerikanistika in the Soviet Union was based on Marxist vision of history. According to this vision, the USSR represented the next step of social development. Every country of the world had no other way but to follow that historical process. My hypothesis is that the oriental metaphors illustrated the process of exclusion of the USA from this universal historical process. The White House and Reagan’s residence were doomed to be turned into museums just like other residences of the past. American businessmen just like old European and Oriental aristocrats were doomed to extinction. Thus, palaces and aristocrats were symbols of exclusion from progress and the future.

Americans did not merely stop and forget its social development and historical progress but turned back to the past. As we have seen they had reinvented aristocracy, because Americans “secretly yearn for titles.”<sup>23</sup> Comparing the American past and present, Zorin underlined the greatness of the founding-fathers, but at the same time he argued that their deeds had been forgotten:

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21. "Amerika 70-h. Filadel'fiya, proshloe i nastoyashee. Valentin Zorin," Sovetskoe televidenie. GOSTELERADIOFOND, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YQEAd66ZRLg> (8:30)

22. Ibid.

23. Alexander Fursenko, *Dinastiya Rokfellerov* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1967), p.3-4.

Most of the descendants of the Pilgrim Fathers settled in Pennsylvania. Having grown rich on the labor of those who came later, exploiting the destitute harder than European feudal lords, they built mansions in Philadelphia, acquired carriages and expensive outfits, imitating the aristocracy of the European kingdoms ... Is it necessary to say that the calls of the authors of the Declaration of Independence for equality and freedom for all aroused the anger and resistance of arrogant aristocrats who hated Washington, Jefferson, and the cause for which they fought? That is why, apparently, not the creators of the Declaration of Independence, not the heroes of the liberation war, were raised above Philadelphia, but a huge bronze statue of the Pennsylvania's ruler, the English aristocrat William Penn, installed on the city hall tower, which became the trademark and symbol of this city. Time passes, eras change, prejudices remain ...<sup>24</sup>

Thus, the American historical process was reversed. At the very end of this Philadelphia episode, showing poor areas of the city, Valentin Zorin vividly expressed this image of exclusion:

The contrasts of Philadelphia are the contrasts of today's America, born in the fire of the anti-colonial revolution, but in 400 years it forgot about the inalienable right of all people to freedom and the pursuit of happiness.<sup>25</sup>

## **Two Modernities**

At the same time there was another image of the USA in the Soviet Union. Soviet Amerikanists visited America a lot. They saw technological development and economic prosperity of the US and showed them to the Soviet public through colorful TV documentaries and fascinating books.

Soviet observers admitted the American development. For example, Yuri Zhukov retold his conversation with Ronald Reagan, in which the California governor had compared his state economy to economies of different countries:

- I'm very proud of California...we're the fifth in the Western world in terms of gross national product.
- The fifth?
- Yes. In the first place, of course, are the United States ... then Japan, West Germany, the UK and California ...
- ...And here I am holding in my hands a beautifully printed booklet, "The Governor's Economic Report. 1968," kindly handed to me by Reagan's assistant, and think of the price of the wealth and the truly

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24. Amerika 70-h. Filadel'fiya, proshloe i nastoyashee. Valentin Zorin," Sovetskoe televidenie. GOSTELERADIOFOND, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YQEAd66ZRLg>.

25. Ibid.

incredible level of technological development of California, which my interlocutor is so proud of.<sup>26</sup>

But how did Amerikanists perceive and explain the visible economic and technological advantages of the US, and how did these advantages not contradict the idea of “exclusion from historical process”? Before we used Orientalism as Max Weber’s ideal type to highlight its similarities to Amerikanistika. It is time to look at their differences.

In classical Said’s *Orientalism*, economic modernization always followed social development. According to that view, orientals were barbaric and because of that their countries were undeveloped. And they needed some external power to rule over them, to educate and to develop them. In later works of western modernist, the wording was smoothed out. As Niels Gilman shows in his book *Mandarins of the Future*, American Cold-war era modernists thought that institutions and economics were a key to the future. By helping to establish western-like institution, backward societies could be developed from abroad.<sup>27</sup>

Even though Niels Gilman himself argues with the postcolonial approach,<sup>28</sup> we can see certain similarities in approaches of orientalists and modernists. According to both, an economically developed society is at the same time socially progressive and vice-versa. Paraphrasing the famous Vladimir Lenin’s thesis about communism and electrification from this perspective, modernization is social progress plus economic development of the country. And a progressive and developed society could be a source of modernization for backward societies.

