

# Editorial

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Vladimir Klavdeevich Arsen'ev is one of the best-known figures of the Russian Far East, and yet the scholarly literature—particularly in English—on his historical significance is surprisingly thin. Literary scholars, drawn by Arsen'ev's famous novel *Dersu Uzala*, and cinema scholars, intrigued by Akira Kurosawa's masterful film adaptation of that work, have most critically engaged with the Russian polymath's work (Arsen'ev was, after all, a military officer, an explorer, an author, an ethnographer, a bureaucrat, and more).<sup>1</sup> Much more rarely have scholars assessed Arsen'ev's important role as an actor in and commentator on Russian colonization in the Far East.<sup>2</sup> This special collection of articles in *Sibirica* makes a start at that assessment, identifying several areas where a study of Arsen'ev's life and writings can illuminate important aspects of the region's early twentieth-century history.

Two of this volume's contributors have long been investigating Arsen'ev's history. Amir Khisamutdinov, one of the premier chroniclers of the Russian Far East's history, has written numerous books and articles in which the explorer has played a central role.<sup>3</sup> In this collection, Khisamutdinov provides Arsen'ev's essential biographical details, especially the difficulties he encountered under Soviet rule. Jonathan Slaght, who works for the Wildlife Conservation Society in Primorye, has translated Arsen'ev key natural history work, *Across the Ussuri Kray* [*Po Ussuriiskomy kraiu*] into English. Here he contributes a different perspective, a retrospective on the subsequent fates of the many regional animals Arsen'ev described, with impeccable detail and great affection, in the early 1900s.

If Khisamutdinov and Slaght provide sympathetic and mostly positive assessments of Arsen'ev, the other three articles delve more critically into some of the ways he was a product of his historical moment and its biases. Ryan Tucker Jones examines Arsen'ev's stint as a Specialist for marine mammal hunting with Vladivostok's Dal'rybokhota, arguing that he marshaled his travel experiences to help found what would be a highly ecologically damaging Soviet whaling industry, but that he also urged environmental caution and respect for Indigenous practices. Sergey Glebov exposes some of the uglier, racist beliefs that Arsen'ev espoused, especially his visceral dislike for East Asians and



his critical support for Russian settler colonialism. Finally, Aleksandr Turbin tries to make sense of Arsen'ev's many contradictions through close attention to his lived experience, especially his "pragmatism and situational thinking" that allowed him to creatively reinterpret some of the intellectual certainties of his time. Turbin offers a wonderful encapsulation of what these articles together accomplish, describing the complex dialectic between Arsen'ev and the region he loved, shaped, and was shaped by.

## Notes

1. See, for example, John Schneider, "Signs and Symbols in *Dersu Uzala*," *Psychoanalytic Review* 96, no. 1 (1963). See also Anatolij M. Kuznetsov, "The Dersu Uzala Story Told by Vladimir Arsenyev as Expression of 'Soul All-spaciousness,'" *Izvestiia Vostochnog Instituta* 3 (2017): 108–120; Olga V. Solovieva, "The Erased Grave of Dersu Uzala: Kurosawa's Cinema of Memory and Mourning," *Journal of Japanese & Korean Cinema* 2, no. 1 (2010): 63–79.

2. Albina Girfanova, "Vladimir Arsenyev: Explorer and Researcher of the Tungus-Manchu Peoples and Their Languages," *Sibirica: The Journal of Siberian Studies* 17, no. 1 (2018): 23–35; Ivan Yegorchev, "Foreword," in Vladimir Arsen'ev, *Across the Ussuri Kray: Travels in the Sikhote-Alin Mountains*, trans. Jonathan C. Slaght (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016).

3. See Amir Aleksandrovich Khisamutdinov's "Russkii Klin v 'Zheltye Strany,'" *Voprosi Istorii* 4 (2017), 152–161 *The Russian Far East: Historical Essays* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1993); *Vladivostok: Etiudi k istorii starogo goroda* (Vladivostok: Izdatel'stvo Dal'nevostochnog Universiteta, 1992).