

Altai

Profile

According to the 2002 national census, there are 67,239 Altai in the Russian Federation. Altai consist of a variety of tribes. The Altai language is from the Turkic branch of the Uralo-Altaic language family. Altai live, primarily, in the Altai Republic, formerly Gorno-Altai AO in Altai Krai (pop. 202,947: Altai 30.6 per cent, Russians 57.4 per cent, Kazaks 6 per cent, others 6 per cent).

The Altai religion is a mixture of shamanist and Eastern Orthodox beliefs.

Historical context

Russians conquered the region from the Chinese in the middle of the nineteenth century. Russians soon began to migrate to the area. After the Bolshevik Revolution, the Oirod AO was created (1922), and this became the Gorno-Altai AO in 1948 to counter potential aspirations for reintegration with Mongolia. The region declared its sovereignty in 1990 and became a full republic in May 1992, renamed the Altai Republic. In spring 1992, conflict broke out between Altai and the richer Russians. Many Russians left the region. The republic adopted a new constitution on 7 June 1997.

Since the Soviet collapse there has been a reported revival of Burkhanism (or *Ak Jang*, 'the white faith'), a religious cult popular in Altai from 1904 to the 1930s.

Current issues

With the onset of mergers between smaller federal units of the Russian Federation with larger ones, there were calls from 2004 for the merger of the Altai Republic with neighbouring Altai Krai. Local Altai elites have resisted this move.