Instead of merging economic and social development into a single idea of modernization, Soviets divided that idea into two separate processes. And while the US was ahead of the Soviet Union in economics, the Soviet Union was ahead in social order. Each of them was more modernized than the other in a different field.

There are a lot of papers exploring the image of the US in the USSR. Ideas of teaching each other and of using each other were developed by Victoria Zhuravleva in her book *The Common Past of Russians and Americans*.<sup>29</sup> Zhuravleva primarily researches the period from mid-XIX to mid-XX centuries and puts this bilateral learning process in a broader context. Calling this process the allure of the “Other,” the author focuses on each side of it. For decades, Russians and Americans were having inside discussions of what they could adopt from their counterparts.

Before the Cold War started in the second half of 1940s, the United States was not perceived as the main Soviet foe. Instead, they were perceived as a pioneer and a teacher of technological progress, which could help to industrialize

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26. Yuri Zhukov, *SSHA na poroge 70-h godov* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoy literatury, 1970), pp. 54-55.

27. Niels Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future. Modernization Theory in Cold War America*. (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 2003). pp. 1-23.

28. *Ibid.* pp. 278-280.

29. Victoria I. Zhuravleva, *The Common Past of Russians and Americans*, (Moscow: Russian State University for the Humanities Press, 2021), pp. 549-571.

the young Soviet state. Journalists and writers went to America to describe its lifestyle and achievements. Young and progressive Soviet engineers who were able to adopt American technical experience and production approaches called each other “Americans.”<sup>30</sup> In 1936 Anastas Mikoyan, the head of the Soviet food industry, visited the US to explore and adopt western technologies.

This image of America as a pioneer and a teacher did not change by the 1970s. Moreover, Soviet American experts took an active part in the process of technological transfer. In the context of economic reforms initiated by Soviet prime-minister Alexei Kosygin, Amerikanists collected information about implementation of advanced management practices and the newest technologies in the government and production processes.<sup>31</sup>

Soviet experts were also interested in the American development experience in general. For example, when American entrepreneur Charles Thornton came to the USSR in 1969. He visited the construction of a new automobile concern in Tolyatti and pointed out that America also had built such huge and full-process productions in previous decades, but they turned out to be not effective enough. In the 1960s, instead of gigantic plants Americans were creating a network of narrowly specialized factories that were more stable. Thornton also warned Amerikanists that according to the US experience that kind of industrialization led to giant shifts in the country’s economy and the USSR should be preparing for those shifts. The American businessman openly told his Soviet companions that he could see all these problems and consequences because the US had faced them a couple of decades before.<sup>32</sup> In general, the Soviet Union was following the path the USA had finished a long time ago. That idea was considered to be so relevant and important that Soviet American experts turned the record of this conversation into a confidential memo and sent it to the CPSU.

The idea of adopting the American experience and best practices can be found not only in CPSU confidential memos, it was well known and widespread. In 1970 the Institute for the US Studies established a journal called *The USA: economy, policy, ideology*. It was not purely academic but a socio-political one: it was a monthly journal with a circulation of over thirty thousand copies.

In that journal, we can find a lot of articles focusing on the newest management practices and implementation of computers in those practices. There was even a department of management systems in the Institute for the US, which, apparently, was focused on the research of American management practices. Boris Z. Mil’ner, a famous Soviet economist, was the head of the department and he published a lot of academic works on the topic. For example, in 1971 he published an article called

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30. Susanne Schattenberg, *Inzheneriy Stalina: ZHizn' mezhdru tekhnikoij i terrorom v 1930-e gg.* (Moscow: Rosspen, 2011) pp. 260-294.

