

SUMMARY

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This work presents an investigation of the traditional culture of the *Altai Uriankhains*. Since the 16th century, their encampments are located in the western and the north-western parts of Mongolia. However, it could be assumed that the formation of their traditional culture was a complex process and has proceeded not only in their present areas of settlements, but also in the broader historical as well as the geographical space. Appearance of the traditional culture of the *Altai Uriankhains* in a number of traits and characteristics reflect the way in which this nation has been evolving in the different periods of its historical development.

Process of formation of modern ethnic composition in Mongolia was prolonged process and has passed a number of historical stages. The Oirats of Western Mongolia became more independent at the beginning of 15th century. Probably, starting from that period Mongols were divided into two branches: eastern and western. The western branch characterized a certain unity in culture and livelihood although each group had somewhat definitive ethnographic originality.

The author of this study aims to recreate if possible, more accurate pictures of the traditional culture of the *Altai Uriankhains*, highlighting the problems of their economic structure, material and spiritual culture, family and social life. This work deals with all particulars, which are typical for the historical and ethnographic investigations of any culture, including the economics, material culture, shelter, food, clothing, utensils, religion, family and social life that constitute a concept of “traditional culture”. Researchers have noted that traditional culture has been created during the pre-industrial era and was based on unwritten sources, i.e., verbal and nonverbal forms of communication, and bears the clear signs of local and ethnic specificity.

The chronological framework of the work covers mainly the end of 19th to early 20th centuries, but it also sometimes does excursion into more of earlier periods.

By ethnicity, lifestyle, forms of traditional culture, especially by language, the *Altai Uriankhains* might be undoubtedly ranked as one of the Mongolian tribes of Western Mongolia.

The paper is based on field data collected by the author in the late 80's of last century during the ethnographic expeditions of the Institute of History, Academy of Sciences of Mongolia as well as during the visits of later periods to various districts of *Altai Uriankhains* where it was possible to record the memories of old

people who knew and remembered those features of culture and life style which are largely lost today among them.

The description of the material culture has used museum collections of Khovd and Bayan-Ulgii aimags as well as some collections of the State Museum of History and Ethnography and historical documents of the State Archives of Mongolia. In addition to archival and museum materials, works of Russian authors have been utilized as the bases of the investigation.