31. Igor M. Tarbeev, "Transfer of Ideas in Soviet-American Relations at the Turn of the 1960—1970s (Based on the Example of the Expert Activity of the Institute for US Studies of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR)", *ISTORIYA*, Issue 6 (104), V.12 (2021): <https://history.jes.su/s207987840016257-1-1/> (circulation date: 17.08.2021). DOI: 10.18254/S207987840016257-1

32. *Ibid.*

“About new tendencies in management.”<sup>33</sup> Ideas from this article correlated to Thornton’s advice – Mil’ner wrote about implementation of modern technologies to quicken communication, the importance of production diversification etc. Mil’ner published articles of this kind at least once a year.<sup>34</sup> Later, in 1977 Mil’ner and his colleagues published a book, called *American Capitalism and Management Decisions: Theory and Methods of Decision-Making*.<sup>35</sup> Next year they published a book *American Bourgeois Management Theories: Critical Analyses*.<sup>36</sup> The book was released by publishing house ‘Thought’ (*Misl’*), which specialized in popular science books or textbooks for universities. That means that the image of the US as a teacher lasted at least for another decade and was not really connected to Kosygin’s reforms.

## Conclusion

There are many more cases of Soviet experts studying and promoting adaptation of US practices and technologies. What is important for this paper is that there were two simultaneous faces of the USA in the Soviet Union – the modern, economically, and technologically developed America and the socially backward, excluded from historic process America. For the first face Soviet Amerikanist used a unique perception of modernization. For them, modernization was not a single process of social and economic progress. Instead, it became two different processes, and the USSR and the USA had gone two different ways. While Americans achieved a lot on their way to economic and technical prosperity, Soviets developed a supreme social order. But only a combination of these processes could lead to the future. That is why Soviet Union should have not only studied but adopted the American economic experience and management approaches. The second face of the US was constructed through oriental metaphors to help develop an image of a society that was being excluded from the historic process and its social progress was reversed. It was thought that just like orientals, Americans forgot their glorious revolutionary past and great ideas of equality and brotherhood. American aristocrats, who lived like sultans made a lot of efforts to put this past into museums.

From the perspective of Soviet ideology, there was no contradiction in that view. America was economically and technologically modernized not because of its political and social order, but in spite of it. Soviet ideology always separated elites and ordinary people, and while American people were talented and smart, elites were greedy and corrupted.

This view is quite different from the ideas of modernization, developed in classical Orientalism or modernization theories of the West. In a way, from that

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33. Boris Z. Mil’ner, "O novych tendenciayah v upravlenii", SSHA: ekonomika, politika, ideologiya. №1, (January 1970), pp. 49-59.

34. See, for example, next year issue: Boris Z. Mil’ner, "Problemy ispolzovanie EVM v upravlenii," SSHA: ekonomika, politika, ideologiya. №2, (February 1971), pp. 49-59.

35. Boris Z. Mil’ner et al., *Amerikanskij kapitalizm i upravlencheskie resheniya: Teoriya i metody prinyatiya reshenij* (Moscow: Nauka, 1977).

36. Boris Z. Mil’ner and E.A. Chizhov, *Amerikanskie burzhuaznye teorii upravleniya: Krit. analiz*, (Moscow: Misl', 1978).

Soviet perspective, there were two types of modernity - economic modernity and social modernity. These modernities could be achieved separately, and the USSR and the USA had gone two different ways. However, the way to the future (communist one, of course) is through the combination of those modernities. To achieve that bright goal, the Soviets should learn economics and technologies from the Americans and simultaneously teach the Americans to reflect on their problems and to reform their social order. I believe that the Soviet perception of two modernities remains undeveloped and unresearched. After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the “End of History,” this vision of progress became irrelevant, but at that time Soviet observers believed in it and were shaping the world accordingly.

The process of orientalization of America and comprehension of America through historic and oriental metaphors has huge research potential. This process of imagination influenced self-perception and resulted in the development of a unique concept of modernization. Future research could help us to better understand how the Soviet Union perceived the United States in different time periods and how this perception influenced the political process and Soviet-American relations.

**About the Author:**

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